

Tradition, authority and dialogue: Arendt and Alexander on education

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Abstract: In this paper I discuss two attempts to challenge mainstream liberal education, by Hannah Arendt and by contemporary Israeli philosopher Hanan Alexander. Arendt and Alexander both identify problems in liberal-secular modern politics and present alternatives based on reconnecting politics and education to tradition. I analyze their positions and bring them into a dialogue that suggests a complex conception of education that avoids many of the pitfalls of modern liberal thought. First, I outline Arendt and Alexander's educational views and discuss their similarities, arguing that both may be understood as opposed to the modern attempt to adopt a «view from nowhere» at the world. Next, I suggest that Alexander's view may benefit from adopting Arendt's conceptions of tradition and authority. In the consecutive section, I argue that Alexander sheds light on significant problems in Arendt's approach to education, problems his understanding of critical dialogue can help solve. The succeeding section joins the two views together to form an approach I call «critical traditionalism», and examines it against prevailing approaches to political education. I conclude by pointing to an important point overlooked by both Arendt and Alexander, namely the need for internal political struggle within each tradition.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt; Hanan A. Alexander; tradition; authority; dialogue; critique

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1. Introduction

We live in uncertain and confusing times, both in terms of politics and in terms of philosophical reflection on political reality. The very foundations upon which post-World War II politics has rested, at least in liberal democratic states, seem to have been unsettled by waves of immigration, refugee crises, economic slumps, etc. Uncertainty and confusion are also apparent in education: in addition to the growing concern in many democratic countries regarding student achievements and school's ability to prepare them for civic life, many of the presuppositions upon which modern liberal education relies have lost their self-evidence; these include rationality, the neutrality of government, and educating for personal autonomy. Various aspects of

contemporary reality, from multiculturalism to the new spirituality, call for rethinking liberal education.

In this paper, I discuss two attempts to challenge mainstream liberal education, by Hannah Arendt in the late 1950s, and by contemporary Israeli philosopher Hanan Alexander. I analyze their positions and bring them into a dialogue that suggests a more complex conception of education that avoids many of the pitfalls of modern liberal thought.

Arendt and Alexander are not the perfect match. There are many differences between the 20th-century non-observant Jew who arrived at the US as a refugee and oscillated between Zionism and anti-Zionism, and the contemporary conservative rabbi who emigrated from the US to Israel out of commitment to Zionism. While Arendt was educated in German-European philosophy and after moving to the US developed an unorthodox, non-liberal political philosophy, Alexander was educated in California as an analytic philosopher and his writings on the philosophy of education, theology and spirituality are anchored in the Anglo-American tradition. Despite the distance in time, space and philosophical orientation, however, the two have much in common. Both are Jewish immigrants who have spent much of their lives in the United States, and for each both Judaism and the American context are important not only biographically but also intellectually. More importantly, they both identify problems in liberal-secular modern politics and present alternatives based on reconnecting politics and education to tradition. This paper brings them together not to gloss over or downplay the obvious differences between them, but rather to claim that the congruence between their views is significant enough to allow a constructive discussion. The dialogue between their views will not only demonstrate their affinity but also enable each to provide answers to problems and lacunae found in the other.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. First, I outline Arendt and Alexander's educational views and discuss their similarities, arguing that both may be understood as opposed to the modern attempt to adopt a «view from nowhere» at the world. Next, I suggest that Alexander's view may benefit from adopting Arendt's conceptions of tradition and authority. In the consecutive section, I argue that Alexander sheds light on significant problems in Arendt's approach to education, problems his understanding of critical dialogue can help solve. The succeeding section joins the two views together to form an approach I call «critical traditionalism», and examines it against prevailing approaches to political education. I conclude by pointing to an important point overlooked by both Arendt and Alexander, namely the need for internal political struggle within each tradition.

2. No view from nowhere

At first glance, Arendt and Alexander do not share the same adversary in the field of education: she aims her arrows mainly at progressive education that places the child at the center of the educational process, while he is troubled primarily with liberal education, which puts abstract reason at its core. Nevertheless, a closer look reveals significant similarities between both their educational views and the

approaches they attack, for both scholars attack them for adopting a kind of «view from nowhere» to education.

Arendt wrote little about education (Higgins, 2010). Her rich corpus on political theory, philosophy and history contains only two texts dedicated to educational issues, both from the late 1950s: «Reflections on Little Rock» (2005c [hereafter RLR]), which drew fierce fire for opposing federal enforcement of school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957; and «The Crisis in Education» (2006c [hereafter CE]), based on a 1958 lecture, in which she developed the connections between her views on politics and education.

Central to Arendt's two discussions of education is the demand to separate politics from education. In spite of her call to reject the traditional hierarchy placing *vita contemplativa* above *vita activa* and restore the central place political activity had in antiquity, Arendt objects to political education. She is opposed to bringing politics to education – as in Little Rock, where adults have imposed the struggle against racial discrimination on schoolchildren. She is also opposed to bringing education to politics – as in totalitarian regimes, which tried to «reeducate» dissenting citizens. While politics, according to Arendt, consists of appearing in the public realm, exposing oneself to peer judgment, the educational situation is inherently unequal: when attempting to act politically by educational means, she writes, «instead of joining with one's equals in assuming the effort of persuasion and running the risk of failure, there is dictatorial intervention, based upon the absolute superiority of the adult» (CE, p. 176).

The approach conceiving of education in political terms is most evident, according to Arendt, in the «progressive education» prevalent in the US in the first half of the 20th century, whose arguably destructive outcomes led to the crisis she discusses¹. This education rests, in her view, on three interrelated assumptions: that the world of children is autonomous; that pedagogy is a science more important than the subject matter taught; and that learning should be replaced with hands-on skill acquisition (CE, pp. 180-183). All three assumptions reflect the collapse of the distinction between education and politics, as well as that between children and adults. The first conceives of children in terms suitable to the public world of equals, while the second and third conceive of teaching and learning, respectively, in terms suitable for doing, namely for making things. That is to say, instead of gradually acquainting the child with the world of adults through an educative encounter with a teacher who is familiar with that world, progressive education throws her to the public eye of her peers in an autonomous children's world, as if she is ready to handle the pressure involved, and conversely turns learning into a play-like activity most suitable for infants.

The crisis resulting from what Arendt views as the inevitable collapse of progressive education is also an opportunity, in that it opens the possibility to see the essential core of education through the multiple layers of history and prejudices. This

¹ Arendt does not specify what she means by «that complex of modern educational theories which originated in Middle Europe» (CE, p. 178), but she most likely has in mind ideas that originate with European educationalists such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (2007) and his disciple Friedrich Fröbel (2005), and arrived to the US with the writings of John Dewey (1997).

essence, for Arendt, is *natality*: «education belongs among the most elementary and necessary activities of human society, which never remains as it is but continuously renews itself through birth, through the arrival of new human beings» (CE, p. 185). The birth of a human child calls for education because the child does not only «become», like any other animal, but is also new to the world:

The child shares the state of becoming with all living things; in respect to life and its development, the child is a human being in process of becoming, just as a kitten is a cat in process of becoming. But the child is new only in relation to a world that was there before him, that will continue after his death, and in which he is to spend his life. If the child were not a newcomer in this human world but simply a not yet finished living creature, education would be just a function of life and would need to consist in nothing save that concern for the sustenance of life and that training and practice in living that all animals assume in respect to their young (CE, p. 185).

The world, therefore, is the necessary complementary, the backdrop against which human natality takes place and has meaning (Levinson, 2001, p. 13). This world, to be sure, is not the natural reality humans share with all living things, but rather the artificial world they make when they engage in the activity of work – as opposed to labor, which is the production of consumable things needed for biological existence, and to speech and action in front of others (Arendt, 1998 [hereafter HC], p. 7).

The role of schools, in this approach, is to mediate between the child and the world: it must protect the child from the dangers and pressures of the world, and at the same time protect the world from the newness inherent in every child (CE, pp. 188-189). Teachers, for their part, stand in front of their students as representatives of the world, and their primary task is to take responsibility for the world regardless of any criticism they may have of it: «responsibility is not arbitrarily imposed upon educators; it is implicit in the fact that the young are introduced by adults into a continuously changing world. Anyone who refuses to assume joint responsibility for the world should not have children and must not be allowed to take part in educating them» (CE, p. 189). Assuming this responsibility, Arendt continues, is the source of the teacher's authority, rather than theoretical knowledge or the ability to punish; it «rests on his assumption of responsibility for that world. Vis-à-vis the child it is as though he were a representative of all adult inhabitants, pointing out the details and saying to the child: This is our world» (CE, p. 189). That is to say, educational authority rests not only on acquaintance with the world but also on the teacher taking place in it, being part of it and of the chain of generations constituting it: «it is his task to mediate between the old and the new, so that his very profession requires of him an extraordinary respect for the past» (CE, p. 193).

This is clearly a conservative approach to education, but Arendt argues that this conservatism is aimed not at conserving the world as it is but rather at renewing it (Gordon, 2001, p. 37): it recognizes that one should be acquainted with the world and become part of it before acting in it. Conservative education is needed to allow children to grow into adults who do not treat the world conservatively: «Exactly

for the sake of what is new and revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which, however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction» (CE, pp. 192-193). The consequences of teachers' inability to identify with tradition and take responsibility over the world, therefore, reach far beyond the educational domain, for it hinders the historical process in which it is being renewed and updated to keep up with a changing world.

However, the crisis in education not only contributes to the demise of tradition and culture, it is first and foremost a reflection of this demise. This demise, Arendt claims, is «a symptom of that modern estrangement from the world which can be seen everywhere but which presents itself in especially radical and desperate form under the conditions of a mass society» (CE, p. 191). World estrangement or alienation, as Arendt argues in her most important philosophical book, *The Human Condition* (published in 1958, about the same time as the two papers on education), is «the hallmark of the modern age» (HC, p. 254). It is a companion to modern thought and science, which are characterized by not settling for what appears to the eyes of earth-bound man, and attempting to replace it with an external, «Archimedean» point of view from which to look down at the earth and discover its secrets. The desire for such an Archimedean perspective can be traced back to Copernicus, whose bold imagination «lifted him from the earth and enabled him to look down upon her as though he actually were an inhabitant of the sun» (HC, p. 259), and is most evident in Galileo, who used the telescope to «consider the nature of the earth from the viewpoint of the universe» (HC, p. 248). As a result, «All laws of the new astrophysical science are formulated from the Archimedean point, and this point probably lies much farther away from the earth and exerts much more power over her than Archimedes or Galileo ever dared to think» (HC, p. 263). In short, the modern attempt to look at the world from nowhere has led to world alienation, which is expressed in the refusal to take responsibility for it and to crises in authority, tradition and education.

Hanan Alexander also claims that the modern view from nowhere leads to a problem in contemporary educational theory. His frame of reference does not reach back to the dawn of the modern age, but rather to the «methodology wars» of the 20th century (2015 [hereafter RLE], p. 40). The two sides fighting these wars in the field of social sciences, according to Alexander's account, were positivism, which originated in the natural sciences, and constructivism, which originated in philosophical phenomenology (Popper, 1992; Husserl, 1977). While the former seeks objective knowledge based on generalizations of empirical data, the latter appeals to conscious thoughts and experiences and suspends all judgment regarding the existence of reality outside consciousness (RLE, p. 45). While positivism believes in what Thomas Nagel (1986) called «the view from nowhere», a view purged of bias or contingency, constructivism acknowledges only the validity of an introspective view, renouncing all attempt to look at the world in itself. The clash between these two approaches eventually led to what Alexander calls «the dual epistemology thesis» (RLE, p. 39) according to which the two research orientations should be allowed to coexist in order to understand reality in a more complex way than any of them

would have allowed in itself. But both, argues Alexander, are highly problematic: introspective constructivism «leaves the subject alone in her own solipsistic universe» (RLE, p. 45), and in denying any ideals independent of consciousness leads even to narcissism and nihilism; positivism, on the other hand, puts its faith in an objective view from nowhere, but cannot escape the need to judge and decide which facts and data are relevant, and the consequent fact that «scientific research programs may vary according to the judgments of distinct knowing subjects» (RLE, p. 45).

Rather than opening up the field of research, the dual epistemology thesis limits it to two dichotomous options and under the veil of pluralism excludes any possible third way. Alexander's alternative «requires admitting the possibility of a view from somewhere, even if we cannot come to agreement concerning where that view is from or what vantage point it allows» (RLE, p. 40). Following the epistemological views of philosophers from the more conservative end of contemporary liberalism such as Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), Charles Taylor (1992) and Michael Sandel (1998), Alexander argues that a view from somewhere cannot be objective and neutral, but does not settle for subjectivist relativism either. The place from which we look is never personal or arbitrary, but rather anchored in a rich intersubjective, communal sphere – it stems from a *tradition* in which one lives, which provides the first context from which one can look. As opposed to the disengagement from the world implied in both the view from nowhere and introspection, the view from somewhere stands firm on the ground of this world. Nevertheless, it is not limited to the actual «world of appearances», not hopelessly tied to the given. To be able to evaluate, judge and apply standards, the tradition from which one looks at the world must be saturated with values and normative meanings, namely with some conception of the good, although this good cannot enjoy the status of an objective, absolute truth:

Knowledge – at least in education – is always the possession of an embodied agent, constrained by language, culture, and history, who grasps, albeit imperfectly, the contours of an entity or the meaning of an idea that transcends – exists independently or outside of – his or her limited experience. And this requires – as a regulative principle – the existence of ideals beyond our own conceptualized experience, whose ultimate content remains shrouded in culture, history, language and tradition (RLE, p. 48).

To be sure, aspiring for transcendental good does not mean an attempt to reach an objective godlike position, but rather awareness of the fact that historical man is always in relation to some transcendent values different from the mundane world and cannot be positively known. A basic insight cutting through the whole of Alexander's work is that man cannot step outside of the life he lives and the world he lives in (RLE, p. 9) – the scholar, just as the teacher and the student, is always conditioned by her specific place in the world and even transgression, critique and transformation are necessarily related to it. Put differently, the view from nowhere is in fact impossible, while the view from somewhere is at the same time fact and value, a given condition and one teachers and scholars need not attempt to transcend.

We can see that despite the considerable differences between Arendt and Alexander, the similarities between their views are also significant: they both insist

on going against the modern current and call for a reconnection of education and tradition. Rejecting the Archimedean view from nowhere, they both realize an educational view must be of this world, and that giving children a future in the world requires putting them in touch with the rich past, which gives the world depth and meaning. Arendt's words regarding the conception of authority she adopts from the Romans could have been written, I believe, also by Alexander: tradition, she writes, is «the guiding thread through the past and the chain to which each new generation knowingly or unknowingly was bound in its understanding of the world and its own experience» (RLE, p. 25). I turn now to examining how the differences between the two positions make the dialogue between them an opportunity for mutual learning.

3. Political tradition and authority

Alexander (2001) takes modern liberalism to be a political success and a moral failure: it succeeded in bringing a multiplicity of cultures, beliefs and ways of life to coexist in a single political sphere, but this led to the secularization and neutralization of the public sphere, and consequently to the inability of liberal society to provide existential meaning to the lives of men and women. In the educational context, liberal society is unable to answer questions such as how we should educate our children and where we can find the legitimacy to teach them one way of life rather than another. Proper answers, Alexander argues, require accepting tradition in a way that can give life meaning and at the same time be a source of authority without imposing itself and without shattering the political framework common to a plurality of traditions.

Despite the persuasiveness of his arguments, I think Alexander's concepts of tradition and authority are not fully developed. His conception of authority is elaborated through what he calls «a vision of good life», namely the answer given to the classic question of how one should live (RLE, p. 98). Such a vision, based on moral values and social norms, is not personal but rather collective, anchored in a community with a long history of living together and giving meaning to a common world (RLE, p. 99). The kind of tradition Alexander advocates is holistic but not totalistic (that is, provides a comprehensive worldview without limiting it to a single interpretation), as well as dynamic and pragmatic rather than dogmatic and monolithic (see also Dorff, 1996). This means that although the vision of the good life is not personal, it should leave room for a variety of ways in which members of the community interpret the vision they share and practice their tradition. This is clearly an inclusive conception of tradition, which is not limited to religious traditions like the Jewish one but applies also to national, cultural and philosophical ones (Alexander mentions, for example, the Aristotelian philosophical tradition [RLE, p. 103]).

However, I think that there are two major problems with this conception of tradition. First, Alexander does not provide a satisfactory account of how tradition is transmitted from one generation to the next, as well as of how it passes from the theoretical level of knowledge and belief to the practical one, which gives life order and meaning. Second, his conception of tradition lacks an important political dimension, in that it does not account for how tradition compels some people to obey others and accept their authority. Although he is deeply rooted in the communitarian

political tradition of MacIntyre, Taylor and Sandel, Alexander's conception of authority focuses on each individual's authority to make her own decisions, but refrains from discussing the origin and legitimation of one individual's authority over another. Thus, although he comments that «What accounts for the identity of a tradition is the diffusion of authority between past, present, and future, in which nothing that ever belonged is completely lost» (RLE, p. 119), nowhere does he make the relation between tradition and authority the center of discussion. Consequently, he is silent regarding the ways tradition gives power to some over others and the role authority plays in passing tradition onwards.

Arendt, on the other hand, dedicates considerable attention to conceptualizing both tradition and authority. Despite her Jewish descent, she does not draw these concepts from the monotheistic context, but rather from the Roman one – a context in which tradition and authority are tightly connected to religion yet are importantly distinct from it as well as from each other. The Roman trinity of tradition, religion and authority, Arendt argues, is decisive for Western history, and has influenced the meanings of these concepts in Judaism and Christianity as well. Elaborating Arendt's concepts of tradition and authority therefore enables a better understanding of the educational position outlined in her two essays on education, and helps add substance to these concepts in Alexander, providing him with more historical depth and theoretical width. Since Alexander convincingly shows that the shaking off of tradition by liberal educational discourse is problematic, Arendt's thorough discussion of tradition and its relations to authority will strengthen his position and contribute to its contemporary relevance.

Tradition, according to Arendt, is not simply continuation or a relation with the past, and the kind of tradition which originated in republican Rome and declined in the modern age is by no means identical to the one we find in cultures we often refer to as «traditional» (Arendt, 2005 [hereafter TPT], p. 54). There is a specific Western tradition for thinking of tradition – a tradition with a definite beginning and end, leaving the present without the special type of relation to the past it used to make possible. The most important function of tradition is «to give answers to all questions by channeling them into predetermined categories» (TPT, p. 55). That is to say, tradition has an inherent pretention to be all-encompassing, and this task is both made possible and limited by the conceptual tools available to it. Traditional categories are clearly manifested in language, in the vocabulary people use to interpret their world and communicate about it, but the linguistic dimension of human interaction does not exhaust them.

Tradition mediates our very experience of the world, including the meanings we give to our immediate feelings and perceptions. Arendt calls the thick array through which we feel and perceive our shared world «common sense»:

It lies in the nature of a tradition to be accepted and absorbed, as it were, by common sense, which fits the particular and idiosyncratic data of our other senses into a world we inhabit together and share in common. In this general understanding, common sense indicates that in the human condition of plurality men check and control their particular sense data against the common data of others (TPT, p. 41).

Common sense provides shared criteria for making sense of the world and for speaking and acting in it in ways that make sense to others – it is thus a crucial condition for political action. To be sure, common sense is neither universal nor natural but specific to culture, to people sharing a human world. But common sense not only connects each member of the community to the others, it also connects them to their ancestors, preserving the past in the present by determining what aspects of the past are still relevant:

The tradition-bound judgments of common sense extracted and saved from the past whatever was conceptualized by tradition *and* was still applicable to present conditions. This 'practical' commonsense method of remembrance did not require any effort but was imparted to us, in a common world, as our shared inheritance (TPT, p. 42).

Arendt is not tired of saying that this understanding of tradition and of the role of common sense in carrying it forwards is based on Roman political experience. Much different from that of the Greeks, in this experience «political action consists in the foundation and preservation of a *civitas*» (p. 47). The whole of Roman history and politics relies on maintaining a connection with the great act of foundation and making sure this act and the actors responsible for it will forever be part of the political body they have founded. The qualities of greatness and eternity bestowed upon the act of foundation and the founders, and through them on the city and political community, have a religious nature:

This sanctification of the gigantic, almost superhuman, and therefore [...] legendary effort of foundation [...] became the cornerstone of the Roman religion, in which political and religious activity were considered to be one... This Roman religion, based on foundation, made it a holy duty to preserve whatever had been handed down from the ancestors, the *maiores* or greater ones (TPT, p. 49).

Through religion, tradition can preserve not only the memory of foundation but also its binding power, its influence on the way of life of all succeeding generations, namely ancestral authority: tradition, Arendt writes, preserved authority, «which was based on the testimony of the ancestors who had witnessed the sacred foundation» (TPT, pp. 49-50).

Authority, in other words, stems directly from the founding fathers – it is integral to what keeps the city together throughout the generations and makes the common political existence of its citizens possible. Hence, a regime based on such authority is by no means tyrannical or capricious: «The difference between tyranny and authoritarian government has always been that the tyrant rules in accordance with his own will and interest, whereas even the most draconic authoritarian government is bound by laws» (Arendt, 2006b [hereafter WA], p. 97). The root of the difference lies in that «The source of authority in authoritarian government is always a force external and superior to its own power» (WA, p. 97). Hence, while authority is often confused with power, strength or violence since they are all designed to make others

obey, Arendt insists that «authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed» (WA, p. 93). And although authority implies unequal relations between people, it does not involve oppression: «Authority implies an obedience in which men retain their freedom» (WA, p. 106). When the past event of foundation has been sanctified and transmitted through tradition, the authority of the ancestors is present in citizens' lives, enabling rather than impinging upon their political freedom.

This trinity of tradition, religion and authority was strong enough to survive the transitions from republic to empire and from paganism to Christianity, the latter through the founding of the Roman-Catholic church on the writings and heritage of the church fathers (TPT, p. 50). However, all three mutually dependent elements declined at the beginning of the modern age as the belief in the sanctity of foundation was replaced by the belief in future progress (TPT, p. 50). The loss of traditional tools of understanding and judgment, accompanied by the weakening of religion and authority, brought upon the demise of common sense itself – not of a specific common sense, replaced by another, but of the very possibility for making sense in common (Snir, 2015). This led to «an atrophy in the dimension of the past and initiated the creeping and irresistible movement of shallowness which spreads a veil of meaninglessness over all spheres of modern life» (TPT, p. 42).

We can now return to the crisis in education, whose origin Arendt locates in the gap between the modern world and the inherent need for authority and tradition in education:

The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority nor held together by tradition. That means, however, that not just teachers and educators, but all of us, insofar as we live in one world together with our children and with young people, must take toward them an attitude radically different from the one we take toward one another. We must decisively divorce the realm of education from the others, most of all from the realm of public, political life, in order to apply to it alone a concept of authority and an attitude toward the past which are appropriate to it but have no general validity and must not claim a general validity in the world of grown-ups (CE, p. 195).

Tradition and authority, therefore, should function in education despite having lost their validity in the world of adults. But if educators succeed in this task, and students in turn renew the world in a way inspired – not determined – by their experience with educational authority, education may be able to become a source for renewal and re-instantiation of tradition and authority – which are supportive of political freedom – also beyond the school.

Alexander clearly cannot accept the sweeping claim that the modern world has lost touch with religion, tradition and ancestral authority – after all, he lives, writes and educates within a traditional religious community – but the historical and philosophical aspects of the picture Arendt draws can nevertheless be related to his view and contribute to its understanding of tradition and authority. First, her concept

of common sense sheds light on the *modus operandi* of what he calls «a view from somewhere». Understanding that the lenses through which we look at the world are painted with common sense means realizing that looking at the world is tightly connected to the way people sense their world and make sense of it together with others who share the same world. Second, Arendt's concepts of tradition and authority allow educational theory to flesh out the connection between past and present and demonstrate that it contains much more than continuity, belonging and identity. As tradition transmits the act of foundation and authority rests with the founding fathers, they are not merely historically contingent but constitute the very thing that makes living together possible. Such tradition does not limit perspective but rather opens it and gives it depth, and such authority is not arbitrary but the very thing that makes freedom possible. These points by no means contradict Alexander's view, but rather bring to light implicit and underdeveloped aspects of his thought, thereby adding to its relevance.

4. Pluralism, difference and dialogue

In various contexts where she discusses tradition, Arendt writes of «our» tradition (2005b; 2006a) and in «The Crisis in Education», she speaks of «the» world, as if there are only one relevant tradition and one common world. But she is well aware that society is split into groups with their own traditions, religions and authorities. Should education ignore this plurality? Arendt thinks not.

In her essay on Little Rock, Arendt denies government the right to impose educational integration and upholds the parents' right to choose in whose company their children will be educated. The backbone of her position is a distinction between three domains: the private, the social and the political. The political domain is characterized by equality. This equality is manifested nowadays, among other things, by equality before the law and the equal right to elect and be elected. This is not the case in social and private life, however. Upon entering society, «We become subject to the old adage of 'like attracts like' which controls the whole realm of society [W]ithout discrimination of some sort society would simply cease to exist and very important possibilities of free association and group formation would disappear» (RLR, p. 205). Discrimination, therefore, is a social right just as equality is a political right, and is by no means illegitimate. The third, private domain is ruled by exclusiveness – one chooses one's close friends and intimate partners (RLR, p. 207). The political domain, Arendt concludes, must not intervene in the right of individuals to make friends and find a marital partner of their own choosing but must also refrain from acting in the name of equality against social discrimination.

To which domain, then, does education belong? «Children», Arendt writes, «are first of all part of family and home, and this means that they are, or should be, brought up in that atmosphere of idiosyncratic exclusiveness which alone makes a home a home» (RLR, p. 211). This entails parental right over the education of their children, a right compulsory education limits but does not annul. The right of the state concerns «only the content of the child's education, not the context of association and social life which invariably develops out of his attendance at school» (RLR, p. 212). The right of parents to decide whom their children will go to school

with legitimizes private and separate schools, even segregated ones. As long as the schools of the different social groups are equally good, political equality is not impinged by social discrimination. Arendt's claim that education should mediate the world to the young through tradition and authority should therefore be understood in the context of the right to separate schooling: each of these schools has its own tradition, authority, and sometimes religion.

Arendt's position in the Little Rock essay is therefore consistent with that developed in «The Crisis in Education», and as mentioned overlaps Alexander's on certain points: although he would probably reject her distinction between the political, the social and the private domains, he too is an enthusiastic supporter of the right of parents to educate their children in separate schools. In the important debate between Eamonn Callan and Terence McLaughlin regarding the right to separate schooling, Alexander sides with the latter – who claims that «parents are justified in fostering a stable and coherent 'primary culture', which may be infused with religion» (RLE, p. 180) – against the former's claim that education for rational autonomy allows parents only to expose their children to their beliefs but not to instill them (Callan, 1985). Much like Arendt, Alexander argues that liberal societies «require both common and separate schools in some form or another» (RLR, p. 171), and that the choice between them should rest with the parents.

However, Alexander's approach brings to light at least two problems in Arendt's. First, his question, «Can education in particular religious, ethical, or political traditions be distinguished from morally troubling forms of ideological indoctrination...?» (RLE, p. 92), may be addressed to Arendt, namely: Does applying the Roman model of tradition and authority to education not lead to illegitimate oppression, to indoctrination? The connection Arendt makes between authority and freedom cannot be a sufficient answer here, for Alexander asks about the initial consent to enter into the hierarchical structure and accept the kind of freedom it offers; he asks, in other words, about parents' right to choose traditional and cultural affiliation for their children. Second, Alexander argues that although separate schooling based on religious or traditional (but not on racial) identity is acceptable, it might still reproduce social power relations, and that this potential problem must be addressed. Given that not all groups enjoy equal status in the state, we must ask whether separate education «excludes from the language of political power others who are not members of that [hegemonic] group» (RLE, p. 107). In other words, how can traditional Arendtian education be prevented from passing discrimination on to the political domain?

Alexander's approach also offers solutions to these two problems. For traditional education not to be indoctrination, Alexander argues, the pedagogical relation between the student and tradition must not be unidirectional – schools must not impose tradition on a passive student, but rather invite her to engage in dialogue with tradition. Without such dialogue, genuine absorption of tradition is impossible: understanding tradition «requires first that we grasp the purposes and intentions, the norms that govern conduct and expression, by entering into a dialogue with those who live by them» (RLE, p. 83). That is to say, tradition is not a petrified body of facts about the past and guidelines for the present one can look at and understand «from the outside»; it must be understood «from within», as a way of life, and this requires «living» interaction between teacher and student. Moreover,

such dialogue is not limited to becoming acquainted with tradition as it is; the teacher should facilitate a critical approach to tradition and allow the students to ask difficult questions. As new, original questions often require answers tradition cannot provide, educational dialogue can breathe new life into tradition, revise it to fit the changing world: «Teaching not only transmits old ideas; it creates new ones. It is associated not only with predetermined feelings and norms; it also creates new attitudes and practices. Teaching is generative, not merely reproductive. It recalls the past, but it also pushes the limits, criticizes, explores, examines» (RLE, p. 61; see also Dorff, 1996). Tradition is thus party to the educational dialogue and as such, it learns and evolves when it is learnt and embraced by the new generation.

This reveals an important difference between Alexander and Arendt. Not, to be sure, in the understanding of tradition as dynamic, for in Arendt too the renewal of the world, and with it tradition and common sense, is inherent to living interaction with it. Rather, the difference lies in the answer they both give to the question *who* is to renew: for Arendt, only adults, who have been acquainted with tradition and are already at home in the world, are prepared to renew the world without placing either the world or themselves at risk. According to Alexander, however, the renewal of tradition takes place also, perhaps primarily, by the students engaged in educational dialogue with it. A claim running throughout Alexander's writing is that students are moral agents, and that this agency must be nurtured from early on, even when it is expressed in skepticism and criticism of tradition, authority and religion:

What conceptions of education must share in common – what makes them conceptions of education rather than something else, say indoctrination – is a commitment to human agency [...] Refining the capacities of human agency [...] requires learning to understand, apply, interpret, and create norms within the context of communities or traditions that render them meaningful (RLE, p. 99).

That is to say, it is impossible to raise children to be moral and political agents through education that does not treat them as such and does not encourage them to think and act critically; in this sense, the Arendtian separation of education and politics is impossible and undesirable.

Furthermore, Alexander emphasizes that educational dialogue takes place not only between the student and tradition (or its representatives), but rather between tradition and other traditions. In order to be a living body of beliefs and practices, each tradition should be open to others, and genuine traditional education must involve exposure to diverse traditional perspectives: «Dialogue and debate among contrasting and conflicting views sharpens understanding of one's own position, fosters learning from other perspectives, and promotes the humble recognition that competing orientations have many advantages of their own» (RLE, p. 106). The resulting approach of «intelligent spirituality» (Alexander, 2001) requires, in terms Alexander borrows from Simon Rawidowicz (1957), an interpretation combining both *exegesis* (reading out) and *eisegesis* (reading in) – both loyalty to what already exists in tradition and openness to new readings based on external perspectives acquired through resonant intercultural encounters (RLE, p. 172). The plurality of beliefs, traditions and cultures is from this perspective not a problem or even a fact

to reconcile with, but a necessary condition for the vital, intelligent existence of every spiritual tradition (see also Sacks, 2003).

Emphasizing dialogue across traditions and cultures is not only a pedagogical and epistemological stance but also a political one, and it enables Alexander to formulate an answer to the second problem we pointed to in Arendt, namely the danger that education in separate traditions would contribute to the political inequality between majority and minority cultures. The challenge pluralism presents to modern liberal societies, is «to discern how prevailing traditions can serve as a source of, rather than a hindrance to, moral independence and to ensure that relevant rights and liberties are not denied to citizens affiliated with minority cultures or those of the weak or powerless» (RLE, p. 134). The answer is for societies to «initiate students of both majority and minority cultures into ‘dynamic’ versions of the traditions to which they are heir. In addition to celebrating their own legacies, dynamic traditions are willing to engage opposing perspectives and reinterpret current practice» (RLE, p. 134). Intercultural dialogue involves taking a critical stance, essential to liberal-democratic education within a given tradition, «that addresses power relations both within that tradition and between it and other traditions» (RLE, p. 123).

This position, which Alexander dubs «pedagogy of difference» (RLE, pp. 126-138; Alexander, 2017), does not rest dialogue on suspicion, looking to uncover power relations in order to advance the struggle against oppression as in Paulo Freire (1996). It is closer to the hermeneutical approach advocated by Martin Buber (1996) and Nel Noddings (2002), attempting to truly understand the Other and build a common denominator to bridge over gaps without eliminating them. Such dialogue brings to light not only differences but also power relations and hierarchies, and seeks to quell them by working together to promote openness, tolerance and willingness to accept the other. This dialogue does not presuppose a shared rationality undergirding and trivializing any differences, but rather emerges from the differences themselves in an attempt to form a common civic ground endowed with both width and depth, from which a plurality of groups and individuals can grow and live together side by side.

5. Critical traditionalism

Can Arendt’s approach to tradition and authority be combined with Alexander’s pedagogy of difference? I believe it can, if two major problems are overcome. The first is the clear hierarchical structure of authority, which is opposed to the mutual, egalitarian relations open dialogue implies. Arendt makes clear that authoritarian relations are incompatible with persuasion, which «presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation» (WA, p. 93). However, critical dialogue is not necessarily deliberative discussion between equals, and does not necessarily entail eliminating all hierarchical differences: an open, critical conversation may certainly respect all kinds of differences, so that teacher and students can maintain their respective roles and positions and still engage in a conversation where students ask critical questions rather than merely learn passively. An approach that joins Arendt and Alexander together will encourage dialogue between non-equals based on common sense, which includes recognition of the obvious differences in authority and responsibility between teachers and students; indeed, some may have much

more to learn from others, especially the traditional contents, values and rituals of the community.

The second problem is more fundamental to Arendt's view. It involves her demand to divorce education from politics and treat schoolchildren as a-political beings. As explained above, this demand is grounded in the need to protect children from the dangerous pressure of the public realm, as well as on the claim that one needs to be acquainted with the world before being able to act upon, criticize and transform it. However, as various scholars (Curtis, 2001; Biesta, 2001; Schutz, 2001; Schutz & Sandy, 2015) have already pointed out, this view is untenable. Indeed, even Arendt's own understanding of political activity calls for revising it: political engagement is never a miraculous event springing forth *ex nihilo*; one must practice it gradually. Hence, there is room even in Arendt's view for Alexander's position that learning must involve active engagement with the world, and teachers should encourage students to be moral and political agents without thereby exposing them (and the world) to excessive danger. School can and should provide the liminal space in which students can act without being threatened, criticize without destroying and being destroyed – a space in which the distinction between education and politics can be reexamined each time anew without utterly collapsing (Snir, 2016). Educators in such schools have a double role: on the one hand, to follow Arendt in presenting the world to the students and taking responsibility over it as a source for authority and legitimate hierarchy; and on the other hand, to follow Alexander in gradually providing the students with a secure place from which they can challenge the world, including tradition and common sense. School should be safe enough to allow teachers and students the confidence to dialogue with other cultures and traditions, without thereby undermining the very foundations of their own. I suggest calling this approach, which brings Arendt and Alexander together, «critical traditionalism»: it combines recognition of the self-evident authority of the teacher with critical approach on the part of the student, who is anchored in tradition but also criticizes it from within and from without, through dialogue with other traditions.

The juxtaposition of traditionalism and critique may seem contradictory, for we often think of traditionalism as uncritical commitment to beliefs and practices, and of critique as commitment to nothing but critical reason itself. Critical traditionalism rests, however, on the understanding that criticism is never the application of abstract universal reason but is necessarily performed from within, from a point of view anchored in tradition (whether it is aware of that fact or not). Tradition, for its part, is paralyzed or disconnected from the actual world if it is not open to criticism at the same time it is being taught and passed on. While some version of critical traditionalism may be ascribed to both Arendt and Alexander, I believe a much richer view is generated when they dialogue, with each shedding light on and helping overcome problems in the other.

To illustrate this approach, I will briefly compare it to two prevailing approaches in education: liberal and multicultural education. Liberal education rests on each person's ability to use their reason and promotes rational autonomy. As clarified by Eamonn Callan (1988), the most influential representative of this view in contemporary philosophy of education, such education distances itself from any partiality and seeks political neutrality, locating its contribution to democracy on

two levels: providing the knowledge needed for civic life, and fostering autonomous personalities able to judge and decide for themselves. This version of liberalism is clearly individualistic, as it emphasizes the student's own intellectual capabilities, arguing that proper education will allow her not to yield to arbitrary powers but rather to mindfully choose her own views and actions, and take active part in democratic political life. Critical traditionalism also takes introducing the students to the political world to be one of its major roles, and it too emphasizes the development of the student's moral and political autonomy. However, according to that approach, becoming acquainted with the world means much more than learning civic rights and duties or intellectually understanding the foundations of democratic government – it means rather growing into a rich tradition that provides communal belonging and common sense as a basis for personal identity and critical engagement. Autonomy, therefore, does not rest on abstract rational capacities but rather on a place within tradition and in relation to authority. Autonomy is the ability to criticize authority while respecting it, of being tied to tradition while appealing to other traditions as sources for expanding one's horizons and possibilities for self-fulfillment. The contents and meaning of the individual's intellectual capacities, therefore, are derived from the community and its tradition; in fact, individual liberalism is itself but a specific political and intellectual tradition.

The emphasis on belonging to a specific tradition and community as the root necessary for growth is also characteristic of multicultural education. Unlike liberal, individualistic education, multicultural education acknowledges that the individual is always part of a community and tradition, and seeks to prevent situations where the student's communal or cultural belonging impinges on her school performance or is threatened by the dominant culture. Such education is based on each student's need to be a member of some community, and on the community's right to live alongside others without being assimilated into the majority culture (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Levinson, 2009). This approach may come down to giving room to various identities and voices within a mixed classroom, or to defending the right for separate communal education that ensures continuity of tradition and empowers the individual by drawing meaning and identity from the community.

Critical traditionalism also acknowledges the right of every group to educate the next generation in light of its unique tradition, but rejects the extreme relativism implied by multiculturalism, namely the assumption that each culture is a closed totality that cannot be criticized using the conceptual tools of another. The point here is not only the paradoxality inherent in every extreme relativist view, which has to apply its skepticism to itself (RLE, p. 56). From the point of view of critical traditionalism, the major problem of multicultural education is its emphasis on preserving and strengthening culture and tradition at the expense of criticizing and changing it. Without denying the power students can draw from standing firm in their own traditions, critical traditionalism puts much more weight on the criticism each student may have of her own culture and tradition, as well as on intercultural dialogue that enables each culture to renew itself and individuals to find their place in the world by adopting a critical perspective. In the words of Kimberley Curtis, education seeking to preserve the pluralist spirit of multiculturalism while avoiding relativism and separatism «makes our world more vividly, more actively held in common» (2001, p.

131). Such education rejects both the status quo and multicultural separatism, and by using cultural differences as resources rather than a problem, looks at the world from ever more perspectives, thereby enriching the world itself (Lane, 2001).

6. Afterword

The dialogue between Arendt and Alexander I have suggested offers an alternative to the current educational discourse by rejecting the view from nowhere and anchoring education in tradition and authority. However, this alternative is not problem free either. Arendt and Alexander also share some blind spots, naturally reflected in the approach developed here by combining their positions. Instead of repeating all of the above, I will end by pointing to one important issue that seems to escape both: the importance of power relations in appropriating tradition and in taking a hold in the common world.

Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* that:

To regard the universe as one's own [...] one must belong to the caste of the privileged; it is for those alone who are in command to justify the universe by changing it, by thinking about it, by revealing it; they alone can recognize themselves in it and endeavour to make their mark upon it (1956, p. 671).

Taking one's part in the world and belonging to tradition are thus not neutral processes occurring in the same way in everybody or varying only according to personal differences. They are influenced by power relations within each group and in relation to any tradition – no world is equally shared by all. Alexander is indeed aware of such relations *between* different communities, and as argued above, this view can be consistent with Arendt. However, my point now has to do with relations of oppression and domination *within* each culture and tradition, as is arguably the case with women in Orthodox Judaism and slaves in Roman antiquity. Internal critique through dialogue with the past and its representatives in the present will not suffice here, for one of the obvious implications of internal power relations is that some voices are not sufficiently heard in each culture because tradition itself silences them.

A way out of this conundrum, I believe, requires not only dialogue but also struggle. Such struggle may be integrated into the critical traditionalism developed here, but this would require turning our gaze away from Arendt and Alexander; it will require engaging them in further dialogue with political and educational theorists whose account of political struggle is characterized by the depth and sensibility of Arendt's discussion of authority and by Alexander's discussion of the pedagogy of difference.

7. References

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