SOCIAL MEDIA, WORLD ALIENATION AND POST-TRUTH: REFLECTIONS ON HANNAH ARENDT'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Kelly Janaína Souza da SILVA[*]

Abstract. In light of recent debates on "post-truth", "post-facts", "fake news", and other contemporary phenomena that cover the issue of lying in politics, Arendt's work provides precious reflections on the relationship between truth and politics. The last few years have seen significant changes in how citizens communicate and appear in public to be seen and heard by everybody. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become essential tools for expressing and sharing opinions, ideas, preferences, and thinking. Social Media affordances heavily shape and impose the manners we interact with each other, leading many users of these networks to consider their expressions in them as effective political participation. Despite this situation's undoubted advances, the contemporary obsession with social media may reflect just "a form of world-alienation in interrelated ways". The character of the world as a set of facts and objects agreed upon and recognized by our common senses, unequivocally affirmed by Arendt, is then impaired since alienation is one of the great threats to the preservation of the common world.

In our article, Arendt's notion of world alienation is put to bear on social media phenomena most closely associated with the post-truth condition: manipulation of factual truths, lying in political discourse, and misinformation dissemination techniques on social media platforms. This work aims to present the main aspects of Arendt's thought that are consistent with contemporary phenomena that involve truth and lies in politics, shedding light in particular on the question of world-alienation amplified by social media techniques.

Keywords: Social Media & Post-truth, World Alienation, (Lie in) Politics, Hannah Arendt

Introduction

The theme of truth carries an ambiguous character in Hannah Arendt's – the German Jewish thinker – political thought, which makes it subject to controversy and contestation. Present with greater prominence in the essay *Truth and Politics* (1967)[1], – which is the main work that interests us in our argument – the subject of truth is also

[*] São Paulo State University (Unesp) / São Paulo Research Foundation / NOVA University Lisbon. E-mail: kelly.js.silva@unesp.br.

implicit in other Arendt's works such as *Lying in Politics* (1969)[2] and *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1971)[3]. It can be said that, although Arendt rarely engages with the theme directly, her concern for truth permeates her political thinking, serving as the main topos for interrelated topics on organized lying, opinion, the plurality of opinions, and the possibility of political authoritarianism. In some way, all of them are interrelated with the theme of truth in politics.

In light of recent debates on phenomena surrounding post-truth, Arendt's work provides precious reflections on the relationship between truth and politics. In her essay, she announced an important theoretical gap regarding reflection on the relationship between truth, lie, and opinion in the public sphere. She presents this to us through an idiosyncratic account that seemingly opposes politics and philosophy.

Her analysis of systematic mendacity and the danger it poses to factual truths is, nowadays, something we hear almost daily in political administrations around the world, facilitated by social media techniques. Her emphasis into the factual truth, therefore, is not a merely philosophical or speculative discourse. Despite her undeniable German philosophical background, Arendt's focus is not on the ontological, epistemological or hermeneutical issues that guide the debates around the truth, but rather on the challenges posed by the present. According to Arendt's reflections, the current post-truth era may imply not so much the death of truth as the death of the spaces that guarantee this truth (Díaz, 2021: 57)[4]. The institutions that historically made possible the existence of a common public sphere premised on shared truth – i.e., governments and the media – are now the very root causes of its fragmentation with patent signs of turbulence and uncertainty.

Our argument is divided into three sections: the first section of the paper introduces briefly Arendt's main ideas regarding this topic, presenting some of her political concepts related to truth. The second section provides a short exposition of post-truth politics and social networks techniques that influence political deliberation. The third section considers social media, post-truth, and other contemporary phenomena, as potential causes of world-alienation as understood by Hannah Arendt. It is beyond the scope of this article to go into the epistemic and philosophical complexities relating to this topic. The aim of this work is to flesh out those aspects of Arendt's thought that are consistent with contemporary phenomena revolving around truth and lies in politics, in particular, the question of world-alienation amplified by penetrative techniques of social media that are so persuasive in shaping beliefs and opinions.

The *truth* in Hannah Arendt's political thought

First of all, it is important to highlight that the relationship between truth and politics sustained in Arendt's work is much more complex than it might seem at first glance. The theme of truth in her work has been the subject of many controversies and, as a starting point in an extensive discussion, it is possible to say that for Arendt the possibility of truth to engender the public sphere goes beyond factual truth but turns on the decisive role of opinion. Two readings might be distinguished: on the one hand, scholars who argue that Arendt considers truth antagonistic to politics, and on the other hand, researchers committed to her notion of factual truth, as part and

parcel of the political field. To a lesser extent, however, the literature on the subject also contains propositions of conciliation between truth and politics in Arendt and the possibility of a connection between truth and human plurality in her work.

Regarding the former reading, we shall be careful not to dismiss Arendt's stance as inimical to the relevance of truth in the political field. Indeed, this is the risk succumbed to by many readers who limit her conception of truth to the high Platonic ideal interpreted by Arendt as a metaphysical truth: a source of absolute standards in service of tyrannical abuse of political power rather than one legitimated by public opinion. This truth, as defined by Plato, is incapable of sustaining the passivity of opinion, which is the only truth admitted by political action. Furthermore, if Arendt's statements are taken as relative, and not as absolute, her position diverges from many hasty conclusions about the theme of truth in *Truth and Politics*. The conviction with which Arendt opens the essay seems to invite the question of *whether* and *how* should truth be figured in political praxis rather than placing it in direct opposition to the public sphere. The manner she builds her argument does not seem to indicate that the opening of her essay is her fundamental position of political thought.

In *Truth and Politics*, Arendt demonstrates how opinion can easily be just another form of lying, as well as how the factual truth can be taken as just another opinion in the political space. It is also possible to highlight the importance of the political actors, their possibility of action, and of starting something new. It mentions terms of the veracity of opinion and deliberate lying, which may compromise political judgment. In a more cautious analysis of *Truth and Politics*, Arendt seems to propose not only to explore whether the truth should be told but also how to tell it, how to recognize it, and how to preserve it. The essay also clarifies her concern with the risk of voluntary or involuntary erasure and/or misrepresentation of the truth, with the effort to the organized fabrication of lies and with the role of opinion – a preponderant and indispensable element in the public sphere. Finally, moving beyond *Truth and Politics*, Arendt's writings invite us to consider the self-sufficiency of the public domain.

The phenomenon of the instrumental use of lies in politics occupied a central place in Hannah Arendt's thinking, both in terms of her analysis of the totalitarian event and the different meanings that the lie can take in the field of modern politics. Lies are strongly linked with truth. The tension between truth and lies in human affairs highlights a very thin line between them, even though the lie is the very opposite of the kind of truth that interests Arendt, from a political perspective – the truth of facts.

In the 1960s, Arendt already warned about the danger of lying in politics. It is not, therefore, about lies that gain the status of truths, or about truths that are discredited as lies. Rather, it is about the sense by which we orient ourselves in the real world which is impaired in the process. The mass production of lies in public space is seen by Arendt as a disastrous legacy of the totalitarian regimes of the last century. The *Lying World Order*, or a world order based on lies, is a feature she highlights as essential to totalitarian systems of government.

Right at the beginning of the book *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt emphasizes that the most striking difference between "ancient and modern sophists"

is the way that they undertake their victory in the face of truth: while the ancients saw it as an ephemeral victory based on the argument over the facts, the moderns yearn for a more lasting victory, "even at the cost of reality" - Arendt, H., (2012), 34. It is well known that the lies that occurred in the 20th century, such as those that Hitler told the Germans about the existence of a pure race, happened through ideology and propaganda. In this sense, it was the nature of these advertisements to show a deep contempt for the facts, putting them at the mercy of the one who invented them, providing the adjustment of reality to these well-known lies.

The modern lie, or organized lying, is understood by Arendt as the lie promoted by political or economic interests, in a systematic way. It aims to address indistinctly every citizen, not necessarily seeking to replace their beliefs but undermining their sense of reality. Organized lying is seen by Arendt as a relatively new phenomenon of "mass manipulation of facts and opinions" - Arendt, H., (2016), 311. Arendt locates the organized lying both in totalitarian regimes and in governments whose monopoly of decision and decree about the factual elements is not established, always in character of demonstrating that the lie potentializes a certain distance from reality, which allows the erasure of the dividing line between what is real and what is not. Therefore, what this kind of lie shows is the rewriting of history and image-making.

The "image-making", mentioned by Arendt, deals with the fact that every established fact can be denied or neglected. The way this image creation can be done is through modern techniques and with the help of media. Thereby, the importance of the concept of image for lying in politics and its role in the teletechnological modernity of the media cannot be overlooked. Notwithstanding, this aspect is always highlighted along with others in Arendt's work, such as propaganda and the *defactualization* of reality. Her analysis does not place the issue of the image as a central point, building the argument on the amalgamation of several other elements, such as propaganda itself, state secrecy, and manipulation of the masses. The media are a part of her defense, but she involves, in addition to them, the counterfeiting of facts versus opinions, the opposition of types of truth, and, above all, the recognition of a fact as beyond agreement and consent - Arendt, H., (2016), 298. It means that the facts are true despite our agreement about that. We either subscribe to facts and share them or disagree on facts or about their meaning/relevance, but we cannot agree or disagree about their existence itself – that would be undermining the very sense of reality. Therefore, for Arendt, factual information needs to be guaranteed, which does not open space for the suppression of facts, only for their replacement. That is to say, what can happen is the blatant or subtle replacement of factual truth by lies. Furthermore, as Pashkova[5] put it, the construction of an image of reality through organized lying could never replace reality itself, even if everyone believed in it, because "for Arendt, reality is a more complex phenomenon than something which is entirely constructed through interactions between humans" - Pashkova, V., (2016), 247. In *Truth and Politics*, Arendt points out that reality is different from and more than the unattainable totality of facts. Whoever says "what is" always tells a story, and in that story, particular facts lose their contingency by acquiring human meaning[6] - Lafer, C., (2008), 293.

In this sense, Arendt helps us to understand the phenomenon of post-truth through the loss of a shared world – a shared world of facts, as Zerilli[7] (2019), 157, put it,

> Arendt remained convinced that, in the wake of totalitarianism and the rise of scientism and mass society, the corrosive effects of Cartesian doubt (devastatingly described in the final chapter of *The Human Condition*), and the erosion of common sense had turned all evaluative judgments in liberal democracies into subjective preferences because the worldly conditions of their objective and shared character had been lost. This is in important ways what we now (mis)characterize as the condition of post-truth. In her view, however, the loss is not of truth as such but of a common world in which we can so much as experience common sense and so a shared reality.

This view is endorsed by Hyvönen[8] who reminds us that post-truth politics must be understood as a situation in which political discourse is "increasingly detached from a register in which factual truths are *plain*", i.e., not decorated or complicated. According to him, "the idea of a world constituted by shared facts withers away, tampering with our ability to react to political events and to engage in a democratic process of opinion-formation" - Hynöven, A., (2018), 38.

The discussion on post-truth policies in their various forms reveals, above all, the importance of combating lies, inevitably spilling over into aspects of opinion in the public sphere and the relationship between truth and politics. On a first impulse, the refined need to preserve the factual truth is recognized: so much so in terms of the integrity of politics as well as the integrity of reality – (i.e., so that we have the orientation towards a common reality). But it is essential to recognize that there are also several other aspects, such as free speech, the role of the mass media, the importance of telling the truth, the defense of individual opinion, etc., that also play a role into the issue.

Therefore, we will now move on to the second section of this article, which will focus on current technologies and their implications in political deliberation.

The new technological tools and the political deliberation

The last few years have seen significant changes in the ways we, as citizens, communicate and appear in the digital public sphere on political issues. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have become essential tools for the expression and spread of thinking, preferences, and ideas, transforming and/or intervening in ways of deliberation of people with each other; and making many users of these networks consider their expressions in them as effective political participation.

In this sense, the possibility of self-deception that Arendt talked about in *Truth and Politics* is a risk that may be extended to the expression of opinions on social networks. If we take into account that users (mis)perceive their own engagement online as proper political action/engagement, so they tend to misconceive the

effectiveness of their political participation on social media platforms. Hence, we can also say that there is a large tendency for these users to believe in the "authenticity"[9] of that "public" space.

About self-deception, this is how Pashkova refers to the phenomenon described by Arendt in relation to the "average liar":

> In *Truth and Politics* Arendt sees self-deception as the greatest danger in relation to truth and truthfulness in the political realm. A self-deceiving individual loses her bearings and fails to distinguish between honesty and mendacity – she deceives herself about her honesty and starts "honestly" believing falsehoods and defending them. An individual finds herself in a situation where she seemingly cannot rely on her own sense of honesty to ensure that she is truthful; neither can she fully rely on others, who may also have fallen prey to self-deception. Pashkova, V., (2016), 324.

At this point, it does not seem misunderstood to extend such an understanding of the phenomenon of self-deception to those who, for instance, engaged in a social network, believe and defend "honestly" fake information. Furthermore, the political actor expresses oneself in the firm belief that his manifestation contributes to an effective public debate, engaged among the peers who are in the virtual space, and his sincere faith gains an "aura of veracity". According to Arendt, "only self-deception can create an aura of truthfulness [...]" - Arendt, H., (2016), 314. Thus, despite the advances that this can also mean, the contemporary obsession with social media may reflect "a form of alienation from the world in interrelated ways", as Tchir[10] points out (2018), 73.

Nevertheless, whether or not the issue of self-deception in relation to the virtual space is possible, the reflection on its possibility already contains within itself the claim of questioning personal responsibility. Personal responsibility here does not concern only those who lie, but also those who believe and reproduce these lies, often deriving their actions from them. In the era of fake news, we could ask whether those who share fraudulent news on their social networks have epistemic or moral guilt in relation to them. For Arendt, self-deception is one of the most dangerous elements capable of threatening truth and veracity in the public sphere. Bringing a medieval anecdote[11] as example, she considers how much our apprehension of reality is dependent on our sharing the world.

The character of the world as a set of facts and objects agreed upon and recognized by our common senses, which Arendt unequivocally affirms, is then impaired; since alienation – when the common world is not taken as part of our "private worlds" – is one of the great threats to the preservation of the world. Arendt's reflection is borrowed here in the sense that the technology is created by humanity in its modern relationship with nature but it endorses, in any case, the alienation of the world, as it can only represent the encounter of each one with oneself through instruments. Duarte[12] says:

> For the author [Arendt], the discovery of the Archimedean point, with which man could project himself out of the Earth and conquer the impressive advance in scientific and technological knowledge of the Earth and of the solar system itself, brought with it, as a necessary condition, the phenomena of modern man's alienation from the Earth and from the world. For Arendt, therefore, the theoretical gain achieved by technical and scientific progress was paid at the high price of the loss of a relationship of trust and interest of modern man for the planet and for the surrounding world in which he lives, giving rise to ecological and political crises that characterize our present[13]. (Duarte, 2010: 54)

The world-alienation literally means a denial of the cosmos (*mundus*, in Latin), i.e., a degradation of everything that links the human being to the human and common world. It can also be said that such alienation comprises an imbalance in the full institution and preservation of the world, especially on its public (political) features. Nowadays, it is also the fertile ground wherein the phenomenon of post-truth sprouts. The *Oxford English Dictionary* chose this word as 'Word of the Year' in 2016 to express what was observed in public behavior on the Internet: people were ignoring facts and reality in favor of their personal opinions or perspectives on events. Wichowski[14] says that this phenomenon is a kind of reaction from people wanting to have "control over the kind of information they were consuming", but in reality, post-truth "is just another way of saying that people do not want to face reality, they do not want to face the facts. So, they declare this phenomenon, 'post-truth', as a way of ignoring the facts." Further, as Hyvönen suggests, "the present situation can be described as a continuation of a longer process of devaluing truth in political discussion" - Hyvönen, A., (2018), 32. For this author, the post-truth phenomenon as an era we have entered or as something that "emerged out thin air" are not acceptable positions. Such a phenomenon would be more like "an event of crystallization that brings into view a longer trajectory that has not fully captured our attention before" (Ibid.). In this sense, the evolution of the mass media, the rise of the Internet, and the fragmentation of the journalistic media only contributed to a particular visibility and, therefore, a certain credibility of the phenomenon, especially on politics.

In some instances, the construction of an online profile "validated" by likes, comments, and shares can be understood as more "real" and, in some ways even more legitimate than an offline life that is not able to interact with those immediate replies. In this way, losing the sense of a shared world is easier, since the interaction takes place with images, avatars, and personas *hidden* from the real human vision, in the literal sense, and may even have repercussions on fictitious constructs, far from real people behind those avatars. Despite the fact that, figuratively, these are the very objects of appearance there. On social media, we present ourselves publicly through our avatars, and they are not removed from our vision but on the opposite – they are subject to human vision. As a consequence, the illusory avatars that mediate our participation in the public sphere make it easier to fall for misinformation and false beliefs because we are removed from the real space of appearance. In other words, we

11

substitute real space of appearance with symbolic[15] space of appearance. This kind of self-deception can result in fewer reflections in the exposition of opinions and, thereby, little openness to the opposition of divergent opinions, among other consequences. Therefore, the debate and/or judgment are able to operate only through "categorical positions" – which Tchir (2018), 74, summarizes:

> When one retreats and remains in an atomistic form of subjectivity, the internally consistent rationality of logical systems can come to dominate thought more easily, unchallenged by the facticity and complexity of the world outside. It becomes easier to draw highly questionable inferences between concepts or intuitions. It becomes easier to judge another person categorically, rather than reflectively, as a particular example subsumable to a category – their group – and expect a predetermined mode of behavior, political opinion, and historical destiny for that person.

This leads us to another factor: the "echo chambers". Because of the dynamics of networks that work with algorithms and predominantly expose their users to stories that reflect and endorse their own opinions, the fragmentation of political discourse in the global community of users is increasingly rigid and fast, feeding the effect of political polarization. In addition, it provides the fertile soil for the emergence of the possibility of fake news as a political and rhetorical weapon, which is another dilemma in the contemporary public sphere. As Tchir reminds us,

> The digital echo chambers of social media do not allow for sufficiently visiting the perspectives of others, nor a careful examination of the detailed facts and particularities of public events, to develop the more moderate opinions which can best stabilize political communities and best encourage respect for all citizens' right to live well. - Tchir (2018), 74.

On that account, the interaction with "personas" compromises the possibility of a critical and complete, as well as comprehensive, deliberation. The debate on social media is not equivalent to the same debate carried out in face-to-face conditions. The virtual debate is constructed in the way that centers on one's own preexisting vision of the world than those of others. In this way, the opening for reconciling divergent points of view is deemphasized and the time for reflection and response is severed.

Politics, which is apprehended here according to Arendt's account, and which must involve a courageous acceptance of responsibility for one's own posture, remains damaged, among other aspects, in its possibility of veracity. To the extent that political actors can retreat anonymously, expressing themselves through 'masks' in virtual environments, they do not face the confrontation of physically appearing in public to defend their points of view, nor do they need to publicly confront others in the imperative to visit their perspectives and respect them in a "detached" spirit. Furthermore, it is this disinterested union, this detached engagement, which Arendt

suggests in *The Human Condition* (1958)[16] for a more critical and total deliberative praxis that becomes improbable in a space of purely virtual interactions. Therefore, the virtual agora is a false public space, even though it has become pivotal as a form of reinventing proximity and politics nowadays; and, not least, because the action must be connected to our commitment to the world.

Finally, there is also the aggravating circumstance that the temporal dynamics of social media are both too fast and too slow for what the different modes of engagement – verbal, oral, and discursive – require in conventional or real-world conditions. Consequently, speaking and writing, which are the predominant modes of expressing opinions on social networks, may not operate with the same temporal dynamics required by the faculty of thought – i.e., we have atemporal or temporally lose the structure of communicative environments on social media platforms. There is either as much time as you want when you write a post on social media or there is too little of it when you are trying to engage in dialogues where conversation threads are growing very fast. This leads us to the important question of whether there would be enough time to formulate an opinion through the thought process in the face of social media engagement. In many cases, we can have just the banal manifestation of unexamined prejudices being fought by others of the same kind.

Additionally, we can question if social media is, in itself, the cause of the increase in political polarization, populism, and the sharing of untrue information, or if it just provides the tools capable of promoting this "meeting of man with himself" through a potentiating effect. We can also ask to what extent can the mastery of technique and technology over the human factor lead us to the end of politics itself, which Arendt configures as "being among others", in active participation in the public sphere. Either about what is the role of technique or what is the role of each citizen in the political consequences arising from technology. And, after all, what is the role of each citizen regarding the preservation of truth?

These are just a few questions that arise from the fact that technologies play an important role in contemporary political deliberation or how users of these networks understand deliberation.

Now, the final point of our argument deals with the world-alienation, according to Hannah Arendt's terms, also promoted through the technologies and the uses that the citizens make of them.

World-Alienation

To conclude, our reflections on world-alienation will be presented.

For Arendt, our common world can only exist insofar as many people can talk about it, exchanging perspectives and debating opinions, with the freedom to talk to each other about the world. This is how the common world appears in its objectivity and visibility. However, what we have today, thanks to the Internet and social networks, is: a) on the one hand, an enrichment of the common world through the union of people constituting a part of the public sphere. They aim to debate, exchange, and reflect on different opinions. And, b) on the other hand, and perhaps more intensely, the refusal to listen to other points of view. Despite the digital bubbles and algorithmic limitations, citizens also have a responsibility in this, because, in order

to publicly justify their views, they deny each other the space to test and debate disparate ideas.

For Arendt, freedom of expression (or "free speech") is one of the most important political freedoms. However, it only materializes to the extent that the right to factual information is assured. It is not possible to have responsible opinions without being sure of the facts. And this is a central point in post-truth times. Nowadays, freedom of expression can even be used to confuse facts with mere opinions. Confusing facts with "mere opinions" is one of the main tools of organized lying, which Arendt compares with traditional political lies, and highlights as an effectively threatening phenomenon against the truth. Her critical stance is not a moral or idealistic view of the traditional lie, but rather a rightful appreciation of the modern lie, whose nature is unprecedentedly destructive. The exercise of freedom of opinion is, therefore, highly dependent on access to factual information.

Besides, the absence of other relevant forms of political manifestation (in the "real" world), with the possibility of exchanging opinions and acting among one's peers, can endorse this impression of being seen and heard from the digital sphere. The feeling of being useful and participating in the construction of the public sphere, in representation and/or in democracy, are all borrowed from a virtual stage that, however, does not require the effort to reflect and represent the opinions of others, and to question one's prejudices; it is more, therefore, a kind of world alienation endorsed by the algorithmic limitation that operates strongly in digital networks. As Dias (2020)[17] observes, social medias did not invent images, but they brought them to a greater degree of control and led people to a greater degree of alienation, thereby, Arendt's notion of world-alienation allows us to point out a difference between public appearance and the images that make up our digital lives.

In its extreme sense, being so, the construction of an online profile "validated" by comments, likes and shares sounds more real and authorized than a legitimate deliberation between equal pairs, with an exchange of ideas and effort for understanding other points of view, amid plurality, in the offline life. The way citizens deliberate with each other and how they consider their role as active political participants are undergoing transformations and changes under the influence of interaction in social media. There is a retreat to the internal domain of the network, in the manifestation as a user, which ends up reflecting the loss of the sense of action and discourse in its presentation in the real world, impairing not only these two important tasks (action and discourse) but also bringing threats to the permanence of the world itself. What Arendt argues is that the human world needs permanence and resistance over time for it to become a public space. The preservation of memories, actions, and speeches of actors and "speakers" needs to go beyond their private lives. What is at stake is whether human beings can conserve these memories and whether they can make the world a shared space – but shared not only with those who live simultaneously with them, but also with those who have been before and with those who will come after – Arendt, H., (2010), 67. Aligned with that, there is a relative security promoted by a profile that does not necessarily need to be linked to a real identity, contributing to the weakening of the degree to which a political actor needs to consider the perspectives of others with very different *doxai*, with no moderation or

reflection on one's own opinion. The ethical imperative of dialogue which a *tête-à-tête* debate of ideas is capable of producing is, here, replaced by the rhetoric of hate to those with very divergent points of view.

For Zerilli (2019), for example, the issue of post-truth is intrinsically linked to the problem of worldlessness. In this sense, Arendt's work permits us to consider the stakes as having less to do with the loss of truth but rather the loss of a shared reality.

> The idea of there being a shared object that is viewed from different perspectives drops out and there are only perspectives and more perspectives (understood, for example, as competing worldviews), no one any better than the other, just more entrenched, powerful, or appealing in ways that have nothing to do with rationality or better or worse ways of judging. Here, plurality can only appear as a threat and descent into the condition of post-truth as its consequence. It is as if we inhabited an ever-expanding universe of perspectives without common objects. - Zerilli, L., (2019), 161.

Zerilli concludes that, although Arendt insists on plural perspectives as the very condition of judging, she also argues that there is a certain mode of subjectivity that isolates us from the world. And it is this alienation from the world, the "hallmark of the modern age", that can enclose the subject in his or her mind, carrying out a tendency to interfere with their access to reality.

Finally, we bring the contribution of Rini (2017)[18], who stresses that social media sharing has tools that decline the public's goodwill to critical thinking or to check facts. This effect is enlarged "when the testifier and audience share a partisan orientation". The reason is the tendency for co-partisans to share a set of values and worldviews, making, at first, someone who defends the same political position and/or worldview into a more "trustworthy" person. In this way, the partisan bias reinforces the digital "bubbles", especially when those who hold opposing ideological views systematically trust or distrust different news sources. Consequently, this partisan trend of fleeing into different realities – since each "bubble" can make up divergent realities – reinforcing the vicious circle, "further erodes public reliance on common facts as part of a common world" - Lejeune, J., (2018), 59[19].

Therefore, all this indicates that the media environment and the significant shift in our forms of communication, undergone in recent years (such as the impactful change from textual to audiovisual culture, the erosion of shared facts and common sources of information, among other aspects already mentioned), play a fundamental role in understanding the conditions of possibility of post-truth politics. Digital networks exert a strong influence on the way we structure our reality and, as Hynöven points out, post-truth practitioners capitalize on this feature to their advantage. They realize that "political communication is not only – or primarily – about transmitting information: it is about creation of subjectivities, transference of emotions, and crafting of identifications" Hynöven, A., (2018), 45. All of this sheds light on the need for an *ethics of communication* and/or a *philosophy of technology*, thought from a political point of view, not a technological one, so that such a reflection on the

status and significance of technology in the modern world would allow us a rescue of the *zoo politikon* from *homo digitalis*, and so that the latter's thought – a human faculty so precious to Arendt – could advance beyond a technological reason.

Conclusion

The current scenario is full of challenges for politics and for the truth, especially in the face of constant misinformation fed by social networks. This is a complex and urgent issue that, at this moment, seeks determinations that can contribute to minimise the impact of phenomena such as post-truth. If we follow Arendt's thought, without the guarantee of factual truth there is no true freedom of expression and no guarantees for the permanence of the world.

Much of what blatantly happened in totalitarian regimes is being practiced today by political leaders with great enthusiasm. As Bernstein[20] put it, it is done "employing the techniques of social media to deny factual truth and to spread lies, to create a fictional world of 'alternative facts'" - Bernstein, R., (2018), 30. Arendt's work, on the account of this, has a disposition that is still relevant and allows us to sketch a contemporary portrait which many of her analyzes survive, perhaps in a more harmful and threatening way.

However, we shall pay close attention to the fact, however, that despite already having an idea of how technology could contribute to the spread of lying, Arendt could hardly have anticipated how, in times of the Internet, the lies, disinformation, misinformation, and lack of intellectual seriousness would spread precisely through Internet media assistance. Nowadays, technology has made it possible for lying to proliferate in many new ways, making them possible under new guises and tools. The potential of these far-reaching lies to compromise our sense of reality and also rewrite history, however, had already been warned by her. Resuming the discussion of these themes, therefore, sounds of fundamental importance in our time, in which organized lying stamps the political scene almost daily, and often we cannot properly adjudicate between a lie and a truth.

Lastly, it is emphasized that the contemporary advents of distortion of facts and organized lying are increasingly taking on worrying dimensions. We understand that bringing reflections and questions about the important role that technology has been assuming in the face of growing political polarization, populism, the rise of the extreme right and fascism are very important questions. Perhaps the only viable way to understand these phenomena and our individual part in them is from the critical observation of how we operate in our networks and whether we believe that this is actually a matter of political deliberation. Therefore, it is up to the political actors themselves, from their opinion articulation process, to play their part in the accountability for the common world, according to Arendt's precepts.

This is also an attempt to escape the alienation of the world in which technological advances, despite the progress they promote, also subject people's forms of deliberation by making them believe that their digital participations are expressions of effective policy, when, indeed, we must ask whether these forms of mediated manifestation are really able to produce democracy[21].

References

[1] Arendt, H., "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future*, ed. Penguin Books (New York, 2006).

[2] Arendt, H., "Lying in Politics", in *Crises of the Republic*, ed. Penguin Books (New York, 2006).

[3] Arendt, H., *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2012).

[4] Díaz, M.P., "Posverdad y destrucción del espacio público: Uma lectura desde el pensamento de Hannah Arendt," *Revista Científica de Estrategias, Tendencias e Innovación en Comunicación* 22 (2021): 45-64.

[5] Pashkova, V., "Arendt's Political Thought: The relationship between Truth and Politics." Thesis submitted to the Institute for Culture and Society (Sidney: Western Sydney University, 2016).

[6] Lafer, C., "Hannah Arendt: Vida e Obra" (Posfácio), in Arendt, H., *Homens em tempos sombrios*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras (2008): 291-312.

[7] Zerilli, L. M. G., "Rethinking the Politics of Post-Truth with Hannah Arendt," in Bedorf, T.; Herrmann, S., *Political Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2019), 152-64.

[8] Hyvonen, A,. "Careless Speech: Conceptualizing Post-truth Politics," *New Perspectives* 26 (2018): 31-55.

[9] The word "authenticity" in this application is not used in any specific philosophical sense.

[10] Tchir, T., "Hannah Arendt's Ethic of Responsibility to the 'Who' and the 'World'," *Russian Sociological Review* 17/4 (2018): 70-87.

[11] "A medieval anecdote shows how difficult it can be to lie to others without lying to yourself. It is a story about what happened one night in a city in which a watchtower was on duty, day and night, a watchman who was supposed to warn the people of the approach of the enemy. The watchman was a man 'given to pranks' in bad taste, and that night he sounded the alarm just to scare the townspeople a little. His success was spectacular: everyone threw themselves at the walls, and the last one to do so was the watchtower himself." (Arendt, 2016: 314). My translation from Portuguese to English.

[12] Duarte, A., *Vidas em risco*: *crítica do presente em Heidegger, Arendt e Foucault* (Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2010).

[13] My translation from Portuguese to English.

[14] Wichowski, A., "Post-truth in the information age". Interview granted to UM Brazil, 2017.

[15] At this point, we are not working with a very Arendtian premise. If we consider the symbolism from Freud/Lacan, it has an edge: the very faculty of judgment and understanding hangs on the purely symbolic order of representation. This sphere is artificial and not factual. Facts come in this sphere but they are not accessible to us in the language of science. We represent facts and make them meaningful through our symbolic engagements. This framework thus stands on the distinction between factual truth and the messy symbolic realm of language which offers "hinges" (Wittgenstein's term) to make sense of facts. In other words, the space of appearance is artefactual – man-made – and, in this sense, minimally illusory. But this is the very condition for the public sphere/common space of reasons.

[16] Arendt, H., *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[17] Dias, T., "Fake news and World Alienation: Reflections on Bolsonaro's use of Whatsapp," Hannaharendt.net – *Journal for Political Thinking* 1/10 (2020): 105-123, accessed April 2025.

[18] Rini, R., "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology," *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal* 27/2 (2017).

[19] Lejeune, J., "Hannah Arendt and the Dark Public Sphere," *Russian Sociological Review* 17/4 (2018): 47-68.

[20] Bernstein, R., "The urgent relevance of Hannah Arendt," *The Philosophers' Magazine* 82 3rd Quarter (2018): 24-31.

[21] The author would like to express her deep gratitude to Paula Tomi, the editor of the special issue, and the two anonymous reviewers who took the time to read the manuscript thoroughly and provided helpful advice. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the event *Perspectives about Truth: Truths about Truth*, held in Universitatea Politehnica Bucharest in June 2022, and I am indebted to the many people who joined in the discussion. In this sense, thanks also to the audience members for their comments in the mentioned event. Particular thanks are due to Lukas Mozdeika for his valuable input, suggestions, and proofreading, beside for our intellectual exchange expressed in conversations and correspondence.