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Hannah Arendt's Conceptual Framework for the Crisis in Modern Education

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Hannah Arendt's Conceptual Framework for the Crisis in Modern Education

Neiva Caetano dos Santos [α] & Marcus Vinicius da Cunha [σ]

Abstract- **This work analyzes Hannah Arendt's essay "The Crisis in Education", published in the late 1950s, intending to elucidate its central themes through the concepts presented in other works by the author. This intention is a valuable initiative not only because of Arendt's qualifications – who is one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century – but also because the essay has fostered research in the area of education and is frequently included in the bibliography of teacher training courses, both in undergraduate and graduate levels, due to the critical reflections it elaborates on the relationships between adults and children in modernity, which includes the exchange between teachers and students.**

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I. Introduction

A conference is not, as a rule, the most suitable form of communication for detailed explanations of facts, much less for conceptual deepening, although this is necessary for the fully understanding of the message that one wants to convey. One of the functions of the debate section that usually follows the lecturers' manifestation is precisely to fill in the inevitable gaps left by them. When a conference is published in printed format without the transcription of interventions that may have occurred, the text incorporates the gaps in the original elaboration. Therefore, the analysis of works derived from conferences requires increased attention, which needs investigating the concepts that are hidden under a simple and, in certain cases, colloquial style.

The essay "The Crisis in Education" was elaborated by Hannah Arendt (2018b) for a conference given in 1958, entitled "*Die Krise in der Erziehung: Gedanken zur Progressive Education*" (in free translation: "The crisis in education: thoughts on the progressive education"). That same year, the printed text was published in the Partisan Review and, in 1961, translated into English, it became part of the book *Between Past and Future* (Arendt, 2018c). According to Almeida (2011), there are no significant differences between the conference and the printed text.

This paper aims to analyze the essay mentioned above in search of the concepts that support Arendt's ideas to expand reader's field of vision about the themes addressed in it. It is a valuable initiative that goes beyond the strictly academic content of the text, whose author is part of the list of the greatest exponents of philosophical thinking in the 20th century.[1] Examining the conceptual framework of "The Crisis in Education" is relevant because it is a work that encourages research in the area and is frequently included in the bibliography of teacher training courses, both at undergraduate and graduate levels, due to the critical reflections that elaborate on the relationships between adults and children in modernity, which includes the exchange between teachers and students.

To achieve this goal, it is necessary to observe that the primary purpose of "The Crisis in Education" is not to discuss problems of a strict school nature. Although the essay addresses such problems, the author says that her analysis reveals something beyond the relationships between teachers and students. The "essence of the matter", says Arendt (2018b, p. 223), lies in a broader sphere, in which childhood educational practices are developed. The crisis within the scope of schools deserves the author's attention – and ours, of course – as it poses two questions: What is the modern world? What does educating mean?

In this paper, we will follow the order of questions proposed in the essay, starting with the second, guided by the procedure of sustaining her theses in the conceptual framework developed in her other works. The word *thesis* is used here in the sense attributed by Lalande (1999) as "a doctrine that we undertake to defend against the objections that may be made to it" (p. 1134). Arendt does not present dogmas, but concepts based on arguments that can be discussed. By offering the reader an expansion of the conceptual framework contained in the text under examination, we hope to contribute to deepening the discussions that should accompany its use in research work and teacher training courses.

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[1] On the life and work of Arendt (1906-1975), see Adler (2007) and Young-Bruehl (2020).

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II. What Educating Children is

The first thesis related to this issue can be formulated as follows: The child is a newcomer to the world and, therefore, needs protection. Through this reasoning, Arendt (2018b) places education on the list of "the most elementary and necessary activities of human society, which never remains as it is, but is continually renewed through the birth, the arrival of new beings" (p. 234). Children arrive in the world in a "state of becoming"; they are incomplete human beings, and the world, for them, "is strange and is in the process of being formed", which gives the educator a special responsibility. Arendt (2018b, p. 235) explains that the child is not simply a "living creature"; if it were, it would be enough to preserve its life and train it in vital activities, just as the other animal species do.

When parents bring a child into the world, they assume "responsibility, at the same time, for the life and development of the child and for the continuity of the world." The child, the newcomer, can put the world at risk, undoubtedly because the child does not yet know the principles of its functioning, the rules, and duties concerning mutual coexistence. Therefore, Arendt (2018b) argues that the responsibility for protecting the child is added to the responsibility for preserving the world, so that it is not "overrun and destroyed by the onslaught of the new that bursts upon it with each new generation" (p. 235).

For Arendt (2018b), educating children is, fundamentally, dealing with responsibilities concerning natality, that is, the insertion of "newcomers" into the world. Since education is one of the most essential activities in society, it is necessary to ensure that this "new thing comes to fruition concerning to the world as it is" (p. 235); the child is not familiar with the world, and it is necessary to gradually introduce them to it (Arendt, 2018b). Education must operate on natality; it must integrate newcomers into this world as if they were foreigners, lead children into the world that presents itself to them, and prepare for their entry into the community of adults.

The concept of *natality* comes from Arendt's previous writings, especially *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 2020). In this work, *natality* is not just about the beginning of biological life, but also about a kind of second birth which is represented by acts and words in the "human world" (p. 222). The human world is translated by the expression *vita activa*, which describes the fundamental activities of man – *labor, work, or fabrication, and action* –, whose location in the world has to do with its effectiveness, whether in the political sphere, or in the pre-political spheres. Such activities are associated, respectively, with the conditions of human life – land, materiality and plurality – which are equivalent to natality and mortality.

To describe the human condition required to carry out each of the activities of the *vita activa*, Arendt resorts to ancient Greece to rescue relevant aspects of Athenian democratic life (Fry, 2017, p. 64). Correia (2020) shares this same understanding about the author's objectives, stating that her return to Classical Antiquity is a way of characterizing fundamental human activities, moving away from the traditional characterization. Arendt's genealogy of *vita activa* – *labor, work or fabrication, and action* – constitutes, therefore, a questioning of the conditions, the origin, and how daily activities were conducted and how they were transformed until the event of modernity.

The first category, *labor*, corresponds to the biological process of the body, intrinsically linked to vital needs, aiming at the preservation of the species, that is, the realization of "man's metabolism with nature" (Arendt, 2020, p. 121). The human condition of labor is life itself, the activity of maintaining biological processes through a cyclical process, consumption, and meeting the maintenance needs of the human organism. Even if subsistence needs are met, labor does not cease, its continuity aims at "the reproduction of more than one life process, but it never 'produces' anything but life" (p. 108). Its requirements are ongoing, not having a specific beginning or end; it encompasses immediate consumption and "barely survives the act of their production" (p. 118).

The survival needs of the human species are endless, and their needs must be met if life is to be preserved. Although it is an activity conducted in the private sphere, a context that makes it impossible for people to participate in public life, labor is a prerequisite for this life, as personal needs must be met and recognized before concerns with the demands of political life. Who acts in the dimension of labor is the *animal laborans*; the man who acts to preserve biological life, and who produces in complete solitude, works to consume and does not enjoy the social life. It is in this respect that human activity resembles animal activity.

The second category of *vita activa – work or fabrication* – is related to the production of permanent structures associated with the unnatural legacy. The human condition for its realization is *worldliness*, the human capacity to build the artificial world, giving it materiality through durable and productive objects of use. Tools and instruments whose durability must be more excellent than the man's existence and whose usefulness must reach the following generations correspond to this activity. Contrasting with labor, which operates to meet biological needs, the objects of the work are not for consumption, being endowed with a "definite beginning and a definite, predictable end" (Arendt, 2020, p. 178).

In the dimension of the work, there is the *homo faber*, the one who manufactures and produces his

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instruments to mitigate the effort of the labor undertaken by the *animal laborans*. Fabrication, which is the work of *homo faber*, consists of reification, and intends to give materiality to objects in the human world, as Arendt (2020) explains. This individual's motivations are the ideals of "permanence", "stability", and "durability" of his products (p. 155). According to Fry (2017), by building a world of durable objects, people initiate a movement to avoid "some cyclical demands of nature" (p. 67), meeting survival needs and paving the way for political action.

As with the labor, the work is carried out within the scope of privacy because *homo faber* needs to be alone with his ideas to create his objects. Once finished, these objects allow people to meet in the exchange market, where they can trade their goods. So, in comparison to the labor activity, the work takes on a more public character. Even located in the public space, this market, however, cannot be seen as belonging to the political sphere, as it is driven by individual interests and the dynamics of commerce, as opposed to politics, which requires joint action in favor of collective demands. The objects produced in this way do not require the presence of other people, unlike action and political discourse, whose scenario is a web of relationships that requires the presence of the other, and each action finds a set of already established relationships that will trigger new reactions (Arendt, 2020).

The third category of human activity, *action*, requires the condition of plurality, referring to the fact that all individuals are plural and singular beings, unique and different from each other, indispensable attributes that leads them to act. Based on this reflection, Arendt (2020) removes the dichotomy between essence and appearance and conceptualize politics as a space in which action and discourse reveal the individuals in their uniqueness. Action is the most human of the dimensions of the *vita activa* because those who cannot appear as political beings are invisible; they have no public existence. What gives reality to the individuals is their presentation before the other, when they can express their desires and participate in collective decisions, because what defines them is not their identity, their physical characteristics, but the place they occupy in the world.

The concept of *natality* is not synonymous but is directly associated with the activity called *action*, when, through words and acts, the individuals insert themselves into the human world, an event that constitutes a second birth. When they are born, they are not just beings of a species but newcomers who have their characteristics, and this beginning brings with it the possibility of carrying out new deeds and modifying the course of history; a course that has been narrated by those who already inhabited the world before them. The newcomer is seen by Arendt (2020, p. 220) as a "miracle", a term that refers to the belief in the human, in the political capacity to contradict the established and break the cycle of predictability. The condition of natality leads to the possibility of public discourse, a moment of realization of the "human condition in plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals" (p. 221).

As Fry (2020, p. 46) explains, among all the activities related to the *vita activa*, political action is the one that is most in tune with starting over, and this capacity derives from birth because human beings "are born with a potential still unknown." Arendt's interest in political action and plurality is closely related to natality and the resulting events in earthly life, associating the beginning with the potential for action, which is characteristic of human beings; and these unique beings must be prepared to act in the story of humanity. Natality is not imposed on us by necessity, as with work, but is instituted in the "space in-between" by the presence of the other, even though it is not conditioned by them (Arendt, 2020, p. 219).

The child, the newcomer to the world as a foreigner, is a promise of "renewal" and "conservation", as stated by Custódio (2011, p. 120); for being unique, the child has the power to start something new, something that begins through action in the world. However, the capacity for the new can only be realized through action by the adult because the adult is the one who acts in freedom, who initiates something new in the public sphere. For this to become possible, education must have done its work in the pre-political sphere.

III. Society's Obligations to Children

Arendt's first thesis on the essence of educational practices states that to educate is to assume responsibilities concerning natality and that, by protecting the child and developing their potential, education plays an essential role in politics, as it prepares the individual to exercise the required freedom in the public space. The second thesis on the same theme says that the place of protection of childhood is the domestic sphere: "Because the child must be protected against the world, his traditional place is in the family" (Arendt, 2018b, p. 235). This thesis is complemented by another, whose statement records that families have not fulfilled this purpose because they expose children to the public world at an early age, making their protection unfeasible.

Arendt (2018b) argues that the public sphere is the space of freedom. Although children are potentially free as human beings, they are not yet prepared to exercise the typical freedom of that space. Therefore, they need the protection offered by the private sphere, by family life, in which a "shield against the world and specifically against the public aspect of the world (…) a secure place, without which no living thing can thrive" (p. 236).

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This protection is necessary because, like every living and developing creature, children need shelter to meet basic needs that sustain their full biological and affective development; they also requires that the values and customs accumulated by previous generations be transmitted to them. As a new human being, the child is fragile, not prepared to deal with the demands of the public world, space where everything is publicly exposed, and people relate to each other as equals.

Arendt (2018b) points out that, whenever human life is "consistently exposed to the world without the protection of privacy and security, its vital quality is destroyed" (p. 236). The child, therefore, should not assume responsibility for the world, a task that falls to adults, and when "the attempt is made to turn the children themselves into a kind of world", they – "human beings in the process of becoming but not yet complete" – are unduly exposed "to the light of a public existence" (p. 236). One of the requirements for action is a space in which where every human being can present themselves as a plural and singular being through acts and words. For Arendt (2018b), it is up to politics to maintain and preserve this space; pre-political spheres, such as the family and the school, play a decisive role in this context by fulfilling the task of presenting this space to newcomers, so that, at the end of their education, they can participate in this world.[2]

The concepts of *responsibility* and *authority*, which occupy the core of this reflection, are fundamental to understanding "The Crisis in Education". Arendt's thesis about educational responsibility in the pre-political sphere – protecting the world's children – deserves to be analyzed considering the concept of *world*, which can be apprehended based on *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 2020). In this book, *world* has two connotations:

> The set of "tangible and durable objects" produced by *homo faber*, composed of artificial things; and the "aspects related to the in-between space", which includes human affairs, the place where political actions take place that allow human beings to gain visibility and reveal their uniqueness (Almeida, 2011, p. 25-26).

Arendt (2020, p. 64) states that the term public refers to "the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it"; it qualifies as a space for collective decisions, in which it is allowed to act and express opinions, which makes the human being interested and, at the same time, responsible for issues that may affect the destiny of all. It is in the public domain that the action and speech of each individual contribute to the construction of the common world. This construction is a "human artifact"; it exclusively demands a disposition for interaction that can only be conquered in the public sphere.

The idea of a *common world* is central to Arendt's reflection on politics: The world is a "space constituted by labor and constituted by action" (Almeida, 2011, p. 21). In this shared space, responsibility for the world takes the form of authority, but modernity has eliminated this conception in public life and in politics, a fact that Arendt (Arendt, 2018b) analyzes through the event of totalitarianism, stating that "violence and terror exercised by the totalitarian countries have, of course, nothing to do with authority– or at most plays a highly contested role" (p. 240).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (2019, p. 609) characterizes the phenomenon that makes up the title of the book through the analysis of the Stalinist government, in force between 1930 and 1953, and the Nazi government, from 1933 until the end of World War II, showing that its consequence was to produce "superfluous men". By impoverishing the channels of communication between people, eliminating human plurality, extinguishing freedom, and installing a regime of terror and fear, totalitarianism destroyed the "inner capacity of man" (p. 632). The isolated individual feels in a fictitious world that does not admit the expression of spontaneity, dialogic interaction, and effective participation in the public world. There is no public world when human beings do not see themselves as "builders of worlds or cobuilders of a common world" (p. 608). There is no true authority when the world is inhabited by atomized beings, members of a mass society in which superfluity prevails in the relationships between people.

Arendt (2019) shows that totalitarian rule left deep marks on modern society, demobilizing free initiative in all fields of action; human beings become incapable of differentiating themselves from one another, as if all of humanity were a single individual. For this domain to be established, the first step was to "kill the juridical person in man", causing the human being to lose the ability to perform any "normal acts", which contradicts any possibility of action (p. 594). The next step consisted of the "murder of the moral person in man", as happened in the Nazi concentration camps (p. 599-600). To kill the moral and juridical person is to destroy individuality, spontaneity, and the ability to do something new, leading everyone to adopt the same behavior and to act in a predictable way, under the control of fear and impotence.

It can be understood that Arendt's thesis about the educational tasks of the pre-political sphere expresses the conviction that, by not protecting children from the world, families do not prepare them to take on the challenges of this complex space, the public world. If education is not carried out satisfactorily in the pre-political sphere, if individuality and privacy are not

[2] This is the theme of "Reflections on Little Rock", text in which Arendt (2004) discusses the problems arising from the racial desegregation law in American schools. She defends that this law transferred exclusive attributions of adults to children. About the controversy resulting from this text, see Briskievicz (2019).

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adequately safeguarded within the family, it cannot be expected that adults will see themselves as members of a common world and assume the responsibility that belongs to them in the political sphere. Action requires initiative and sharing with the other, but this will be unfeasible if these requirements were not learned at the right time.

Arendt realizes that both families and schools fail to take care of child development; the omission to protect children and the urgency to release them early into the world predominate. Without care and protection, the individual is not educated to act later in the political space, which characterizes modernity as a time devoid of people capable of taking responsibility for the world.

Arendt's thesis on responsibility towards children is complemented by the concepts of *authority* and *tradition*, which deserve special attention in the analysis of relationships between adults and children, which includes exchanges between teachers and students. On the subject, "The Crisis in Education" formulates a thesis that, if misunderstood, can sound retrograde to all those involved in educating: It is necessary to reassume authority and recover the sense of tradition in pre-political spheres. However, it is essencial to remember the bleak picture to which Arendt (2018a) refers: By not taking responsibility for the world, people fail to assume authority, as the two terms have always been linked. With the destruction of authority in the public and political spheres, accountability to the world has been devalued. For Klusmeyer (2020), Arendt associates the ideas of *tradition* and *authority* because "tradition defines the terms by which authority is framed" (p. 184).

Arendt (2018e) seeks to show that tradition, responsible for conducting authority, has also been distorted, and makes a statement entirely related to the crisis in the relationship between adults and children: Totalitarian domination "broke the continuity" of Western History, an event that made "the break in our tradition (…) an accomplished fact" (p. 54). The failure of authority and tradition brings damage, such as the elimination of the human capacity to build, preserve and care for a world that should survive our existence and remain for those who are still to arrive (Arendt, 2018a).

In the essay "What is Authority?", Arendt (2018d, p. 127) explains that, for centuries, authority, religion, and tradition served as parameters, providing a support base for "authentic and undisputable experiences common to all". This explanation does not mean that the world in the past was good or free from injustice, but that there were explicit references to right and wrong. The modern world has abolished that base, destroyed authority, both in the public and political and in the pre-political spheres, and this process reached the relationship between parents and children and between teachers and students. Arendt (2018d, p. 240) says: "the more radical the distrust of authority in the public sphere becomes", the greater the probability that the private sphere will be affected.

In pre-political spheres, authority is a "natural need", Arendt (2018b, p. 128) says, because the child is not able to make decisions on their own, either in the school context or in the family context, needing, therefore, the adult to understand the world. Arendt's concept of *authority* is complex, as analyzed by Lafer (2018, p. 23), because "it involves obedience, and, however, excludes coercion" – which goes against common sense, which equates the two terms. Although it involves obedience, Arendt's authority excludes coercion because the use of force and violence makes authority unfeasible.

Authority is also not compatible with persuasion in education practiced in pre-political spheres because persuasion implies an exchange between equals established through argumentation. If there are arguments, it is because there is no authority: "Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical", which leads those involved to assume different positions – there is one who commands and one who obeys. Persuasion among equals is an inherent condition of political action, and in the political context are adults, those who have already passed the "age of education" (Arendt, 2018b, p. 129). The condition for subjects to act in politics begins when the education stage ends (Arendt, 2018b, p. 160).

In Arendt (2018b, p. 129), the "authoritarian relationship between the one who commands and the one who obeys", both at school and within the family, does not have a negative connotation. It is a "natural need", as it happens between old and young people, a relationship whose "essence is educational" (p. 160). The exchange that is established in education positions adults, on the one hand, and, on the other, children who cannot yet be "admitted to politics and equality" because they are not yet capable of acting in these spheres (p. 160). In short, authority is essential for the "raising and education of children", and it is only effective when the elders, who are the educators, operate as models for the younger generations (p. 161).

In "The Crisis in Education", Arendt (2018b) is incisive: It is inconceivable to reject the evidence that learning is based on the authority of elders and, in the case of schools, the authority of teachers; contrary to what can be accepted in the political sphere, in education one cannot admit any ambiguity in this regard – "Children cannot throw off educational authority, as though they were in a position of oppression by an adult majority" (p. 240). Accepting this overthrow represents an authentic "bankruptcy of common sense" (p. 227).

This reflection completes the scenario in which Arendt positions the failure of families in protecting children: By renouncing the authority that is their own and which was assured to them by tradition, parents

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prevent the development of the children towards the public world. In pre-political spheres, whether at home or school, the absence of authority and tradition preclude the establishment of a sense of stability, durability, and connection with the past. For Arendt (2018b), by creating a "world of children", modern education "destroys the necessary conditions for vital development and growth" (p. 236) of children themselves, which violates the obligation to protect them. This fact is surprising, as modern education emerged and established itself intending to "serve the child and rebel against the methods of the past because these had not sufficiently taken into account the child's inner nature and his needs" (p. 237).

IV. What the Modern World is

So, Arendt's arguments about the essence of education and our responsibilities towards children are elucidated. We will now examine the first question posed by the author: What aspects of the modern world and its crisis are revealed by the educational crisis? In other words: What can the crisis instituted in the pre-political spheres teach us about the transformations of the political sphere in modernity? The discussion now does not strictly concern educational practices, whether those adopted at school or those that occur in the family, but what these practices suggest about the relationships between people and the world, relationships that the author characterizes through the concept of *vita activa*, as seen above.

In "The Crisis in Education", a single thesis expresses Arendt's (2018b) position on this issue: The "strange state of affairs" that affects education originates in "judgments and prejudices" about the "nature of private life and the public world and their mutual relationship, characteristic of modern society since the beginning of modern times" (p. 237). In this equation, a liberation is identified that is only apparent, as it hides, in fact, a broad process of "alienation" of man in the political sphere.

Let's first see what the author understands by *modern times* and what the referred process of alienation means. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (2020, p. 7) clarifies that "the modern age is not the same as the modern world"; from the point of view of science, the modern world began in the seventeenth century, ending "at the threshold of the twentieth century"; in political terms, "the modern world we live in today was born with the first atomic explosions". Although Arendt uses this temporal delimitation, she intends to analyze human capabilities, which are permanent and do not change without transformations in essential human activities. This historical record aims, says Arendt (2020, p. 7), to clarify how the process of "modern alienation from the world" originated, in addition to understanding the position of the individual in the face of the new model of society.

However, modern alienation is much earlier than these events, as it concerns historical facts that established the individual's distance from the world, such as the discovery of America, the Protestant Reformation, and the emergence of the telescope, events carried out by men whose feats broke the boundaries hitherto established for human experience. These events, as well as the significant advances made possible by modern science, are similar in one crucial point: They indicate the break with tradition, the rupture of the common sense that guided the lives of people in the world. New and more daring scientific and technical advances – the launch of an artificial satellite, the creation of life in test tubes, and the advent of automation, for example – contributed to making life a set of artificial apparatuses and "toward cutting the last tie through which even man belongs among the children of nature" (Arendt, 2020, p. 2). Alienation is precisely the product of this cut that distanced and continues distancing human beings from nature. This rupture makes the world a strange place, far from immediate and concrete individual existence.

The individuals "seem to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence", Arendt (2020, p. 3) says; they don't act with the purpose of denying the value of scientific and technological development but to denounce that the decision regarding the use of this knowledge was left to "professional scientists or professional politicians", when it should be shared by all. The collective decisions are the ones that preserve our ability to think and express ourselves about what surrounds us daily: "for speech is what makes man a political being". And Arendt (2020, p. 4-5) concludes: "And whatever men do or know or experience can make sense only to the extent that it can be spoken about". It so happens that, as the world is a strange place, intangible to immediate and concrete experience, we can say nothing about it, we alienate ourselves to move forward with life.

The scenario produced by scientific discoveries contributed to annihilate common sense, the sense through which people guided their "strictly private sensations" to adjust to the common world, Arendt (2020, p. 351) explains, in modernity, common sense retreated and acquired another meaning, that of "an inner faculty without any world relationship". It is this process, by the way, that Arendt (2018b, p. 227) refers to in "The Crisis in Education", when she says that the "disappearance of common sense" is one of the characteristics of the current crisis. People no longer deliberate about how to educate their children; they accept the guidelines of modern pedagogy based not on their perceptions of what is right and wrong but on what experts say is most appropriate.

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Arendt (2020, p. 317) states that the first moment of "modern alienation" coincides with the removal of workers from the "double protection of family and property", which, until the advent of modernity, housed the "vital and labor activities" – components of the *vita activa*, in which the *animal laborans* is located, the man who produces alone to preserve biological life, without enjoying social life. In Classical Antiquity, there was an explicit distintion between the private domain, which encompassed the home and the family, and the public domain, concerning the affairs of the *polis*, Arendt (2020) points out. The first was called *zoé*, biological life, common to men and animals, and the second, *bios*, political life, comprising man in the public space. At home, matters were related to the economy, to the management of daily needs, being discussed by those who shared the same roof, without the intervention of third parties, and without openness to the interaction between groups, as each family took care of its subsistence. It was in this domain that human beings developed, and that is why the author refers to it as a place of protection, not only for the child but for the whole family, a refuge from the public world.

Polis did not invade the private life of citizens because of respect for the limits of each private property, and this same property forced men to enter the domain of worldly affairs. The head of the family who did not deal with the difficulties and needs of the domestic sphere became free to participate in public decisions; owning property meant having the vital needs secured, which allowed integration into the political body of the city. When private wealth was transformed into capital, whose only function was to generate more capital, the property affairs became equal to those of the shared world. This event, which Arendt (2020) attributes to modernity, sealed the victory of the *animal laborans* over the *zoon politikón*, the man of action, giving rise to the political impotence of modern man.

Then, an apolitical being appears, alien to the actions inherent to the political space, which returns to the cycle of work and consumption to meet the basic survival needs of the species. As Correia (2020, p. 48) attests, this victory meant the "refusal to confirm, through action, the novelty that each birth represents", by the work of a being averse to politics, the "worker-consumer". Arendt (2020) shows that, in the manufacturing activity, homo faber accompanied the entire production process as holder of the means and ends. In modernity, however, built objects are devoid of identity, a fact that instituted a way of life that is a mere being alive in an endless cycle of work and consumption. By returning to the condition of *animal laborans*, people lost the possibility of being among their peers; they saw themselves cut off from action and discourse, essential components of the political community.

In "The Crisis in Education", Arendt (2018b, p. 237) analyzes that, in modernity, domestic life and all activities related to privacy, this sphere of protection and preservation, have been subsumed into the public sphere, exposing people "in the light of the public world", which resulted in the "emancipation of workers and women". The real reason for this process does not concern the value of people as such, but the social role they then began to play, a "necessary role in the vital process of society". Outside the domestic space, immersed in the public space, everyone started to be able to take part in political decisions through acts or words; they began to have "a claim on the public world, that is, a right to see and be seen in it, to speak and be heard" – a "true liberation" (p. 237), in fact, but which caused harm to children, whose maturity is insufficient to assume such burdens.

According to Arendt (2018b, p. 238), the problem is that, by abolishing the distinction between what concerns the private and what belongs to the public sphere, a "social sphere in which the private is transformed into public and vice versa" was created. At that moment, society, no longer the individual, appears as the "subject of the new vital process" (Arendt, 2020, p. 319), and belonging to a social class assumes the function formerly performed by the family. The rise of society caused the simultaneous decay of public and private domains.

Furthermore, the elimination of "private ownership of a part of the world" and the obscuring of a "common public world" gave rise to the phenomenon of "the lonely mass man and so dangerous in the formation of the worldless mentality of modern ideological mass movements" (Arendt, 2020, p. 318). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (2019, p. 446) explains that the masses descend from the fragments of an "atomized society" and that the mass man is not defined by "brutality or backwardness" but by "his isolation and his lack of normal social relationships" – typical features of man in modernity, incapable of seeing the other and taking responsibility for the world.

Arendt (2020) argues that alienation reaches its apex when the social sphere replaces the old pillars of support for the individuals and their bond with nature – the family and property – for something of universal, the Earth. The individuals' relationship with the world changes drastically, as people can no longer become true citizens, with the right to be seen and heard, because social individuals cannot be "collective owners" of the world, unlike *homo faber*, whose existence was defined within the scope of the family and property.

The social sphere instituted individual life as a supreme value, but this life is not like it was in the past. Arendt (2020, p. 397) emphasizes that the "inversion between life and the world" is the threshold of "all modern development", causing harmful effects on

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human life. The political crisis that has hit Western civilization since the foundation of modernity is based on the impossibility of giving a collective meaning to the world, making action unfeasible – a fundamental concept of *vita activa*, which defines political activity – and consolidating the alienation that prevents people from taking responsibility for the world.

César and Duarte (2010) point out that this typical process of the modern era described by Arendt has a direct impact on education. In the light of these analyses, the passage of "The Crisis in Education" is understood, in which Arendt (2018b) states that the problem under discussion goes beyond pedagogical issues–it is not a matter of knowing why "little Johnny" does not master reading–, as it concerns the process that resulted in the end of tradition and the emptying of responsibility of adults towards the common world and, consequently, towards the new generations that arrive in this world by natality. For Arendt (2018b, p. 223), it is not possible to "completely isolate the universal element from the specific circumstances in which it appears". Specific issues related to education are only elucidated through Arendt's discussion about the human condition within the scope of the political crisis that hit modernity.

V. Conclusion

Once the conceptual framework that allows a more precise visualization of the essay "The Crisis in Education" has been presented, the main objective of this paper, we can conclude this analysis by highlighting a passage in the text that refers to the historical background of the phenomenon in question, which will be useful for us to understand the magnitude of the problem addressed by the author and the possibilities we have to overcome it.

Arendt (2018b, p. 244) claims to be of the "essence of the Roman attitude (…) to consider the past *qua* past as a model" and assumes this specific case as illustrative of the "Western tradition as a whole" since the Christian era has not substantially modified its characteristics. The Romans had in their ancestors an example of conduct to be followed and conceived education as a means to make young people worthy of previous generations: "Fellowship and authority were in this case indeed, but the two sides of the same matter, and the teacher's authority was firmly grounded in the encompassing authority of the past as such" (p. 245).

The subject comes to the fore because of the obstacles that stand in the way of overcoming the current educational crisis. In modernity, Arendt (2018b, p. 243) says, it is difficult to achieve "that minimum of conservation and conservative attitude without which education is simply not possible", considering the emptying of tradition and the devaluation of the past. Educators then find themselves in a conflicting situation that cannot resolve: They are practically unable to exercise their job, whose core lies in "serving as a mediator between the old and the new", while their "profession demands an extraordinary respect for the past" (p. 244).

Although Arendt's examination is discouraging for all who act as educators, both in the family and at school, it is crucial to recognize that the problem discussed in the essay and which still affects us today – the impossibility of protecting children and giving them a favorable environment for their development–had a beginning, modernity, constituting, therefore, a problem of historical nature. If we conceive history as a set of processes and events produced by the human being, a path of hope opens up regarding the possibility of acting to obtain its transformation.

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