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COVID-19 and religious education reimagined: discovering a reflective space through Hannah Arendt's concept of thinking

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ABSTRACT

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and its rapid spread around the world, the normality of people's lives was disrupted. Education was not immune from this. In many countries, to limit the spread of the infection, students were required by the government to study remotely. This social isolation in a limited space generated concerns among educators about the quality of learning, notably through virtual platforms. However, this crisis also brought with it an opportunity for change for the better. Social distancing could allow for a 'reflective space' that extended students' learning beyond the physical space. This research paper explores how the disruption of the normality of our lives and the provision of reflective space might enrich religious education, both in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. I will analyse this issue philosophically in light of Hannah Arendt's concept of 'thinking'. This thinking refers to the quest for meaning which occurs when we withdraw ourselves from *inter homines esse* (being among humans) into a solitary realm. Drawing on Arendt's ideas, I argue that the reflective space enables us to reimagine religious education such that it better prepares students from across the cultural and religious spectrum for a democratic society.

KEYWORDS

COVID-19; thinking; reflective space; religious education

Introduction

Before coming to the UK to pursue my doctoral studies in early 2020, I taught at a Catholic school in northern Thailand. It was the period when the COVID-19 pandemic was becoming widespread, and the number of fatalities was increasing. Through the media, our teachers and students learned how rapidly the virus was spreading. When it was clear that our students could not resume any face-to-face classes soon, our teachers had no choice but to find ways to teach the students using various virtual platforms.

As the COVID-19 pandemic was a global crisis, schooling was disrupted across the globe. This disruption raised concerns and led educators to ask many questions: How long will it be before this pandemic stops so that we can resume our onsite learning? If the pandemic continues, will virtual studies be equally effective in comparison with onsite learning? Will solitary education slow down students' learning progress? Will this pandemic widen the educational opportunity gap in our society? and so on.

Although these concerns and questions are vital and need a long period of academic research, I argue that it is worth looking at some of the opportunities this crisis brought to our lives. One such opportunity is how the disruption brought about by the pandemic forced us to *stop* what we were ordinarily doing: to *distance* ourselves from what we ordinarily did for a while, and to *reflect* on it. In

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other words, this crisis provided us with a space to ‘think of what we are doing’ (Arendt 1998, 5). This includes those who were involved in education to *re-examine* how this challenging time not only impacted us negatively but simultaneously drove us to develop our educational engagement more meaningfully and creatively. As a blessing in disguise, this reflective space offered us the possibility for what Schwab and Malleret (2020) called ‘a great reset’, meaning that this pandemic disclosed new possibilities for individual and collective change for the better.

This article seeks to discover how the disruptive nature of the pandemic and the consequent solitary learning experience could turn into a ‘reflective space’ that enabled us as educators to reimagine our religious education curriculum and pedagogy. Why focus on religious education? The pandemic impacted people of all faiths and of many and diverse religious practices. It invited us to consider how reflecting on religious faith and practice could more effectively and meaningfully prepare students for a democratic society. This resonated with today’s educational context, where groups of students have become increasingly diverse and multicultural, a context which requires religious education to accommodate and be open to pupils from various religious and cultural backgrounds. To explain how reflection on faith and practice can promote democratic values, I will focus on Hannah Arendt’s idea of ‘thinking’ in *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt 1978), which provides us with an understanding of the interrelationship between our reflective space in our mind (the *vita contemplativa*) and our relationship with others in the political realm (the *vita activa*).

The article is divided into three sections. The first section will begin by reflecting on COVID-19 and its disruptive nature. The second section will explore Arendt’s concept of ‘thinking’ that requires our withdrawal from ‘being among humans’ (*inter homines esse*). Drawing on Arendtian thinking, the final section will look at how we can reimagine religious education at school in a way that allows students to think more reflectively about themselves and their relationship with others.

COVID-19 and its disruptive nature

After the beginning of COVID-19, people globally had anxiety and fear. There are [at least] two reasons why these feelings occurred. First, COVID-19 is one of the great global plagues, the last major one being the 1918 influenza pandemic known as the ‘Spanish flu’. As it is a viral respiratory infection, COVID-19 can be rapidly disseminated across continents. Until now [the start of 2023 when the author wrote this article], over 6 million people have died worldwide. Second, apart from its severe harm to people’s lives, the pandemic had a disruptive nature. The reason is that as COVID-19 can spread very quickly, the state usually requested or mandated the infected person to be quarantined and other people to remain at home. This restriction aimed to lessen and prevent infections. Consequently, these people could not live as they usually did, i.e. go to work or school, associate with peers, and engage in religious ceremonies, etc. Although the lockdown has now been lifted in most countries, it is still worth reflecting on how this long period of restriction that disrupted our normality continues to impact us and *what* we can learn from it.

When we look at the term ‘disruptive’ (adjective) or ‘disruption’ (noun), it usually sounds negative because when we are disrupted, we are forced to *stop* and to *change* the usual ways we live, whether we want this or not. To proceed outside normality can be risky because we lose control and the ability to do as we previously planned, and do not know how the different options we take or are forced to choose will result, especially in the long term. Nevertheless, the disruption not only means how our normality is challenged, but simultaneously it discloses other positive, new, radical societal transformations. It corresponds to Zygmunt Bauman and Carlo Bordoni, whose view in their *State of Crisis* (Bauman and Bordoni 2014) is that in every crisis where our normality is greatly interrupted, something positive, creative, and optimistic can emerge. They reflect on the word ‘crisis’ from the Greek κρίσις, which can mean: judgement, a result of a trial, turning point, selection, or decision. The reason is that in *crisis*, while confronting a difficult situation, we cannot remain indifferent but must decide what we need to do in order to bring about change for the better in our society.

As can be seen, 'crisis', in its proper sense, expresses something positive, creative and optimistic, because it involves a change, and may be a rebirth after a break-up. It indicates separation, certainly, but also choice, decisions and therefore the opportunity to express an opinion. In a broader context, it takes on the meaning of the maturation of a new experience, which leads to a turning point (on a personal level as much as on a historical-social level). (Bauman and Bordoni 2014, 3)

In terms of the *pandemic crisis*, Schwab and Malleret (2020) contend that there have been similar plagues throughout human history which brought disruption to various dimensions of human lives, and sometimes, their immense impacts amounted to a turning point in our history. The reason is '[b]ecause of their inherently disruptive nature, epidemics throughout history have proven to be a force for lasting and often radical change: sparking riots, causing population clashes and military defeats, but also triggering innovations, redrawing national boundaries and often paving the way for revolutions (Schwab and Malleret 2020, 13). Two examples are the Plague of Justinian in 541–542 which caused the decline of the Byzantine Empire due to its military and economic destruction; and the Black Death in 1347–1351 which fuelled the rise of anti-Semitism across Europe in which the Jews were accused of spreading the plague and asked to convert, with the consequence that at least 1,000 of them were burnt alive. For Schwab and Malleret, the turning point that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about could be different from the previous great plagues, because of our interconnected and interdependent world, including the growth of globalisation and AI automation. Therefore, 'we should take advantage of this unprecedented opportunity to reimagine our world, in a bid to make it a better and more resilient one as it emerges on the other side of this crisis' (Schwab and Malleret 2020, 19).

In *After Lockdown: A Metamorphosis*, Latour (2021) invites us to reflect on the opportunities presented by our lockdown experience, one in which we were compelled to remain at home for an extended period. Although our routines and long-term plans were interrupted, the lockdown reminded us that we are all 'the earthbound, or *terrestrials*' (Latour 2021, 15). This means that as the lockdown forced us to be confined at home, within four walls or at most within a compound, we became profoundly more aware of who we are in relationship to a natural space which we inhabited along with the people around us and with whom we had previously interacted less due to the demands of living in a rapidly changing and competitive society. In addition, this confinement, it is argued by Latour, existentially challenged the modern way of thinking, which over-emphasises human freedom and which has for centuries oriented humans towards progress and expansion and has even led them to dream of escaping from this world. Consequently, we forget that we are part of this earth, interconnected with other creatures and that we must simultaneously be accountable for what we do to them and for the impact our actions have on future generations. For Latour, therefore, although this pandemic may have confined us physically, it presented us with an opportunity to 'deconfine' our thinking and set it free by prompting us to reflect more meaningfully on who we are in this world.

Similarly, Breslin (2023) views the disruption of normality during the pandemic crisis as possibly bringing novel insights in the ways we look at education and work collaboratively for young people in education. In *Bubble Schools and the Long Road from Lockdown* (Breslin 2023), despite Breslin's awareness of several negative impacts on teachers and students due to the lack of onsite learning, he states that this challenge enabled us to rethink and reimagine how to provide education to young people differently and creatively. Furthermore, it helped us realise that education involves not only teachers but also many others, e.g. parents and people in a local community, who support and take part in the students' learning process. This is why Breslin mentions three positive aspects (inspiring, enabling, and humbling) of this disruptive experience during lockdown:

For those of us professionally engaged in the provision of education, lockdown has been inspiring, enabling and humbling in equal measure – *inspiring* because it has called on us to rethink the plethora of tactics and strategies that we have used for so long in our teaching and in the organisation of mass education; *enabling* because it has set free at least some of the creativity that many of us feared had been long brow-beaten out of us by a range of compliance, accountability and assessment process, and *humbling* because, as professional educators, we have been reminded that many more than us contribute to the process of education; it does, indeed, take a village to educate a child, albeit a village that is variously local, virtual and global. (Breslin 2023, xvii)

In this way, it can arguably be said that the disruptive nature of pandemic invited us to *think beyond* the frame of the statutory schooling years. These years can refer to either the *period* of students' learning or a *curriculum* formally set by the state or educational administrators. One way to think beyond the statutory schooling years is called 'lifelong and lifewide learning'¹ which emphasises how education is not constrained by a classroom or a particular curriculum but accompanies an individual's journey throughout their life.² This requires schools to be aware of and assist students by considering each pupil's context and long-term impacts from our new pedagogies. To reach this aim, I argue that schools must provide students not only 'what' to learn but also how to think independently about what we have learned. The nature of this thinking invites us to go beyond the routine and to reflect more meaningfully on our lives and relationships with others in society.

Hannah Arendt on thinking and a reflective space

The relationship between the disruption of normality and education is not something new and can be traced back to an ancient period, notably during the life of Socrates. In 'Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture' (Arendt 1971), Hannah Arendt admires Socrates not because he was acquainted with much knowledge or established famous schools, but because of his ability to disrupt others to think beyond normality. In other words, Socrates' enquiries and statements to his students and other Athenians enabled them to open up to the possibilities of novel understanding. This is why Socrates is viewed using various similes: a 'gadfly' (Plato 2021, 34) who awakens people from their sleep of habitual unthinking; a 'midwife' (Plato 1961b, 855) who assists others to draw their better understandings from unhelpful ones; or a 'sting ray' (Plato 1961a, 363) who paralyzes people to cease the conventionality of their daily activities and to think about their lives and relationships with other fellow citizens.

But what is the problem with normality? Why does Socrates need to disrupt his students and others? In this context, normality means the ways people live daily without any investigation, such as their lack of critical disposition towards their state leaders' commands. The problem is that when they get used to passively following orders, one day their leaders might manipulate and subvert their orders with more destructive and harmful ones. At this point, it could be too late because people, still in their sleep of unthinking habits, lose their ability to discern right from wrong and follow them unthinkingly. Arendt (1964) gives the example of Adolf Eichmann, a former officer of the Nazi regime, who was *unable to think about or reflect on* his participation in the crime of the Holocaust.³ During the trial in Jerusalem, while listening to several victims of the Holocaust, Eichmann did not show any guilty feelings. He claimed he was merely following orders and obeying laws then in force:

There was no sign in him [Eichmann] of firm ideological convictions or of specific evil motives, and the only notable characteristic one could detect in his past behavior as well as in his behavior during the trial and throughout the pre-trial police examination was something entirely negative: it was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*. In the setting of Israeli court and prison procedures he functioned as well as he had functioned under the Nazi regime but, when confronted with situations for which such routine procedures did not exist, he was helpless, and his cliché-ridden language produced on the stand, as it had evidently done in his official life, a kind of macabre comedy. (Arendt 1978, 4)

Drawing on the importance of the disrupting normality, COVID-19 perhaps reminded us of how we could improve our education beyond just the statutory schooling years. Students must have a reflective space to think more meaningfully about what they have learned, i.e. a religious education that offers a space to reflect on the different perspectives of religious faith and practices students are offered. In this way, we could prevent our students from the habit of unthinking, which can cause catastrophic impacts on our society, more than we imagine.

But what does Arendt mean by thinking? How can we think reflectively? To respond to these questions, it is vital to begin with Arendt's idea on the movement between the public realm (the *vita activa*) and the mental process, i.e. thinking (the *vita contemplativa*).⁴ For Arendt, both realms are distinct but, at the same time, profoundly interconnected.

Arendt (1978) explains that every person who enters this world will exist in a condition called *inter homines esse* (being among humans). It is where a person is aware of being surrounded by others. As a result, the person's normality in life – such as habits, attitudes, decision-making, etc – is inevitably influenced by those around them. This *inter homines esse* in the public realm (the *vita activa*) is a human condition of plurality because of our constant interaction. This *inter homines esse* can be direct interaction with others, as between, for example, colleagues in an office, students-teachers in a school, etc. But it also can refer to an indirect interaction between counterparts, such as citizens having to follow the rules made by their representatives in state legislatures. Although these citizens have never perhaps physically encountered those leaders, their normality of life is framed and formed by their leaders' decisions. The only way we can leave this *inter homines esse* is to exit from being among others and to enter the process of our mind, as Arendt explains:

Since plurality is one of the basic existential conditions of human life on earth—so that *inter homines esse*, to be among men, was to the Romans the sign of being alive, aware of the realness of world and self, and *inter homines esse desinere*, to cease to be among men, a synonym for dying—to be by myself and to have intercourse with myself is the outstanding characteristic of the life of the mind. (Arendt 1978, 74)

What Arendt means by *inter homines esse desinere* is not to stop existing in this world, but to distance oneself from interaction with others in the *vita activa* and move into the *vita contemplativa* where we think in solitude. This *reflective* space of the mind is *metaphorical* and *tentative* because we apply 'images' originating from our 'imagination' or 'the faculty of having present what is absent' (Arendt 1992, 79) to trace back to what happened in *the past* as well as to reimagine what we hope for in *the future*. Being in this 'gap between past and future' (*nunc stans*)⁵ will enable us to re-examine our relationships with others in *the present* and uncover how we can make the *vita activa* more meaningful. To understand this better, I will give an example of a man and his understanding(s) of 'love' as follows.

A man was born into a rich family and received everything he needed. Growing up in this family, his understanding of 'love' was understood as 'love for himself'. So, he always strove for success in his studies and preparations for his future work. On one occasion, he joined the university programme to live with a poor family in a village for a few days. After this programme, he returned to his bedroom in solitude and reflected on his experience with the villagers. The man recalled his *past* experience of how he had been greatly cared for by the villagers as if he were one of their family. The more he reflected on it, the more he became profoundly touched by their kindness and realised that there is a different way of understanding the word love. Learning from these poor villagers, he understood that love could be unconditional and beyond one's own achievement. The man started imagining that he could do something for others out of this unconditional love in the *future*. He also wondered how the world would be a better place if we all could do the same by loving one another, not only by searching for our own success.

This example shows that, in this reflective space, the man was open to a new understanding of the concept of love. This process eventually sheds light on how he looked at his life in the present. It corresponds with Arendt's concept of thinking, which means to 'unfreeze' (Arendt 1978, 171, 174) our fixed thoughts, and allows us 'to search for meanings' and to uncover the new significance of the concepts. This thinking prevents us from clinging or attaching to a fixed comprehension of the past. As a result, this thinking discloses new possibilities of living alternatives in which we can judge and select how to act or relate to others in public more meaningfully, according to our particular contexts in the present.⁶

Thinking is not reserved for a specific group of people. It is an intrinsic ability belonging to all humans as long as they are in this world.⁷ This reminds us of what Socrates said in the *Apology* that 'a life without investigation is not worth living' (Plato 2021, 44). What Socrates means by what is not worth living is, first, when we lose this capacity to think, we lose our one essential nature as humans; and second, without our regular investigation in solitude about what we are doing, we are unable to discover and to live our lives meaningfully for ourselves and other people. That is why Socrates risked

his life to educate young people, by disrupting their fixed thoughts to assist them in learning how to think more profoundly.⁸

The disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic that forced us to be in a solitary and reflective space perhaps reminded us of this *human* quality of thinking. This ability should be included in education if we believe that schools help in preparing students for their future participation in a democratic society. Although other issues of religious education, notably curricula and subject content, are also important, even for Hannah Arendt herself,⁹ I argue that regarding religious education, the what of learning is insufficient; it needs to proceed alongside how to think, so that students can go *beyond* the normality of acquiring knowledge of religious teachings and practices, and construct a habit of *investigating* what they learn and *discerning* how to live their lives in relationships with others, in particular contexts.

Religious education reimagined

Drawing on the disruptive nature of COVID-19 and Arendtian ‘thinking’ previously discussed, the idea of a ‘reflective space’ enables us to reimagine how such a critical disposition could be formed, to respond to the civic aim of religious education. As Arendt argues, thinking is an intrinsic ability for all humans who inhabit the world. Therefore, all students from faith or no-faith backgrounds can develop this thinking habit. In this way, they can reflect on what they have learned and discern how to live their lives together meaningfully, particularly as democratic citizens in a more diverse and multicultural society.

The question is: How can religious education help our students learn how to think reflectively even though they have already returned to school? To respond to this question, I suggest three spaces that can enhance reflective thinking in the students’ learning process: a personal space, an introspective space and a sharing space. These three spaces generate the disruption of normality [of unthinking learning] and the development of the student’s independent thinking habits.

First, students need to have a *personal space* for learning rather than full-time teacher directed learning in which they are interacting all the time with others (e.g. teachers, peers, and so on). This practice of personal space refers to a certain period of silence or solitude which can be undertaken alongside other techniques, both traditional ones such as journal writing, or non-traditional methods such as meditation, yoga, mindfulness, etc. These practices help students calm down, distance themselves from others’ opinions, and become open to the possibilities of new and meaningful understandings. In addition, each student can get in touch with themselves after formal learning, including their feelings, opinions, hopes, and desires deep within them. It corresponds to what Duarte (2001) calls ‘the pedagogy of contemplation’ inspired by Arendt’s concept of thinking, emphasising that the students not only work and think independently but, more importantly, they work and think *reflectively*. In this way, students can learn the habit of stopping and thinking *by* and *for* themselves.

Second, students must have an *introspective space*, focussing especially on reflective questions that encourage students to think more deeply about what they have learned. These questions can be reflective in that they do not mean that the students need to reach correct answers, but that they enable them to *think beyond* one-way learning (in which a teacher merely transmits knowledge to students) and to disclose to a new comprehension. In terms of religious education, for example, it is insufficient to teach students about moral doctrine, e.g. the Christian commandment of ‘love your neighbours as you love yourself’, but to help them think further by unpacking this commandment: What does it mean by ‘love’? Who are our neighbours? How do you love yourself? etc.

This reminds us of Socrates’ ways of teaching: his statements or questions usually ‘disrupt’ his students’ *fixed* thoughts or their habit of accepting whatever other told, and to enter a more profound dialogue with their own thoughts. To be able in schools to raise good questions is not simple because first, a teacher must have some understanding of students’ knowledge and learning

disposition in order to find appropriate and right questions to assist them in thinking; and second, a teacher must be aware that the students are the ones who will search and uncover the meaning of what they are looking for. That is why Socrates compared himself to a midwife (Plato 1961b, 855) who assists another person in uncovering the offspring of wisdom. This offspring belongs not to the midwife but to the person disrupted by these reflective questions.

Third, students should be provided with a *sharing space* where they can talk with one another about their reflections. Nevertheless, we remember that this 'sharing' is not an academic debate or discussion where we search for the best and correct answers, but its purpose is to learn from one another. It requires no feedback or comments from others, only respect and a listening heart. Interestingly, in sharing, each student automatically needs to prepare and articulate 'what to say' [about their fruits of thinking in private reflection], perhaps by writing down their thought and then verbalising it to others. In this process, students would then *rethink* [what they previously thought] through their journals and speech to their peers. As a result, in this sharing space, students can learn and widen their understanding from their peers' new insights and continue thinking about them afterwards. At the same time, this process of *thinking* and *rethinking* will slowly become their habit and enrich their learning in schools.

As I argue, these three spaces of reflective thinking help us move beyond the confines of classrooms and of curricula, because they enable us to be disrupted and to withdraw from our passive learning routine and enter the *vita contemplativa*, a realm of the mind where we can think *by* and *for* ourselves. When this thinking becomes a *habit*, students continue to re-examine not only what they have learned inside school, but also many other issues outside and even after graduation. This is in line with the so-called lifelong and lifewide learning we previously discussed, in which all people can learn wherever they want and about whatever experiences they may have, including their world views and their relationship with others who perhaps have a different faith from them. Therefore, we can see that Arendt's concept of thinking can shed light on how we reimagine our religious education, both in terms of curriculum and pedagogy. In this way, students are better prepared to become democratic citizens who can view and live their lives more meaningfully in the world they share.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic gave the world a profound shock. It caused, directly or indirectly, the deaths of many millions of people and disrupted the normality of our lives, individually and collectively. We did not know how the pandemic would continue to shape our world in the years to come. Nevertheless, we did not forget that there were, at the same time, new opportunities in the disruptive nature of COVID-19, which invited us to reflect on profound existential questions concerning who we are as humans and notably on our ability to think. This *vita contemplativa* enables us to reimagine how religious education helps students go beyond what they study in classrooms and learn how to think critically about it. It allows students to unfreeze their fixed thoughts, obtain new insights, and uncover better pathways to living with others in the *vita activa*. In this way, we can prepare our students for lifelong and lifewide learning, in which they also become capable of reflecting on many other challenging crises (such as the rise of populism, ecological destruction, wars, and immigration) that lie ahead of them.

Notes

1. The term 'lifelong and lifewide learning' consists of two keywords: lifelong and lifewide. Lifelong learning refers to the learning that occurs not only in the childhood schooling years but also in adult's everyday life; thus, it is called 'adult education'. It was developed around 1970 in Europe and made into a global commitment by UNESCO, particularly in the 1997 conference in Hamburg, Germany. Meanwhile, lifewide learning refers to learning, not only the *organised* and *intentional* form by the experts but also *self-directed*, *non-formal* and *unintentional* modes, which can be anywhere (i.e. workplaces, leisure time, families, etc.) and about any experiences (i.e. accident, death of a friend, relationship, etc.). Lifewide

learning ensures that the lifelong learning becomes neither limited within organised and intentional education, nor a market- and company-centred orientation. In this way, lifelong and lifewide learning becomes the ‘learning en passant’ that ‘encompasses the whole person, develops the person to his individual “form”, including all the “wide” possibilities a person can reach, and leads to a unique personal “composition”’ (Reischmann 2014, 293).

2. Education with an emphasis on an individual’s journey is affirmed by Breslin’s second book, *Bubble Schools and the Long Road from Lockdown* (Breslin 2023), following his first book, *Lesson from Lockdown* (Breslin 2021). After further research regarding the experiences of teachers and students after the return to school, Breslin recognises that it is irrelevant to call this ‘post-covid’, since COVID-19 continues to impact us individually and collectively. Instead, Breslin uses the word ‘the long road from lockdown’ in the title of his second book, to emphasise that ‘education, unlike statutory schooling, has no endpoint and, at any point in time, no boundaries’ (Breslin 2023, xvii).
3. Adolf Eichmann was a German-Austrian and one of the major organisers of the Holocaust. After World War II, he was captured in Argentina on 11 May 1960 and sent to trial in Jerusalem. He was executed by hanging in 1962.
4. Hannah Arendt (1978) develops her political idea by applying the interrelationship of two realms: the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*. The *vita activa* is literally translated as the active life, which mainly refers to the public or political realm where people ordinarily interact with each other, and consequently, can make decisions collectively about their society. Meanwhile, the *vita contemplativa*, or the contemplative life, refers to the unseen space of the mind, including thinking. To enter the *vita contemplativa*, it is necessary to first withdraw from the *vita activa* into a solitary space.
5. In *The Life of the Mind* (Arendt 1978), Arendt adapted the idea of *nunc stans* from Franz Kafka’s story *He*, originally written in Kafka’s diary between 6 January and 29 February 1920. The notes of 1920 were included in volume 5 of Kafka’s *Gesammelte Schriften* published in New York in 1946. Franz Kafka (1883–1924) was a Bohemian novelist and short-story writer. His writings have greatly influenced many writers, artists, and philosophers. In this story, ‘He’ [who is at the same time ‘the present’] was caught in the ‘battleground’ (*nunc stans*) between two antagonists: ‘the past’ and ‘the future’. In this battlefield, ‘[m]an lives in this in-between, and what he calls the present is a life-long fight against the dead weight of the past, driving him forward with hope, and the fear of a future (whose only certainty is death), driving him backward towards “the quiet of the past” with nostalgia for and remembrance of the only reality he can be sure of’ (Arendt 1978, 205). But in this story, ‘He’ will not be always in the battlefield but jumps out for a while. This is like an individual that cannot think all the time in the solitude of the *vita contemplativa*, but returns to the *vita activa* to live among others.
6. For Arendt, thinking is related to ‘judging’ because thinking discloses new understandings that enable us to see and to choose different ways of living in society. Although these two faculties (thinking and judging) are interrelated, Arendt distinguished them, that is as ‘[t]hinking deals with invisibles, with representations of things that are absent; judging always concerns *particulars* [my italic] and things close at hand’ (Arendt 1978, 193). That is why although both faculties are in the *vita contemplativa*, thinking remains much deeper in the mind as it deals with the images in the ‘gap between past and future’, while judging is the stage where a person, after thinking, must judge those particular options and contexts which are closer to the *vita activa*.
7. Kafka’s story *He* metaphorically represents all humans, as long as they are on earth, and they can enter into the battlefield or the *vita contemplativa*. It corresponds with Arendt’s emphasis in *The Life of the Mind* that ‘[t]his battleground for Kafka is the metaphor for man’s home on earth’ (Arendt 1978, 205).
8. In *The Apology of Socrates* (2021), we come to know that there are two allegations against Socrates, and these caused his death: first, he was accused of his rejection of the gods recognised by the state; and second, he corrupted young Athenians through his teachings. In the *Apology*, Socrates was offered not being sentenced to death if he accepted not teaching anymore. Nevertheless, Socrates insisted that he still wanted to teach, and he compared himself to a ‘gadfly’ (Plato 2021, 34) that would continue awakening the Athenians from their sleep of unthinking.
9. In *The Crisis in Education* (1954), which was later included in *Between Past and Future* (Arendt 1977), Arendt emphasises the importance of teachers’ authority and their expertise in the knowledge of their subject. This was against the rising influence of progressive education (child-centred education) in the US that considers teachers as mere facilitators and who do not necessarily deepen the knowledge of their subject. The argument from Arendt is that in order to teach students *how* to love and care for the world (*amor mundi*), they need to know *what* the world is.

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