Freedom as a Mode of Thought. Hannah Arendt

“What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing”

Hannah Arendt

In this paper I am going to explore Hannah Arendt’s ideas of freedom and the political in relation to thinking, responsibility and necessity in order to find the way to treat the question of freedom in the context of contemporary society. I am going to outline the structure of these notions in the Greek polis according to which Arendt gauges contemporary mass society. Arendt’s phenomenological thought on the nature of the political existence in Western society and the decline of Europe encompasses a wide range of themes, tracing the origins of the Western culture and exposing how the changing dynamics of the private and public, thought and action, and the development of science and technology have resulted in the animality of mass society, i.e., the way of thinking that allowed the rise of totalitarianism.

What changed in the human self-understanding in the modern age and what constitutes the humanness of a human being nowadays? Is it possible to restore the freedom in Europe in its true, original meaning? The questions are related, and the fact that Arendt’s work does not shape coherent systematic philosophy only proves that she creates her thought in the quest for vital, truthful thinking. It is a thinking which is not isolated from the reality and practical human activity, touching upon painful historical events in 20th century Europe. Arendt, never admitting to be a philosopher, however, bases her oeuvre in ontologically important questions and creates a political theory according to deep philosophical insights, where the political, freedom, and thought are closely related. Her considerations about a human being in the world are strongly related to thinking and place. These two dimensions, in my opinion, are the cornerstones of her thought and constitute a certain kind of vitalism of time and space: firstly, Arendt de-substantializes the political, showing that plurality, freedom and the unpredictability are indistinguishable in order to build a meaningful world, and, secondly, she considers spatiality as the fundamental condition to human existence. These are the main two principles upon which Arendt establishes her theory of the political. And my question in this regard is – what is freedom in her thought and where is a place for it in the contemporary world?

Arendt starts “The Human Condition” paying attention to an event in recent history; in 1957 there was first ever man-made object launched into the universe; an event that marks the point in the history of humanity when the first “step toward escape from men’s imprisonment to the earth” has been made. This event initiates a completely new way of thinking about the human being and raises the question ‘Why such an escape?’ Is this stepping out from the natural conditions just a pursuit of progress and manifestation of scientific exploration spirit or does it nonetheless run deeper and imply a wider scope of issues dealing with the technological progress that undermines and potentially changes the ontological status of human being in the world?
Arendt elaborates comprehensive political hermeneutics, taking into account fundamental ontological insights on human being in the world, where thinking and acting are closely related in the realm of the public. Arendt originally intended “The Human Condition” to call “The Vita Activa”, because in the centre of the book is the discussion on three fundamental activities of human being, but realizing that in the Western tradition the notion of vita activa was coined as the opposite and subjected to vita contemplativa, which was held as a passive state of contemplation, she eventually did not. For Arendt, thinking and acting coincides and are closely related to the questions of freedom and responsibility, and vita activa in her thought takes a different orientation from the traditional reception of the term.

Arendt’s political thought is hermeneutical, which means that, firstly, human beings do not have a pre-given nature according to which one could judge deeds, and secondly, human activity is reflexive – human beings, creating the world are in turn conditioned by created things and deeds. It is Heideggerian assumption about the historicity of human beings, but instead of creating hermeneutics of being, she extends argument into the political and shows that a human being is conditioned by his activity in the world, manifesting it by three capacities – labour, work, and action. Arendt finds the Greek polis as a model where these three activities were separated in three different life-forms and constitute certain relationships of human being with space and time. Labour, being basically the pure maintenance of life, deals with natural level of human life and maintains the circular time of everydayness; labour, dealing with the necessities of life, had been the task of the slaves in the Greek polis. Work is the activity that creates the world of artifice – durable and usable things, made with certain aim. Work creates the worldliness – it sustains and establishes rectilinear order of time, being is related to the lifespan of human being. The third mode of life that Arendt distinguishes, action and speech, principally differs from the former two. If labour and work are, or can be, realized in solitude, and preserve the private sphere, the action takes place in public and establishes the political realm, space of appearance, and does not require or produce any material medium or artefact. The political is the space of freedom, the creation of historical narrative that bestows human life with higher meaning; it is not subjected to mere necessities of life. Men, acting politically, exercise the freedom to gain immortality, which means to be memorized among others and inscribed in history. For Arendt free activity of human beings is possible only when released from the necessity of what the maintenance of life presupposes, and is realized in the common realm with others; a human being is not born free, he is born for freedom. The political as the space of plurality is created by free, equally distinguished citizens who contribute their perspective in the common deeds. It is creation of the common, of new meaning, creation of the human world, withdrawn from the worldliness and utility that ties human being to the level of animality:

“Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the common nature of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of positions and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object.” (HC, p. 58)
The human condition of labour is life itself.
The human condition of work is worldliness.
The human condition of action is plurality.

The characteristics that Arendt assigns to labour and work shows that they are closely related to the conditions under which life on earth has been given to man and thus entails the mode of thinking that is conditioned by necessity, instrumental one:

“Labor manifests itself in extremis in the form of dehumanizing automatic processes and compulsive repetitions that displace the human death; work manifests itself in extremis in the form of dehumanizing fabricating processes and instrumentalized objectifications that violate human life.” (CC, p. 97)

In contrast, action constitutes the world “in between” and creates the space of plurality, constituting in relations among different, but equal citizens. The political is not and cannot be exercised in isolation or solitude, and the speech is not instrumental or necessary (as it is in a household, ‘oikos’ that is defined by labour and work); political speech is an action in a sense of lifestyle.

If we follow the distinction of these three activities as different modes of thought, it is interesting to think how these three modes of life are ontologically tied together today. As these three activities are distinguished in the Greek polis in the three parts of society, Arendt does not defend slavery as acceptable part of society, rather she tries to show that the logic of labour has to be left out of the political. This mode of life is (or has to be) an avant-garde of the existence of human beings as such, where speech as an appearance and exposure to others is the action, not motivated by any practical aims, and constitutes the common world in its meaningfulness. The political implies certain thinking that is not corrupted by pre-given motifs or subjected to general principles; instead it constitutes free action. Since political action coincides with historical narrative, it is not directly related to the material, but constitutes as free and truthful thinking manifested in the narrative and remembrance. Arendt stresses Socratic virtue of thinking that is directed to making citizens truthful (CC, p.81) she shows that thinking is essential for politics, and truthful thinking is always motivated by freedom, contrary to practical consideration of sciences that is motivated by instrumentalization and necessity. Action and speech coincide when they presuppose the answer to the question “Who you are?” of a newcomer into realm. This answer discloses the individual both in his words and deeds and shows the revelatory and initiatory (the beginning) aspect of the action/speech. Action without speech would lose the revelation as well as the subject, which shows that speech is ontologically tied to the truth as well as being to thinking.

Arendt’s understanding of truthful thinking and the political that bestows human existence with meaning, in opposition to scientific thinking requires closer observation. To disclose her understanding of truth and the notion of meaning in the political she refers to Leibnizs’ distinction of two kinds of truths – truth of reason and truth of fact, where the only reliable truth is truth of reason – for instance, mathematical reasoning that is intrinsically necessary, the opposite of
which is *per se* impossible. Different from this is truth of fact that is considered to be contingent and allows also opposite state of affairs to be possible. Leibniz uses the ages-old tradition at least since Plato and treats mathematical reasoning as a paradigm for thinking, where higher ontological value between necessity and contingency, eventually, is given to the necessary. Arendt turns against this tradition, saying that if truth of reason is accessible universally to everyone with equal brain power, then truth of fact can never be witnessed by everyone and, moreover, “the true opposite of factual, as distinguished from rational, truth is not error or illusion but the deliberate lie.” (LM, p. 59) She denies the necessity of the truth of reason and notes that mathematical truth is also produced by the human brain that is natural and in no way has to be considered as universal and total. Since the human being is conditioned by its faculties, Arendt wants to disclose the meaning, thus liberating the thought process from the necessity as a condition to it. She distinguishes two types of human faculties – thinking and knowing, and follows Kant’s distinction of reason (*Vernunft*) and intellect (*Verstand*). Intellect as the faculty of cognition and apprehension of perception, desires to grasp what is given to the senses. It is manifested in sciences, in means-end operation of the mind, and supplies us with objective, factual knowledge. Reason, on the other hand, is the faculty of thinking that Arendt actually calls *thinking* and deals with in her philosophy, and upon which her theory of the political is built. Reason as a reflective praxis is comprehension; it wishes not to find the verifiable truth, but to understand the meaning. She calls it the “sixth sense” that endows with meaning the world, grasped by our five others.

“[..] truth is located in the evidence of the senses. But that is by no means the case with meaning and with the faculty of thought, which serves for it; the latter does not ask what something is or whether it exists at all, [..] but what it means for it to be.” (LM, p. 59)

We can say that intellect operates with substantial knowledge that is located in the evidence of senses or rationality, while reason, the faculty of thought, is in search for relational understanding “in between” the given and strives to grasp the constellation, relations, - the meaning of the state of affairs. Regards to the condition of the human being, the quest for knowledge would pose the question about “the human nature”, but it cannot lead us to what Arendt is after, i.e., “the human condition”, the answer to “Who is human being?” instead of “What is human being”?

Arendt makes a strong separation between the common sense (including scientific rationality and practical calculation) and thinking. Common sense strives to apprehend the given in the senses (*Verstand*) - its desire is ‘to grasp’, so that truth may come *into its reach*; whereas *Vernunft*, thinking, strives to search and establish meaning that is not given in the direct grasp of things. It can be compared to the process of wandering and wondering, looking for the explanation rather than right answer. These two modes are manifested in two distinct types of human activity:
“Within [the] metaphors of the manual labourer and the knight-errant, the distinction is consistent. *Vernunft* can establish meaning while on the quest, and this establishment is its special business – a capacity denied to the *Verstand* of science of and of common sense.”

Arendt does not deny that thinking and knowing are related; she introduces this distinction methodologically in order to explicate the consequences of the prevalence and manifestation of one of them in the human world. Thinking and knowing require each other, but in scientific enterprise thinking has a specific role – means and end operation, the result of which is knowledge. And although the end is determined by non-scientific question “what is worth to know”, although withdrawn from the world of evidence and appearances, it serves to find better methods or more promising approaches towards the goal – reliable, verifiable, and usable knowledge.

“Science in this respect is but an enormously prolongation of common-sense reasoning in which sense illusions are constantly dissipated just as errors in science are corrected. […] The very concept of an unlimited progress, […] is the best documentation of the fact that all science still moves within the realm of common sense experience, subject to corrigible error and deception.” (LM, p. 54)

The modern world comes with the victory of common sense and is marked by three great events (HC, p. 248) – the discovery of America, the Reformation and the invention of telescope, and the development of a new science that considers the nature of the earth from the viewpoint of the universe. For us the third one is of greatest importance; Arendt turns to Archimedes *dos rnoi pou sto* (HC, p. 262) and states that although we are still bound to the earth, we have found the way how to act and think from this universal Archimedian standpoint, as though we would stand outside, “even at the risk of endangering the natural life process we expose the earth to universal, cosmic forces alien to nature's household.” (HC, p. 262)

A universal and rational standpoint of the modern science takes its effect also in philosophy, which was introduced with the famous Cartesian doubt that constituted the tendency of modernity to go against traditional understanding of truth based on the sensory experience, revelation or reason. Cartesian doubt weakened human being’s confidence in the world, and traditional duality of being and appearance collapsed in doubt that truth as such exists at all. Instead of the understanding that appearances hide the true being, other kind of being emerged – that created its own appearances. The modern age is still haunted by the consequences of this doubt, firstly, because the world and senses are unreliable and can turn out to be grand illusion, and, secondly, in terms of human condition; it turned out not only that the world was not ruled by God, but that some evil spirit, which lured a human being towards a web of illusion, had taken its place. The consequence of this overall uncertainty was that a human being was seen as a “creature which harbours a notion of truth only to bestow on it such other faculties that it will never be able to reach any truth, never be able to be certain of anything.” (HC, p. 277) Arendt notes that this motive ever since has been present
in modern age as a decisive aspect of modern morality. What was lost forever was the certainty in any truths that could be accepted as true. Basically, it loosened the very level of conviction, implementing latent impugnation in human’s mind. Cartesian thinking is based on assumption that the only things that the mind can be sure of are those created by the mind. It marked the rise of the modern sciences with one ideal – that of mathematics that escalated in the modern age with industrialization of all spheres of human experience. The aforementioned Archimedean point in Cartesian context shifted into human mind itself; what was the common sense now, was the very structure of the human mind that happened to be common. The criterion of truthful knowledge was appropriate play of the mind with itself. Without any doubt, this process marks the shift and alienation of the human mind from the worldliness, sensuality and given reality. Neither God nor evil spirit cannot affect that ‘two and two is four’.

Curiously that, along with the new philosophy, modern science rose with the belief in progress, with immense optimism in man’s ability to learn and think. It did not apply to each one human being, but to the succession of generations that are able to accumulate knowledge and make a progress of Mankind: “Progress became the project of Mankind, acting behind the backs of real man – personified force that we find somewhat later in Adam Smith’s “invisible hand”, in Kant’s “ruse of nature”, Hegel’s “cunning of Reason”, and Marx’s “dialectical materialism”. “(LM, p. 153) This aspect introduces the third mode of thought apart from thinking and scientific cognition - that of logical reasoning which produces knowledge in the mind that are reliable to the mind - logical deductions from self-evidence and subordination of particular under general. Logical reasoning can be understood as a production of this “personalized” sphere of knowledge that creates the world of theory which in turn in the modern age is applied to actual states of affair and experience in order to analyse and predict the outcomings. With each step of ever-further rationalization and functionalization of the faculties of the human mind, human being has become more and more alienated from the un-functional and un-necessary realms of life, and becoming more and more utilitarian and depriving certain spheres of life from sacredness, the feature of measurability has taken the place of the sacred (and not even in religious sense).

In turn, this same structural shift has been manifested also in political, social, and economic organization of the Western society according to the new understanding of humanity as a rational “subject”. For instance, if in the pre-modern world, economic and political structures were linked – the private property and wealth were indistinguishable and constituted the political status of free citizen, then the modern world comes with the collapse of the private and public in the domain of social; historically started with the transformation of the private property into public concern, the rise of economics coincides with the expropriation of the private property of peasants around the time of Reformation that basically changed the understanding of wealth and property and introduced the rise of common wealth. In the modern world property has been detached from its sacredness and bondage to the place, and has become nothing more than privately consumable wealth without any further political meaning. This original stage introduced a century’s long process of the extinction between private and
public that later escalated in capitalism where wealth became a capital that is able
to produce more capital, where capital starts to live its own, *personalized* life.
Changes in the perception of private property do not necessary abolish the private
property as such; this shift rather implies certain alienation both in terms of place
and the meaning of wealth. Wealth and property is no longer bound to the earth,
house or place; it is virtually changeable and mobile. These changes have deprived
man not only from a place in the world in political sense, but also from home as a
shelter from the outer world. Since the public has become the concern of the
private, and the private – the only concern of the public, it is the social where the
only common concern is each individual’s private interest, and where is no place
left for political action. The real consequence of the social is that it excludes the
very possibility of action that was previously excluded from the household,
because the common has become a huge *household*. Economics could have
achieved its status of the social measurement of human activity because man
became a social being with certain patterns of behaviour as the only way to
express one’s individuality that is tied to what one “does for life” and what
consumes. Logically, the social comes with the liberation of the labour as a
*meaning* of human life, where one’s only value is measured by one’s skill, which
in turn can be reduced to a mere labour power, productivity. Modern society thinks
in terms of means-end pattern and, according to the three kinds of human activity,
a kind of paradox appears – although alienated from his milieu, the human being
thinks in terms of necessity, which has been lifted to a higher level of value: “It is
not that in modern world there would not be poetry, philosophy or politics, but the
fact that these spheres of human activity are reduced to satisfy human needs –
those of public admiration or financial reward – are not able to constitute the
public sphere as a space in which things are saved from destruction of time.” (HC,
p. 57)

Three modes of life in the Greek polis are quite directly related to three modes
of thinking, and also to three kinds of “discourses” in contemporary world.
Thought in the Greek polis was manifested in the political as speech and action;
this thinking is free, without any aim, it is “useless”, without neither end nor goal
outside itself. Today it seems still to be preserved in philosophy and arts.
Instrumental cognition manifested work and created worldliness, pursuing to
definite aims. It creates knowledge that is practically usable, which means
technological power of scientific progress. Logical reasoning instead, seemingly to
higher reliability lifted rationality, in fact represents measurable brain power of a
human being that can be compared to labour power and, accordingly, in polis was
a task for slaves. It represents the power of a *human animal* which he develops in
its metabolism with nature. The tragedy of the modern age is that this way of
thinking has overtook all the fields of human expression and functions as a mind-
set of contemporary world where consummation and satisfaction of primal needs
as “making a living” plays the main role in human life, whatever he does. The rise
of the labour that prevails all spheres of human activity in the modern age marks
also the radical change in moral standards that is “inspired by the needs and ideals
of its most important group of men, the new scientists; and the modern cardinal
virtues—success, industry, and truthfulness—are at the same time the greatest
virtues of modern science.” (HC, p.17) The human being in the social is led by the
mode of rational operating instead of truthful thinking, where scientific discourse
in the form of economics, social sciences and anthropology prevails, which, as we
have seen, is a mere derivation from the common sense and Verstand. Rationality,
withdrawn from the actual involvement in the world, seems to be mere attempt of
certain liberation instead of establishing true freedom. In the modern age also the
political, reduced to predictability and statistics, has turned into a huge
administrative apparatus of social maintenance and political technologies, striving
to exclude the very possibility of spontaneous, free actions, receiving them as
deviant and asocial. This aspect shows the latent totalization of modern world
where heterogeneous field of human activity has been subjected to measurable
statistics and general rules, accordingly which naturalize human existence in order
to measure and predict its course in the future. It has far reaching political
consequences that risk leading to ideologies and principles under which the true
value of human being can be lost (as it has been seen in totalitarian regimes of the
20th century). Arendt treats this question in her work “On Violence”, where she
notes the risk of reducing the action to random events or irrelevant exceptions,
what actually has happened with the rise of social sciences that strive to theorize
human experience:

“The danger is that these theories are not only plausible, because they take their
evidence from actually discernible present trends, but that, because of their inner
consistency, they have a hypnotic effect; they put to sleep our common sense, which
is nothing else but our mental organ for perceiving, understanding, and dealing with
reality and factuality.” (OV, p. 110)

When the political turns into the social, everything becomes predictable for
the price of the future. Government is replaced by socioeconomic administration
and presupposes “objectivity” and usability. The modern world came with the
prevalence of a scientific ideal in the socioeconomic organization of Europe; the
modern age can be defined by the dominance of scientific thinking in socio-
political organization, turning it into mere ideology. Scientific thinking reduces
meaning to the common sense structures. It is not able to create a world, to make a
home, to produce meaning. It has established a society that is predictable and
measurable and has collapsed in the circularity of consummation; this is a society
that has changed its temporality and has deprived itself from the relationship with
the infinite and with immortality. Modern world itself has been determined by
technological and practical know-how, derived from the universal, distinguished
from the natural laws and involvement in the realm of appearances:

“[..] there are, indeed, few things that are more frightening than the steadily
increasing prestige of scientifically minded brain trusters in the councils of
government during the last decades. The trouble is not that they are cold-blooded
enough to “think the unthinkable”, but that they do not think.” OV, p. 108.

Society that is blinded by the rational speculations of the mind and sheer
scientific development is in a train to nowhere, because it lacks the very sense that
has been written in the origins of Europe – that of true freedom, which actually constitutes human being as being human. Moreover, Arendt compares it to the desert, the world which is deprived of everything “in between”, from everything “useless” that bestows life with untimely dimension and allows actually building a world, where the worldliness and usefulness actually gains its importance. The spirit of discovery that seemingly strives to extend the limits of the human world and experience, in the end only abolish the distance: “nothing can remain immense if it can be measured, that every survey brings together distant parts and therefore establishes closeness where distance ruled before.” (HC, p. 250)

If we distinguish two basic modes of thought – that of instrumentalized, subjected to aims, and free thought, we see how they are related to two modes of freedom in Arendt’s thought. She refers to the two foundational legends of the Western world – Roman and Hebrew, both of which hold that the supreme act in which “We” was constituted as definable entity implied that “the inspiring principle of action is love of freedom, and this both in the negative sense of liberation from oppression and in the positive sense of the establishment of Freedom as a stable, tangible reality.”(LM, p. 203) The difference and link between these two terms - negative liberation and actual, positive freedom, - have far reaching consequences according to the problematic of freedom in the contemporary world. Both legends start with an act of liberation (from slavery in Egypt and by burning of Troy) and are told from the perspective of new state of freedom that has been acquired by spontaneity of beginning something new. There is an abyss between the act of liberation from the previous order and the action, true positive freedom, exercised without any reliable chain of causality. As Arendt puts it, “liberation, though it may be freedom’s condition sine qua non, is never the condition per quam that causes freedom – there is nothing left for the “beginner” to hold on.”(LM, p. 208) This abyss that constituted the beginning of true freedom has been blocked by the reliable rationality of the modern sciences, which started with Descartes. Theories that considered free will strived to reconcile freedom with the necessity by means of dialectical speculations that depend only on the abilities of mind. Modern subject, fearing the unreliability of reality and creating his own verifiable truth in the mind, seems to be stiffening on the cornice of the abyss before the leap into unknown to establish positive, life affirmative freedom. The liberation as a purposeful activity presupposes acting accordingly to certain logic and causality towards the goal, it can be held as a manifestation of this instrumentalized thinking, whereas true, positive freedom does not imply this course of intellect, but searches its own way of being and creates its meaning. The event of launching the Sputnik into space gave a human being the possibility to escape the imprisonment he faces on Earth; a human being of the age of technological thinking, which is characterized by an overwhelming need to discover, strives for a certain kind of freedom which rids him of his natural condition. It becomes rather clear also that it is indeed an attempt to escape instead of establishing true freedom. Thinking that makes human being want to escape, namely, the dimension which is present in the scientific discourse and strives to instrumentalize every part of human life, creates an alienation that is present ever since the rise of the modern world. Humanity is trying to escape its own
imprisonment through the wrong doors, and having challenged natural limits, points to threatening the future and reduces life to sheer surviving. Indeed, the same kind of life will continue the same kind of imprisonment even if a human being will be able to create his own conditions and start living on Mars, for instance. Scientific achievements in the 20th century no longer can be judged according to the common sense, because scientific reality has become too alienated from the lived experience of human being, so Arendt shows the real danger of the loss of the political, where deeds could be judged according to what they really mean for the human being; what is at stake here is not the common sense, but understanding.

“The quest for meaning is “meaningless” to common sense and common-sense reasoning because it is the sixth sense’s function to fit into the world of appearances and make us at home in the world given by our five senses; that we are and no questions asked.” (LM, p. 59)

To find a meaning is to make a home. To create a household and to satisfy natural needs is one, basic organization of the milieu and everydayness, whereas to make a home means to find and create principally new status of human being in space and time apart from mere surviving. Human being exercises this freedom in responsibility that is extended in action and transcends the worldliness and everydayness. What I claim is that mentioned three activities means three different modes of thinking and leads us to more reasonable analysis of the relationship between thinking, freedom and necessity; this triad also expresses the hermeneutical structure of Arendt’s thought showing that they are not only interrelated in the very fabric of human experience, but also that the meaning of this experience can be given only in freedom:

“The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. The human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment, but life itself is outside this artificial world, and through life man remains related to all other organisms.” (HC, p. 2)

Arendt’s understanding of freedom sets her at odds with traditional Western reception of free agent who remains independent from outer circumstances and leads his actions by his own, where the unpredictability just meant that one is subjected to sheer contingency. Arendt’s political agent is not a “victim of circumstances”, he gives himself to the unknown and creates the meaning himself, being truthful and responsible in his appearance, his action is transformative action that creates the world. Political freedom in her hands acquires different meaning and is closely related to necessity. She defends the priority of the will’s initiatory power over reason’s demand for precedent and comprehensibility that she finds in the thought of thirteenth-century theologian Duns Scotus. This dimension of Arendt’s understanding of the “non-sovereign quality of freedom” (CC, p. 181) changes the very concept of the political, introducing truthful thinking and spontaneous action as legitimate events in this realm.
“Events, by definition, are occurrences that interrupt routine procedures; only in a world in which nothing of importance ever happens could the futurologists’ dream come true. Predictions of the future are never anything but projections of present automatic processes and procedures, that is, of occurrences that are likely to come to pass if men do not act and if nothing unexpected happens; every action, for better or worse, and every accident necessarily destroys the whole pattern in whose frame it finds its evidence.” (OV, p. 109)

It is clear that political, subjected to the mind-set of rational, scientific ideal, loses this spontaneous dimension and accordingly, also the possibility to create temporal relation to the infinite, which is possible only when open thinking as searching and establishing meanings, is present. This searching for meaning, as shown, is “meaningless” for common sense, and Arendt calls thinking a “the sixth sense” function of which is “to fit us into the world of appearances and make us at home in the world given by our five senses.”(LM, p. 59) Society that lives only according to practical motivations is deprived from the meaning and importance of human’s life. Freedom, exercised in the political, at first glance seemingly mere, unnecessary benefit of the privileged, turns out to be the essential activity that actually constitutes the vital condition of authentic world of humanity.

In the Greek polis wealth allowed the person to be free for public activity. In the modern world wealth has become liberation, which individual enjoys in the act of consumption. Since every activity of human being in the modern world is submitted to the reward either in the form of money or prestige, there is no other criterion how to evaluate one’s success as sheer statistics of productivity. These two dimensions (wealth and prestige) satisfy the needs of human being and inevitably mark two basic traits of society – those of greed and narcissism. The movement and dynamics of these drives, is plainly circular and leaves no traces in the common world; as said, there is no other meaning for these activities other than individual benefits and advantages to “maintain life”.

Arendt in her critique of the contemporary mass society shows that common sense thinking and utility discourse has usurped its logics upon all the fields of human action and experience; in combination with the circularity of the consumption that has become the basic motivation of what one does, has turned the West into the mass of predictable animal beings, behaving accordingly to traceable behavioural patterns, hopelessly staring into future for the escape.

The changes of the West in recent century show ontological shift in the relationships between the mode of thought of freedom and totalitarianism. Taking into account previous analysis, it is worth to ask, where in the contemporary society the realm for action and speech, that is not being oppressed by statistically motivated structures (at least partly), is still possible, and where the political as a legitimate discourse of creation of the common potentially could be developed. If in the Greek polis the division line between the three modes of human existence could be distinguished in three political classes, then with modernity we see their transformation into modes of thought as potentialities and values, present ever since the rise of Europe.
We are no longer in the Greek polis, but we can realize and actualize these ideas in new forms and discourses that protect the state of freedom of the human being in terms of meaning and being at home, taking into account alienation and global homelessness of our times.

In the contemporary world, the spontaneity and possibility for truthfulness could be preserved in education and art practices. These fields are potentially capable to constitute the realm of speech and action where new meanings are created and questioned; where speaking is not a mere communication, but creates a real conversation about the meaningful, getting taking into account the truth and values of the ontological state of human being.

Bibliography