

## **The Issue of Formation in the Writings of Young Hannah Arendt: an investigation on *Bildung***

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**ABSTRACT – The Issue of Formation in the Writings of Young Hannah Arendt: an investigation on *Bildung*.** With the exception of the text *Crisis in Education*, published in the 1950s, Hannah Arendt wrote directly about this subject in the writings of her youth, in the 1930s. However, her research problem had not yet been well delineated, and both texts dealing with the matter highlight the concept of formation (*Bildung*) instead of directly addressing education and its institutions. Our goal in this article is to investigate how the subject was addressed by Hannah Arendt prior to her immigration to the United States and what elements remain in her later works. In order to do so, we shall deal with two texts: (i) her review of German pedagogue Hans Weil's work, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Bildungsprinzip*, published in 1930; and (ii) *The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question*, from 1932.

**Keywords:** Hannah Arendt. Philosophy of Education. *Bildung*.

**RESUMO – O Problema da Formação nos Escritos de Juventude de Hannah Arendt: uma investigação sobre a *Bildung*.** Com exceção do texto *Crise na Educação*, publicado na década de cinquenta, Hannah Arendt escreveu diretamente sobre esta temática em seus escritos de juventude, na década de trinta. No entanto, seu problema de pesquisa ainda não estava bem delimitado e o destaque para ambos os textos está relacionado com o conceito de formação (*Bildung*) e não diretamente a respeito da educação e de suas instituições. Nosso objetivo neste artigo é investigar como o tema foi tratado por Hannah Arendt antes da sua imigração para os Estados Unidos e quais são os elementos que permanecerão em suas obras posteriores. Para tanto, nos ocuparemos com a investigação de dois textos: i) sua resenha a respeito da obra do pedagogo alemão Hans Weil, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Bildungsprinzip* (*O surgimento do princípio alemão da Bildung*), publicado em 1930 e ii) *O Iluminismo e a questão judaica*, de 1932.

**Palavras-chave:** Hannah Arendt. Filosofia da Educação. *Bildung*.

## Introduction

No scholar would ever deny politics its place as the *leitmotiv* of Hannah Arendt's thought. Rejecting the title of philosopher as a way to ward off the tradition inherited from Plato, she declared in a well-known interview by Günther Gaus to German television in 1964 to be a political thinker (Arendt, 2002). Her interest in politics has a specific source: the rise of totalitarian regimes in the first half of the 1920s. Between the beginning of the 1930s, when she had to go into exile in Paris, and the beginning of the following decade, when she left a Europe overtaken by Nazism and became stateless by migrating to the United States, questions related to national-socialism and socialism took over her research agenda. From that era came *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and other writings, such as *Responsibility and Judgment* and *What Remains? The Language Remains*. With the renowned *The Human Condition*, Arendt (2010) diagnoses modernity through a phenomenological interpretation of the three activities of what the tradition called the *vita activa*: labor, work and action. Even when Arendt, a little before passing away, dedicated herself to investigating the activities of contemplative life in texts published under the title *The Life of the Mind*, she was still ultimately reflecting on the issue of the public sphere. According to Karin Fry (2010, p. 15):

Arendt believed that thinking was inspired by personal experience. The experiences of her life led her to a deep understanding of the importance of politics and her academic interests were devoted to understanding the relationship between philosophical theory and political practice.

It is relevant to note, however, that before the events linked to the rise of totalitarian regimes Arendt began her academic studies in Marburg under the advisory of Martin Heidegger, and by the end of the 1920s she wrote her doctorate dissertation on *Love and Saint Augustine* in the University of Heidelberg under the advisory of Karl Jaspers. Having completed the dissertation, she moved to Berlin in order to proof and publish it, and also to begin research on the life of Rahel Varnhagen, which would result in the book we know today as *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess* (Arendt, 1994). In this period, before Adolf Hitler rose to power, Arendt's thought wandered from a subject to another, without a defined direction. In fact, though she would later become a celebrated political thinker, her reflections were never unilateral, since after all, as Jaspers had taught her, it was important to think about her own time, and that required the mind to move in several directions. Until the beginning of the 1930s, then, Arendt still had interests in the fields of theology, literary criticism, and others related to metaphysics, with a certain emphasis on transcendence. On the other hand, she began to turn to a very actual issue that would a few years later become alarmingly relevant: the Jewish question.

According to her most reputable biographer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1997), since her childhood Arendt presented herself as a Jew, having been taught to do so if questioned or provoked<sup>1</sup>. However, it was the meeting Arendt had with Kurt Blumenfeld, still in her Heidelberg years, that woke her to matters related to Zionism, that is, the direct link between Judaism and politics. This issue thus emerges in Arendt's thought between the late 1920s and the early 1930s. Beyond her thorough investigation of Rahel Varnhagen, two writings from this period are of interest for us: the 1930 review of Hans Weil's work, *Die Entstehung des deutschen Bildungsprinzip*, published in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, the famous journal founded by Max Weber, Sombart and Edgar Jaffe in Heidelberg, as well as her text *The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question*, from 1932. Both writings are closely related to each other, but they essentially appear to us as mirrors to what picked Arendt's mind in the period. Arendt reflected on the intellectual atmosphere left by Jaspers in Heidelberg. Her advisor was a friend of and frequent goer to Marianne and Max Weber's home, and Arendt was directly influenced by this intellectual community. For this reason, she comes into contact at the time with the appeal for the necessity of *Werturteilsfreiheit*, Weber's *freedom from value judgments*<sup>2</sup>, as well as with one of the most influential schools of sociological thought in the German tradition, the Mannheim School. This environment nudged Arendt to pay attention to the political issues around her, even if she did not identify intellectually with the social sciences and Karl Mannheim's ideas. According to Young-Bruehl (1997, p. 90), "[...] Mannheim's sociology and the philosophies she considered most important, those of Jaspers and Heidegger, marched in opposite directions".

If on one hand Arendt began to turn to more actual political issues, on the other she still kept around classic philosophical problems, and still cultivated things which were precious to her since her adolescence, such as poetry and literature. That is the reason why she was involved with matters related to Romanticism – which can be seen in her work about Rahel, but also in her readings of Herder and Lessing, as the 1932 essay, *The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question*, evidences. Elements in this text and in the review of Weil's sociological work constitute a background of interest: it is relevant to analyze the idea of *Bildung* in both texts and ascertain the connection Arendt makes between *Bildung* and some names of German Romanticism, such as Herder, and the Enlightenment itself. With this investigation, we shall be able to broadly and more clearly see this short period between the late 1920s and the early 1930s, when Arendt begins to acquire intellectual autonomy and tread her path as a political thinker. Moreover, it is also relevant to indicate the extent to which some Arendtian insights from this period reappear in later writings<sup>3</sup>.

Still by way of introduction, it is worth remarking on the concept of *Bildung*: although this idea is correctly associated with education, it is not limited to it, and the texts by Arendt which deal tangentially with the matter point in such direction. We shall not worry about elaborating a detailed chronological review of the concept, as it is not relevant

to reflect on it beyond the scope of Arendt's texts, but it should be noted that *Bildung* does not appear clearly defined anywhere in Arendt's writings. It does well to admit there is more that is not written with respect to this than there is on paper. One of the few texts in which Arendt deals directly with the problem of education is late, from the 1950s<sup>4</sup>, and we shall deal with it in an indirect manner only. However, as the concept of *Bildung* as coined by Wilhelm von Humboldt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is broad in itself, we can infer a series of considerations regarding Arendt's ideas. First, it should be noted that classic *Bildung, a la* Humboldt, is inserted in a tradition of a time and a place: it lives within the classic opposition between *Aufklärung* and the ideals of German Romanticism<sup>5</sup>. Hannah Arendt is not indifferent to either. On one hand, she aligns herself with Heidegger's and Jaspers's thoughts, which defied the ideals of Enlightenment disseminated by thinkers two centuries earlier. On the other, especially in the 1920s and early 1930s, as Arendt wrote Rahel Varnhagen's biography and lived in Berlin to do so, she completely surrounded herself with literature from the Romantic era. Recent scholars who studied the author's lifelong literary interests highlight her readings concerning Hölderlin and Goethe<sup>6</sup>, for instance. The latter is generally important since Rahel Varnhagen was an admirer of his. For Anne Bertheau (2016, p. 48), Arendt sees him as a kind of *Lehrmeister*, a formative master for Rahel. Beyond that, the poet appeared in Arendt's readings, quotations and letters throughout her life. In terms of our research, this is not something to disregard, since Goethe fathered the all-time greatest *Bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*. For her biographer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1997, p. 94), Arendt's work regarding Rahel is also a *sui generis* kind of *Bildungsroman*, but "Arendt's *Bildungsroman* has another side, a nocturnal one, for she understood that Rahel had no *Bild*, no model to orient her development".

Past these quick, strictly historical notes on Goethe, it is also important to remark that the concept of *Bildung*, as Humboldt stressed, presupposes the world and everything around it as its foundation. There is an impulse of formation directly linked to nature, but for it to be effective, the *Gegenstände* are needed: the objects, the topics, the tools that are in the world or are themselves the world. To be formed or (for one) to form oneself, even if we speak of forming the spirit or the soul, to take up platonic categories, the world is always a precondition. This might be the crucial point of the entire Arendtian thought, which indirectly touches on the issue of human formation and materializes in the 1950s when she writes the famous sentence: "Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it" (Arendt, 2005, p. 247). Issues related to *amor mundi* and the derived conservation of this world, inspiration for *The Human Condition*, are clearly posed in her considerations regarding Herder and Lessing appearing in the two texts to which we shall now turn our attention.

## The review: sociological interests and the role of tradition

Since Weber, Sombart and Jaffe took over as editors, the journal in which Arendt published her review on Hans Weil's book was dedicated to questions related to the social sciences, but before that, the journal dealt with issues linked to Romanticism. It is not a coincidence, however, that Arendt was being published in such a journal, since at that time, along with Günther Stern, whom she had recently wedded, she came into contact with the work from the sociologist Karl Mannheim, which she criticized (Arendt, 2007, p. 96). The review, requested by her friend Sigmund Neumann, reveals her fleeting interests for the sociology of the time, but partly reflects her concerns with theology and brings to the fore – albeit briefly – some elements that would later play a fundamental role within her work.

Hans Weil's book is considerably permeated by the sociological spirit. As we skim over the summary, we immediately notice that which was also latent to Arendt: the pondering over the dichotomy between *Weltlichkeit*, worldliness, and *Innerlichkeit* or *Innigkeit*, interiority; the dichotomy between the external and the internal necessarily leads to two concepts of *Bildung*, or two different possible kinds of formation: (i)<sup>7</sup> on one hand, there is a hope to reach an ideal of education founded on great, historic examples (*Vorbild*) from the Western tradition, such as Greco-pagan antiquity.

On the other hand, however, we would say it is sociologically determinant to the extent it is related to a class of nobles. The model or example is present in both cases, in the first case being the historical model, and in the other, a sociological model erected from its own time and environment.

The other possibility of formation (ii)<sup>8</sup> considers the development of innate capacities according to an attitude of social conformity (*resignative Haltung*), with an influence from pietism. In other words, we develop our innate capacities, not randomly, but with certain social adequacy. This antagonism, which would later be overcome by Herder, as announced by Weil, prompts Arendt to review the positions from the various thinkers who had led Weil to reach these two concepts of *Bildung*, positions which provide, according to Arendt (1931, p. 200), “[...] the historical basis for a modern discussion of *Bildung*”, as Weil had done.

Concerning the first formulation (i), that which announces an ideal of education on one hand based on great historic examples, and on the other, sociologically determined related to a social class, the reference is Shaftesbury, while Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theory influences the second possibility of *Bildung*, that which is connected to the development of an individual's innate capacities. It is important to highlight, beyond what is later considered regarding Herder, an element which will be greatly debated by Arendt when she writes in the 1950s: the issue of tradition. The *Vorbild*, or the inspiring example, is rooted in the Greco-pagan tradition, which encompasses the entire West. The

discussion blossoming from Shaftesbury in the case of Hans Weil is mainly conducted, in the case of Arendt, through Jaspers' philosophy. In his book *Was ist Erziehung?* (Jaspers, 1999), Arendt's advisor claims the existence of an authority fixed by tradition, and in it a truth transmitted (*überliefern*) through the generations. Formation founded on an ideal based on examples comes, according to our tradition, from the old form of Greek *Paideia*. In it, bards, aoidoi and rhapsodes played a fundamental role as they recited Homeric chants praising the military achievements of characters such as Achilles. Although Arendt does not develop this point specifically in the review of Weil's book – supposedly because it was then barely the embryo of an idea –, the issue appears for Arendt in *The Human Condition* as she addresses the role of poets in preserving the memory of action. That is, in a Jaspersian sense, a form of transmitting the tradition (*Überlieferung*). The issue of the authority of the tradition is also addressed critically in her 1930s essays on Judaism, such as in her 1932 article regarding the *Aufklärung* and the Jewish question. She notices a sort of occult tradition in Judaism, or one which has been hidden by the main tradition. Beyond that, this problem is identified by Arendt in *Between Past and Future* when she recognizes the break of the tradition, that is, the rupture of the line leading us to it, leaving us adrift between the past that no longer exerts authority over us and a future which not yet is. Despite not reaching this argumentative point in the review, it might be possible to say Arendt would have found limitations in a formation based solely on an historic example brought by the tradition, precisely because the authority based on it had ruined. Therefore, only the sociological *Vorbild* might remain, those socially constructed examples, a sort of *social aspiration* (*gesellschaftliche Strebung Vornehmen*). This seems to play an important role for Arendt due to Rahel Varnhagen's life, as she, despite lacking in *Vorbild*, allowed herself to be inspired by the social role she played in her salon, as well as some portion of the Jews who attended it.

The harshest criticism to Weil's work focuses on observations regarding *Innigkeit*, interiority, or the second concept of *Bildung*, associated with the development of innate capacities. Her main criticism is that Weil somewhat forces his interpretation as he attempts to make his two-principle-based (worldliness and interiority) scheme fit; secondly, Arendt criticizes Weil's interpretation regarding the influence of pietism on this second principle. Thus, internal formation (*innere Bildung*) is also influenced by the social context in which it is inserted. In this case, according to Arendt, the author should have more carefully examined the historical investigations surrounding pietism, instead of considering only the idiosyncratic effects it has on individuals.

From there, Arendt outlines Weil's theses on Herder. Herder unifies the two *Bildung* principles. He inherits both Shaftesbury's thought (an ideal of formation within a historical model) and the cultivation of innate capacities. This last one, it is important to remember, linked to a kind of adjustment conditioned by the social rules to which the subject forming itself or being formed is bound. Herder indicates Jean-Jacques Rousseau as the strongest name in this second case. To use the more

classic example from Rousseau's *Emile*, it is known that Nature acts as the fundamental master in the development of the individual's innate capacities, as the tutor aids the process. There seems to be in Rousseau a certain organic principle of formation/evolution in the subject that will later be adopted by Herder. For this reason, even if the individual is formed in the pursuit of an ideal of education (an external principle), he develops his innate capacities almost organically according to his place in society (internal principle with external influence). This aspect will later be criticized by Arendt, who will question the real possibility of autonomy in face of a chain of events happening partly in an organic way, following almost biological-vegetative principles, since men are compared to plants. The way Weil interprets Herder, according to Arendt, runs into the same problem when it comes to the principle of interiority: Weil disregards the influence of Lessing on Herder, taking into consideration only the pietist influence received by the thinker from Königsberg. This causes his thesis to fail as an interpretation of Herder. Lessing's influence on Herder is not indifferent to Arendt, as is evident in the content of *The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question*, in which she compares their philosophies of history.

If Hans Weil's efforts regarding Johann Gottfried von Herder crumble, the same does not occur with his thoughts on Humboldt. In Arendt's opinion, as Weil orients his interpretation of Humboldt sociologically<sup>9</sup>, that is, by considering the aristocratic position the diplomat used to occupy, he creates "[...] one of the best modern expositions of Humboldt." (Arendt, 1931, p. 203) Two of this author's elements are initially explored: the overcoming of the divide between thinking and feeling on one hand, and the love of his own individuality – already present in Herder – on the other. The two are linked by the Humboldtian realism which inserts him in the world at the same time as takes his interior in consideration. Apparently this vocabulary seems abstract not only to us, but also to Arendt, who already denounces Weil's difficulty in explaining the connection between all these elements. Ultimately, however, it seems Humboldt overcomes the world/individual dichotomy because, according to Arendt (1931, p. 204), due to his realism, he "[...] takes seriously every event as an event" and at the same time affirms the necessity to "[...] carefully cultivate inner existence." Humboldt would thus unify the two possibilities of *Bildung*.

It seems that the idea of the individual plays a fundamental role for both Herder and Humboldt regarding *Bildung*. When it comes to Herder, however, the meaning of *Bildung* is intrinsically connected to the development of the subject's autonomy, influencing for instance the kind of formation advocated by the Romantic movement. With Humboldt, the individual appears as the fundamental subject of the process of *Aufklärung*. In summary, for the author of the book, according to Arendt (1931, p. 204), "The goal of all *Bildung* is 'objectivation of itself as a figure'." This figure takes into consideration the examples, as well as its individuality. In this endeavor, the path is, for Herder, according to Weil, more important than the goal; in the same way for Humboldt, *Bildung* is not a concluded stage or a final moment, but also a process.

Regarding the observations concerning the *Geisteselite*, or intellectual elite, Arendt briefly comments on Weil's investigation. It matters more to us to concentrate on what seemed relevant to Arendt at the time than on Weil's interpretive framework. The elite firstly corresponds, according to Weil, *to a particular way of being*. It orients itself according to a model, as Herder had claimed, and keeps its social aspirations alive. The typical salons of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries play a crucial role for the social elites, and Rahel Varnhagen owns one of the most well-known places for meeting and formation in Berlin. In the same way as many Jews, Rahel circulated within the German cultural elite and dealt disinterestedly with the issues related to Jews' political rights. Instead, she assimilated herself and nurtured her prestige in the midst of those who indeed constituted the intellectual elite of the time, as in the case of the Schlegel brothers and their respective spouses, of Wilhelm von Humboldt, and others. There is no reference to Rahel's salon in Arendt's comments to this portion of Weil's book, but it is interesting to note that he remarks on the fact that the elite's intellectual participation could be *apolitical*, since their efficacy did not depend on this, but rather on prestige around it.

### **The Jewish Question and the Issue of Formation**

By affirming, at the end of her review of Weil's work, that she wished simply to present the framework of his ideas about the intellectual elite, and by doing so to quickly summarize his theoretical innovations, Arendt makes only brief comments regarding content and method. However, Weil's notes probably were not completely indifferent for her research at the time, since the environment of the salons in which Jews also *formed* themselves lived in a tradition which was, at first, external to Jewish tradition. The so-called modern *Jewish question* – which for Arendt (2016, p. 111) “[...] dates from the Enlightenment; it was the Enlightenment – that is, the non-Jewish world – that posed it” – also appears in this period. Following her 1931 review, in the 1932 text *The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question* Arendt deals with some aspects of formation as she would never again do, since her focus shifts as she writes about the crisis in education in the 1950s. As a background to her 1930s text's reflections, Arendt critiques Lessing's, Moses Mendelssohn's and Herder's philosophies of history. These three authors mobilize elements associated with history and its function in order to eventually find answers to the question of assimilation. The great question is: what is the role of history in the formation of Jews? Along with history, there is naturally the matter regarding the role of tradition anchored in it. This is doubtlessly the problem which will remain with Arendt for the rest of her life, and is also the investigative line linking this text to the review of Hans Weil's book. The question regarding the role of tradition in the formation of assimilated Jews continues to be of great impact, despite the fact that, after the deadly machinery of Nazism, the thread which leads us to tradition was lost. Arendt asks herself about the authority of Jewish tradition in a non-Jewish world oriented by the En-



lightenment. And after Nazism, she is drawn to ask how the West deals with a great tradition whose only fragments remain. How to educate the young in an old world whose thread with tradition – although not with the past – was broken? Some problematic elements in later writings by Arendt had already made an appearance here. The lack of a precise distinction between tradition, past and history, for one, is evident. Even though she has dedicated herself to writing about the issue in *Between Past and Future*, the relationship between the three concepts still seems as murky as it did in this text from the 1930s.

Although the protagonists of Arendt's text are Lessing, Mendelssohn and some of his disciples, as well as Herder, according to Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1997, p. 97) it was Herder who had the ideas which constituted the environment in which Rahel Varnhagen found herself in. Lessing, however, has no minor role in Arendt's observations, since the distinction between truths of reason and truths of history fits perfectly the war she waged against the platonic concept of truth. To the extent that Lessing attributes to human reason the element that makes us equal among everyone else, his humanist speech concerning tolerance among men plays a fundamental role for Jews at the time. If it is reason which makes us equal, since according to Arendt (2016, p. 112), reason is "[...] the genuine connection linking one person with another", then religion has another function, one which cannot be that of differentiating men. Moreover, with the distinction between truths of reason and truths of history, every dogmatic truth linked to a *true* religion is thenceforth discarded; thus Nathan, Saladino, or the templar knight – neither held absolute truths. Since truths of history can never be proved with anything other than themselves, Lessing's entire discourse concerning tolerance, as well as his philosophy of history, tailored itself to the discourse of the assimilated Jew. According to Arendt, there is for Lessing a clear use for history: it educates men, making them mature, even though they do not add anything to them that did not already exist in them. To the extent that history teaches men, the past is founding to the process, as Arendt (2016, p. 115) remarks that "[...] for Lessing this history that is to be founded anew is definitely anchored in the past. The past ruled by authority is, after all, an educator"<sup>10</sup>.

Establishing part of his theoretical cornerstones based on Lessing at the same time as he backed away from some of the premises of his predecessor, Moses Mendelssohn founds a kind of Jewish Enlightenment and becomes a reference for the question of assimilation. Mendelssohn is partially formed by the Enlightenment, which is dear to him, but Judaism is also part of what constituted him; thus the need to reconcile one with the other. To do so, he concluded that the content revealed in the Torah is not incompatible with the rules of our reason, and that about such things it mattered above all else to think for oneself. To the extent that confidence in one's own reason becomes the protagonist of his thesis, Mendelssohn is forced to disagree with Lessing with respect to the weight of history in human formation. In contrast to Lessing, Mendelssohn claims that thinking while free of the contents of his-

tory means being free to think for oneself. Reason, in this sense, meant to the Jew thinker the same it meant to Lessing, that which we all share in common and makes us humans. However, although “[...] Reason is shared by all men, [and] is equally accessible to all people in all ages” (Arendt, 2016, p. 118), for Mendelssohn the way we are guided by reason varies, and in the case of Jews “[...] this includes not only acceptance of the Jewish religion, but also strict adherence to its Law” (Arendt, 2016, p. 118).

Arendt’s interpretation of Herder appears in this case at all times in connection with Lessing’s or Mendelssohn’s thoughts. This is why she criticizes Weil in her review: he neglected the relationship between Herder and Lessing, describing the first merely based on his personal experiences with pietism. Unlike Lessing and Mendelssohn, Johann Gottfried von Herder begins to criticize the Enlightenment, and, for many, this makes him a precursor of the Romantic movement and an influence on ideas from the time that features Rahel’s salon as background. For Elisabeth Young-Bruehl (1997, p. 97), Herder’s philosophical concepts “[...] correspond to the more personal ideas expressed by Rahel Varnhagen.” According to Arendt, there is in Herder another conception of philosophy of history which acts directly onto the issue concerning *Bildung*. As a critic of the Enlightenment, Herder naturally rejected founding our entire humanity on reason, as Lessing, and Mendelssohn even more, partly did. On the other hand, he developed a philosophy of history not unlike Lessing, as he emphasized that reason itself, isolated or autonomous, does not exist, but on the contrary, is always subjected to history. In this sense, as Weil demonstrates in the text Arendt reviewed, history, past and tradition are deeply consequential to the model of *Bildung* outlined by Herder, since, as Arendt quotes, “[...] tradition approaches him and shapes his mind and forms his limbs.” (Herder apud Arendt, 2016, p. 123)

The ambiguous element in Arendt’s text is related to the Herderian interpretation of the Jewish question. Such interpretation is directly related to his interpretation of history, since to Herder Jews are, in fact, a foreign people linked to a particular territory, Palestine, they are different from Westerners, have their own history, are different from everyone else for being an older people and are, in fact, bearers of the Old Testament. These are more than mere observations: to Herder, they must be recognized as the *chosen people*, as they truly believe they are. In this sense, all of Lessing’s or Mendelssohn’s efforts to *equate* the entire humanity through reason go to ruin when put against Herder’s doctrine which, according to Arendt (2016, p. 126), “[...] understands the history of Jews in the same way that they interpret it, as the history of God’s chosen people”. The way Herder conceives of Judaism brought to light the concepts of formation and tolerance. He confers to the Jewish question and to that of assimilation, this last one so heavily criticized by Arendt, a political tone, which pleases her. Dealing with Jewish assimilation means accepting that another nation is incorporated into Germany. This other nation, that of the Jews, is necessarily formed by

its past, which Western Enlightenment always sees as a strange kind of past. What happens, however, is that assimilation became a question of survival, even if that implies a formation completely outside of a Jewish context. According to Arendt (2016, p. 129-130): “Once the Jews are ‘formed’ in Herder’s sense, they are restored to humanity, which according to their own interpretation, however, now means that they have ceased to be the chosen people”.

## Conclusion

Despite the differences between the texts, especially of a methodological kind, as one is a review, and the other, a speculative writing, there is in both an investigative element which would later form a central problem in Arendt’s framework: tradition and its weight. As it concerns formation and education, it always involves the same question: what is the role of tradition in education? In both cases, it appears in two distinct ways: first, Arendt analyzes Weil’s remark on the classic conception of examples brought by the tradition, thus forming, via Shaftesbury’s and Herder’s theories, an educational ideal. This classic concept of education, anchored in the examples of Western tradition, was not in principle a problem for Arendt; after all, from what we know from her later writings, she indicates the world needs to be conserved and the authority linked to tradition has a fundamental role to play in this endeavor. However, it is not yet clear from her 1931 review that the thread leading us to our tradition was ruptured. From the main tradition, therefore, only fragments remain, and it is no longer feasible to assert the possibility of forming ourselves on the basis of an example anchored in it, as did the Greeks as they heard Homer’s poems, or medieval people who, as they founded a Christian theology, never interrupted their deep dialog with pagan antiquity, criticizing it, transforming it or using it in their favor giving it the alias of *ancilla*. On the other hand, notwithstanding her realization of all of this after the rise of totalitarian regimes, Arendt still admits the past has a fundamental role in the formation of newcomers to the world, but probably for those who continue to form themselves along their lives. This forming past, even with a tradition accessible to us only through fragments, has however two clear functions associated with the ideal of education: a) the conservation of the world and b) the possibility of an openness to what is new. There does not exist in Arendt’s texts a pure conservation of tradition for its own sake; its goal consists instead in the openness to the possibility of the new, the contingent, what is not needed. Neither the past nor the tradition determine anything any longer, but they provide part of the necessary apparatus for new foundations. From there comes her claim that those who educate and form themselves or are formed must maintain a relationship of deep respect with the past and the memory.

In this sense, Arendt will never deal with the problem posed by Weil but already proposed by Rousseau, namely, whether we should cultivate a formative ideal and strive to reach it or simply develop our

innate capabilities. For Rousseau, nature is the master which guides us in the development of our capacities, while culture or ideal models from tradition are not privileged in his theories. Although Arendt does not revolve around this sort of question – not in the 1930s, nor later – there are enough elements in her writings to convince us that in her opinion formation should not be left to the natural development of our abilities, as tradition, history and culture rather shape us, and this is an important factor in the conservation of the world. Traces of this are found each time she adopts the Greek distinction between *dzoé* – almost purely biological life – and *biós*, a certain specific kind of life. It could also be found in a short criticism of the concept of genius in Kant: to the philosopher of Königsberg, Nature offers the handle to Art. In Arendt's view, however, it is Humanity which does so<sup>11</sup>. There is a latent humanism in Arendt, and it reveals itself in many aspects of her oeuvre, such as in the existential sense she confers to action, for instance, but also in the few and brief occasions in which she addresses the subject of education more directly. That is why elders have a crucial role in the formation of the young.

Concerning the education of the young or the educational model to be picked, it is possible to infer a few of Arendt's positions on the basis of her later writings, as well as of the review of the concept of *Bildung* according to Weil, as we have analyzed above. However, in the second text we analyzed, *The Enlightenment and the Jewish Question*, from 1932, the problem is different. It is no longer about reflecting on the formation of the young, of children in an old world. It is neither about Western children within a Western culture, but rather about Jews, with a past of their own, marked by a religion generationally transmitted by mothers under the sign of the *chosen people*. These people were inserted and formed under the custody of an ideal of culture that was not their own, based on a past that did not belong to them but, due to their assimilation, they *wished* it did. According to Arendt, as she commented on Moses Mendelssohn's theses, Jews do not understand history, and this "[...] failure [...] is] based in their fate as a people without a history and nourished by an only partially understood and assimilated Enlightenment." (Arendt, 2016, p. 119) Here is the problem surrounding the text and the question which apparently also affects Rahel: what authority does the Western tradition hold over these individuals? How do they take part in the Enlightenment in order to save the past of their own people? If Lessing is correct to say, according to Arendt, that the past governed by a tradition is an educator, what past should guide Jews into their formation? The answer to such a question is no longer normative, but historical. Assimilation indeed happened, and if it on one hand revealed the great Western tradition under the aegis of the Enlightenment, it on the other hid part of the Jewish tradition, which remained only partially revealed as names such as Moses Mendelssohn used the Western notion of *Aufklärung* to rationally justify theological elements of Judaism. How did Rahel, the educated assimilated Jew, deal with the adventures, the penchant for the arts, the loves and travels of Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, her *Vorbild*, her model and forming master? Perhaps more than trying to

read the 1932 text according to its historical meaning, it would be interesting to read it bearing in mind current problems involving the issue of multicultural education. It is important to ask ourselves about the possibility or not, the emergence or not of a multicultural education. What remains of each tradition and how we transmit it from one generation to another, especially if the new generation has ethnic or cultural roots diverse from the roots from which we were ourselves formed or formed ourselves?

Regarding this, Kimberley Curtis (2001) notes that the educator has, according to Arendt, the task of creating in the young a certain feeling of belonging to the world, to *our world*. The question he then asks, however, disturbs us: which is our world? Sharing a world also means sharing a past or a tradition? Curtis directs our attention to an important element in Arendt's writings, which might be of utmost importance for considerations on education. It is fundamentally about the role of the educator who partly leads the one who is formed through the path of formation, but is also in part a kind of example. For a process of formation which takes into consideration different pasts and traditions, the educator must take on the impartial Homeric attire. If Homer remained impartial as he narrated Achilles's deeds on one hand and Hector's on the other, if Greeks and Trojans were just as important to the poet, the educator must also adopt this attitude, thus preserving *our world* – the one we share regardless of the tradition around us.

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## Notes

- 1 It is worth mentioning Karin Fry's biographical observation (2010, p. 13): "[...] in a letter to Karl Jaspers, Arendt admitted that she initially was politically naïve and found the 'so-called Jewish question boring' (JC 197). In fact, the word 'Jew' was rarely mentioned in her home, and she claimed that she did not know from her family that she was Jewish, though she was not surprised when she heard antisemitic remarks on the street from other children [...]. Her family were not practicing Jews, but were also not ashamed of their ethnicity, and handled antisemitic behaviour by defending themselves as Jews, refusing to feel inferior, and not letting it get to them."
- 2 The word has more commonly been translated into Portuguese, despite the shortcomings of this translation, as *axiological neutrality*.
- 3 The classic concept of *Bildung* is also studied in Brazil. Among the plethora of articles in Portuguese, many reference specific thinkers (such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche or Adorno, for instance), but we would like to mention three that depart from the problems in this text: Carvalho (2016), Flickinger (2011) and Suarez (2005).
- 4 I refer to the text *The Crisis in Education*, in *Between Past and Future*.
- 5 See Wilhelm von Humboldt (2017).

6 See Anne Bertheau (2016).

7 *Bildung als zum Bild machen.*

8 *Bildung als Ausbildung vorgegebener Anlagen.*

9 What Weil calls *transpersonal*. That is, it seems that Weil, while interpreting Humboldt and considering his life history as *always linked to an external or social element*, namely, his noble condition, avoids making precisely the mistake that undermined his interpretation of Herder. According to Arendt, Weil should have further investigated the historical or social elements of the pietism in which Herder was steeped, instead of isolating the context of the family with which he had grown up.

10 Arendt writes about Lessing once more when she receives the Lessing Award in Hamburg in 1959. In this occasion, she takes up the question of the distinction of truths, which comes from Leibniz. She uses this argument to corroborate her classic research agenda: her clash against Plato and the alleged conceit of the philosopher as the one who seeks the truth. Except in this case, nothing else corresponds to the observations written in the 1932 text we analyzed above. See *On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing*, in Arendt (2003).

11 See Arendt's text regarding Kafka (Arendt, 2008).

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