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FIGURE OF SOCRATES AS SEEN BY HANNAH ARENDT

Introduction. The work by Hannah Arendt that I intend to refer to in this paper, and which contains a take on the figure of Socrates, is *Thinking* - the last book she wrote. This take on Socrates seems to me interesting to analyze because, in my view, it captures the worldwide trend of philosophizing after the end of World War II. However, I will begin with a general analysis of this work as a whole, during which I will also refer to her other publications. Then I will discuss the main points of the chapter *Pre-Philosophical Presumptions of the Greeks* found there, in which the essence of philosophical confusion is described not only in antiquity, but also in later times. Then I will present Socrates' take in the context of *Thinking* itself. On the other hand, I will conclude by juxtaposing Arendt's take on Socrates with Hegel's take on this figure, in order to highlight the most significant similarities and differences in the course of this comparison. I find the above juxtaposition interesting to carry out because, as Derrida said, Hegel's philosophy is the "last synthesis of metaphysics," encompassing the entire philosophy of logos and constituting the apogee of logocentrism. Understood in this way, the essence of the system of absolute idealism is one of the most important reference points against which Arendt presents her own project of philosophizing and transcending the authority of traditional metaphysics.

Thinking. Hannah Arendt wrote the work *Thinking* as the second volume of her trilogy *The Life of the Mind*. The first volume was titled *The Will*, and the third volume, titled *Judgment*, she unfortunately did not manage to write again. The titles of these three books directly refer to Kant's three criticisms - *Critique of Pure Reason*, *Critique of Practical Reason*

and *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. In the context of the results of the end of World War II and the earlier rise of totalitarian states, the author proposes a very modest role for philosophy. She believes that one should begin to understand philosophy not, as it was before, as a science, but as a reflection on the life of the mind. According to her, there are two extreme positions, against which she proposes a third and proper way. The first is conservatism, understood as an unjustified, blind reliance on the authority of the tradition of ancient metaphysics. The second position is nihilism, taking its cue from Nietzsche, which involves a complete denial of tradition and rejection of past values. In contrast, Arendt's third proposed solution is to maintain a relationship with tradition, but without its authority. "In other words, the Roman triad linking religion, authority and tradition, which has been in force for thousands of years, is broken. The loss of this trinity does not destroy the past, and the process of exposing it is not itself destructive; it is merely learning from the loss, which is a fact and belongs not so much to the 'history of ideas,' but rather to the political history of our time, the history of our world" (Arendt [1991] p. 284).

The key to understanding Arendt's view is to clarify a distinction. Well, according to her, only cognition is concerned with truth or falsity, when in thinking one remains exclusively within meaning, sense. Traditional metaphysics, having its origins in Plato, is characterized by the confusion of these two domains, and this also leads to the separation of thinking from action. It understands the aforementioned action as the ability to reasonably build the social world and coexist in harmony with others. Among the ancient Greeks, the need to philosophize came from wonder at the world. For the later Romans, on the other hand, the starting point was a complete withdrawal from a world hostile to them into thought. The "professional" philosophers of the past detached themselves from reality, thus denying the human world of phenomena, while Arendt believes that thinking should always be closely linked to action.

The transition from a pre-philosophical to a philosophical period in Greek mindfulness. According to Arendt, central to the understanding of the mind-world of the ancient Greeks is the idea of achieving immortality through the

man. He juxtaposes and compares two periods, pre-philosophical and philosophical, in which immortality could be achieved differently each time.

The peculiarity of Greek thinking in the first period was that the desire to see and judge preceded the desire to attain theoretical knowledge, which are separate from each other. "The point here is that it was axiomatic in pre-philosophical Greece that man's only motive as a human being is the pursuit of immortality; a great deed is beautiful and praiseworthy not because it serves the country or the people, but solely because it will gain 'fame, which will endure through the ages'" (Arendt [1991] p. 189). The turn in the mindset of the Greeks was such that, through the Greek philosophers, thinking also began to be seen as caused by the desire to achieve immortality, and this could be achieved through philosophy, which causes mortal man to be able to be near immortal things, and through his participation with them, he himself achieves immortality.

In the context of the transition from the pre-philosophical to the philosophical period in the Greek mind, it is important to understand the distinguished peculiarities of the Greek gods. Well, according to the beliefs of the time, the gods there were, admittedly, immortal, but at the same time they were not eternal, because, like humans, they were also born. Their credibility is further undermined by a story recounting the deaths of their pre-Olympic predecessors. In the place of the old traditional religion appeared a philosophy, and instead of the old polytheistic concept now appeared a single god. was not, however, that this monotheistic god contained no ties to the old religion, and was not at all understood solely as a normal entity.

The essence of the new way of thinking was that, unlike before, man could now achieve immortality solely by his own efforts, which was no longer, as before, in any way dependent on the opinions and judgments of others. The new means of achieving immortality was from now on *nous*, understood as mind. *Nous*, as a new philosophical concept, was taken from Homer, for whom it previously meant subjective psyche, as well all mental activities. From Parmenides onward, it became widespread in philosophy

is the claim according to which: "to be and to think is the same thing," which implies that mind corresponds to being. This thought is further developed by Plato and Aristotle, and they claim that man, through his mindfulness and withdrawal from the everyday and finite world, resembles a god. Through the philosophers, *nous* began to be understood as a divine primordial. Thinking, directed toward a divine and unchanging object, which can also be understood as the eternal and "harmonious revolutions of the world," thus becomes immortal.

In the Greek philosophical idea of man's attainment of immortality, two levels can be distinguished that are distinct from each other, but closely related. The first is the aforementioned action of *nous* as a contemplation of eternity, but not yet able to be expressed or communicated. The second level was *logos*, or rational speech, describing not only how something manifests itself, but also grasping the necessity and immutability of its object. In man as the only being in the world, *nous* and *logos* coexist, and the whole thing is to always be in harmony with each other. *Logos* as rational speech is of a lower category than *nous* and, not being directed to a divine object, but only to the changeable and phenomenal world, it expresses only opinions, judgments and suppositions - *doxa*.

The advent and spread of Christianity did not cause a change in the understanding of philosophy, which continued to be seen as knowledge dealing with that which transcends the physical world and seeks eternal and immutable laws. In contrast, the ancient Greek idea of man achieving immortality necessarily devalued and was rejected. This is because, unlike the Greeks, Christians believe that every human being is immortal. Also changed was the view of the world, which was no longer eternal, but was created by God and would come to an end. Modern philosophy, or meta-physics, although devoid of the goal of achieving immortality, was still concerned with what was immutable and beyond chance. Arendt cites Hegel's philosophy, in which the necessary and unchanging laws governing human history are described as the laws of the Absolute Spirit, as an example confirming this rule. "From then on, the goal of philosophizing became not immortality, but necessity.

"Philosophical contemplation has no other purpose than the elimination of the accidental"" (Arendt [1991] p. 196).

Socrates' take. The figure of Socrates, among all philosophers, in Arendt's view, occupies a completely special and distinguished place. According to her, he was the thinker who best in the course of the entire history of philosophy embodied its idea of the compatibility of thought and action. The phenomenon of Socrates lies in the fact that "he did not choose to devote his life ... to a particular doctrine or concept - he did not have one - but simply to the right to go and study other people's opinions, to think about them and to encourage his interlocutors to do the same" (Arendt [1991] p. 231). He had a strong conviction that virtue is knowledge, and when he induced his interlocutors to speak and think about justice or piety, he thereby made them more virtuous and pious - although he himself did not formulate any final judgments about values. According to Arendt, the essence of Socrates' activity is best captured by the three terms by which and others called him - gadfly, midwife and trembler. As a gadfly, he stung citizens to make them incline to think and to act and live authentically. As a midwife, he extracted from his interlocutors their own thoughts, and since he himself was "barren" and had no definitive knowledge, so he was able to immediately judge which of their thoughts should be discarded: "he saved people's 'opinions,' i.e., unproven pre-judgments that freed them to think - in this way he helped them to free themselves from evil, from error, without, however, making them good, without giving them the truth" (Arendt [1991] pp. 237-238). Socrates' third term was trembling, meaning a fish that is paralyzing when touched. This had the sense that the Athenian philosopher, during a conversation, so influenced his interlocutors that they, like him, remained in constant ignorance and never unreflectively accepted any final axiological decisions. And as Arendt further observes - "However, what must look like paralysis from the outside - from the point of view of ordinary human affairs - is felt as the highest state of activity and invigoration from within" (Arendt [1991] p. 238). The essence of Socrates' activity as a thinker lies in the fact that, being neither a professional philosopher nor a sophist, i.e. a paid wisdom teacher, he situated himself - using the

a notion developed by Heidegger - in a constant "whirlwind of thought" and prompts his fellow citizens to return to reflect on public and private affairs. "It is in the nature of this invisible element to liberate, to unfreeze, as it were, what has been frozen by language, the tool of thought, into thought, into words (concepts, sentences, definitions, doctrines), the weakness and inflexibility of which Plato so brilliantly demonstrated in his *Seventh Letter*" (Arendt [1991] p. 240). Socrates himself described his action as "the highest boon to the city." Arendt, like Hegel, sees certain elements of Socrates' activity that could become dangerous. Here she has in mind, for example, two of Socrates' disciples, Alcibiades and Kritias, who took his teaching to the extreme and, by stooping to mere denial and cynicism, became a genuine threat to the statehood of the time. Also troubling to her is the situation in which, after doubting traditional philosophical principles or doctrines, one arrives at their opposite, and these are then referred to as "new values" and unreflectively applied in place of the old ones. She believes that such a situation occurred when Nietzsche "inverted" Platonism, and Marx "put Hegel's absolute idealism on its head" back to its proper, according to him, position¹. A similar situation occurred in totalitarian states: "(...) what happened in fascist Germany and, to some extent, in Stalinist Russia, when suddenly the basic commandments of Western morality were reversed; in the first case "thou shalt not kill" and in the second "bear no false witness against your neighbor." The next stage, is a reversal of the inversion; the fact that it was easy to re-educate Germans after the fall of the Third Reich, as easy as if re-education was something automatic, should not comfort us at all. In essence, it was the same phenomenon" (Arendt [1991] pp. 243-244). However, as Arendt rightly points out, there is a fundamental difference between Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism. While one of the main prerequisites for the former was the idea of freedom derived from the French Revolution and classical German philosophy, the latter and all other theories of

¹ Heidegger believed similarly and argued that Sartre's reversal of the Platonic idea of the primacy of essence over existence is still a metaphysical idea, but reversed.

racists derive directly from the gutter. Nihilism, as a negation of generally accepted values, according to Arendt, comes from the desire to make further thinking unnecessary and redundant. Socrates, on the other hand, throughout his life, urged everyone to always think, and what's more, he also claimed that

"An unreflective life is not worth living," he says. "The importance of what Socrates was doing lay in the very activity of thinking. Or to put it another way: to think and to live fully was one and the same thing, and from this it followed that thinking must constantly begin anew: it is the activity that accompanies life and concerns such concepts as justice, happiness, delivered to us by the very language that expresses the meaning of everything that happens in life and that happens to us when we live" (Arendt [1991] p. 244). Arendt is also the author of two rather famous-as soon as they were published-books *The Roots of totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Matter of the Banality of Evil*. In the former, she provides a very insightful analysis of the causes of the rise of 20th-century European totalitarianism, while in the latter she gives an eyewitness account of that notorious trial that ended in the death penalty. In her view, the very figure of Eichmann, who was one of the main Nazi criminals, as well as the evil itself are not at all, as is often believed, demonic in nature, but come simply from ordinary thoughtlessness, lack of reflection and ignorance. Arendt, in the above context, uttered a very profound thought on the Athenian philosopher: "Socrates seems to have nothing more to say about the connection between evil and lack of thought than that people who do not cherish love, justice and wisdom are incapable of thinking, and conversely, those who love wisdom and philosophize are incapable of doing evil" (Arendt [1991] p. 246).

In Arendt's view, Socrates is one of the first thinkers to understand that thinking is dialectical in nature and takes the form of a dialogue with oneself. To visualize this idea, he cites two statements from Plato's *Gorgias*. In the first, Socrates says: "To inflict harm is worse than to endure it, and to avoid punishment is worse than to suffer it" (Arendt [1991] p. 241). While in the second he says: "I would rather have a lyre out of tune and false

sounded, let there rather be a chorus to which I would lead, let the majority of people disagree, and assert the opposite of what I do, rather than that I, the only one, should carry an inner discord and make contradictory thoughts" (Arendt [1991] pp. 247-248). For Socrates, the criterion for the correctness of his thinking is not the truth, which can be understood as the eyewitness congruence of the thought with reality, but only the internal relation of "non-contradiction and congruence with ." Arendt believes that Socrates' way of thinking, i.e., questioning commonly accepted doctrines and customs, is the intermediate link leading to and enabling right judgment. On the other hand, "the ability to judge individual phenomena without subjecting them to general principles, which can be taught and learned until they turn into habits and can be replaced by other principles and habits" (Arendt [1991] p. 263) - is "the most political of human abilities."

Socrates in the depictions of Hegel and Arendt. Turning to the juxtaposition of Hegel's portrayal of the figure of Socrates with that of Arendt, Hegel is often positioned as the philosopher who is the "last great metaphysician"², and his system of absolute idealism is also sometimes rightly described as a synthesis of Aristotle's philosophy and Kant's transcendentalism. The connection between Hegel's philosophy and ancient metaphysics would consist primarily in his belief in the rationality of the world and being - this idea was most strongly expressed in antiquity by Aristotle and the Stoics - and in the possibility of creating a comprehensive and general knowledge of them, as well as a system of philosophical sciences. Kant, Hegel's predecessor, only pondered the possibility of creating a philosophical system strictly binding together and grasping all of reality - unlike among the ancients, here the starting point was the transcendental subject. His further continuators Fichte and Schelling tried to bring about this synthesis, but never brought it to a final conclusion. Only Hegel was the philosopher in whose thought this synthesis of all reality and history succeeded. He always considered the world as a concrete and immanent reality, rejecting completely the

² Karl Jaspers, among others, believed so. In contrast, the "last great metaphysician" for Heidegger was Nietzsche, and for Derrida, Heidegger himself.

notion of any transcendence in relation to it. He created the system as a totality that needs no external grounding. The author of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was the last philosopher in the history of mankind to undertake such a huge undertaking - no one else after him dared. As Vladimir Lorenc rightly notes, "The attempt to create an objectively valid, complete, conceptual theory of the world - the main intention of metaphysics - thus grows out of the fundamental premises of Hegel's thought, and it is no coincidence that Hegel is said to crown Western philosophy" (Lorenc [1994] p. 56).

Hegel's depiction of the figure of Socrates, compared to other interpretations, is much more multifaceted, complex, and fits closely with his ideas of process, development, presentation of truth as a whole, and his system of absolute idealism. The portrayal of the figure of Socrates was also already present in Hegel's early thought and can be found, among other things, in his political writing *On the Scientific Ways of Considering Natural Law...*³ where the Athenian philosopher is mentioned in the course of discussing the "tragedy in the bosom of ethics." In Hegel's mature thought, Socrates is always presented in a broad religious, cultural and historical context. He is the only one of all philosophers to be a figure of universal significance. The universal occurrence of his principle of subjective freedom, which, according to Hegel, was fully legitimate, although it leads to the collapse of the entire earlier Greek world, coincides completely with the transition from consciousness to self-knowledge, and the spirit of the world reaches its higher and necessary level. Socrates argued that the good is an end in itself, and that man in his cognition must arrive at the truth always of his own systems. In the name of personal freedom, he spoke out against objective and direct ethics, still based solely on custom. He suffered death for proclaiming his views, and its tragedy was that the two opposing worldviews and positions of the time were fully justified. All subsequent European philosophy after Socrates' death will be based on individualism and subjective reasonableness, which derive strictly from his principle. In contrast,

³ In G. W. F. Hegel [1994] *Ustrój Niemiec i inne pisma polityczne* (translated by A. Ochocki and M. Poręba), Warsaw.

Christian individualism is a restatement of Socrates' principle on religious grounds.

According to Hegel, philosophy emerges whenever there is a post-important crisis of culture and state institutions. The speech of Socrates, which occurred during the crisis of the Peloponnesian War, took place under just such circumstances. In the context of post-history, that is, the full process of man's realization of freedom, the significance of Socrates is fundamental. Hegel situates him as a figure of universal significance and among the other great historical figures, namely the three heroes of history, Jesus and Luther. In the East, in Hegel's view, the substantive freedom of the state expressed by the patriarch completely excluded subjective freedom. Among the Greeks, on the other hand, prior to his speech, their individual will completely coincided with the general consciousness of the *polis* from which they originated. Socrates, along with sophists, pronouncing the principle of the "liberating the inner world for itself," lead both to the collapse of the Greek world and cause humanity, for the first time in its history, to completely extract itself from its innate connection with nature and achieve true spiritual freedom, which means that thought, being henceforth at the level of self-knowledge, reaches the level of thinking about itself. Through them, reflexive freedom is constituted, and the Athenian philosopher is also the "inventor" of morality. Socrates is also the first of the great historical figures who realize the higher idea of the spirit of the world, and from this perspective, the "dawn of universal history" begins precisely with his speech. Hegel situates Socrates alongside Jesus and Luther as one of the great figures in the process of the formation of modern civil society, which culminates in "socialization through individuation" and in which everyone recognizes another as free and equal. This process exists in parallel with the process of formation of the modern general state, culminating in and universal history is the "authentic" synthesis of this state with civil society.

One of the underlying themes of all of Arendt's work is the lost connection between politics and philosophy. To put it another way,

what she is concerned with is the opposition between the eternal and unchanging truth abstractly grasped by philosophers and political opinions expressed in intersubjective relations, which have only momentary significance. In the context of this problem, the figure capture of Socrates is crucial. According to her, he was a philosopher whose thinking derived itself from authentic involvement political, and who with his teaching not only expressed the essence of the Greek democratic *polis*, but also stimulated his fellow citizens to participate in it. His trial, which ended in a guilty verdict, marks a turning point from which the proper relationship between political participation and thinking is reversed. Moreover, this trial within the history of political thought is as groundbreaking as the trial of Jesus in the history of religion. It was under the influence of the results of this process that Plato rejected the basis of Socrates' teaching and created his anti-democratic and "totalitarian" theory of the state, in which the search for philosophical truth required withdrawal from politics and its subordination to philosophy. Beginning with Plato, Western philosophy of politics is formed on the basis of pure thought, which already has very little to do with social opinions and is negatively oriented towards politics. Henceforth, the philosopher assumed only the position of an "observer" not politically involved. As she wrote in a footnote to *On Revolution*, "The enmity between philosophers and politicians, poorly masked by the philosophers of politics, has been the curse of Western political thought, and of the Western philosophical tradition ever since men of action and men of thought went their separate ways (i.e., since Socrates ran out)" (Arendt [1991] p. 320). However, on the question of the relationship between philosophy and politics, she is not as radical as Heidegger on the lost truth of being, and believes that there have been periods in history during which this relationship has had a proper run, and she considers the times of the French and American revolutions, for example, as such.

To visualize how distant Plato's late thought is from Socrates' tenets, Arendt distinguishes certain fundamentals of his teaching. Well, first of all, he was a pluralist and a supporter of democracy. Even more strongly than the sophists, and he believed that any issue could be

always considered in two ways. Unlike Plato, for whom human opinions were falsities or mere unfaithful representations of reality, he regarded them all as containing within them a potential truth that could be extracted. He also rejected, contrary to Plato, the possibility of absolute knowledge. According to Socrates, all views even the most common ones can be transformed and changed in the course of discussion. As Arendt notes, Plato's opposition between opinion and truth or justice is the most extreme departure from his teaching of potential truth in opinion. The role of the philosopher, then, is not, as Plato wanted, to constitutionalize the state on an absolute model, i.e., the "tyranny of truth," but to induce fellow citizens to genuine political participation. Such an approach has the advantage of relating with detachment to commonly held public opinion. Such a multifaceted perspective was one of the cornerstones of the democratic state in ancient Greece in the period leading up to the trial of Socrates. However, a necessary condition for such participation in the state to occur was his postulated conformity to himself - an idea developed in the Christian era.

Arendt's political views are similar to her take on Socrates. She, too, values the Greek *polis* very highly and is a proponent of democracy and pluralism. For her, the highest value of politics is freedom, which can only take place in plural social interaction - a view similar to Habermas. In the above context, she just describes Socrates as a political philosopher. She mainly has in mind his ability to induce other citizens to participate in public, since she is fully aware that it was Plato, not he, who took an active part in politics.

Conclusions. From the above compilation of approaches to the figure of Socrates, it is irresistibly and unequivocally clear that both Hegel and Arendt formulated their views on the world, its assessment and evaluation of history under the very strong influence of the political situation in which they lived. The author of *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* formulated his philosophy in the context of the rise of the post-Napoleonic state, which was one of the results of the French Revolution. The comprehensive system he created is a teleological and completed vision of the development of the world. Within the history of philosophy, he considered his absolute idealism to be the abolition, or preservation and transcendence, of all the principles of the philosophies that preceded it, preserving them in themselves as their necessary moments. On the other hand, within universal history, such fulfillment is the emergence of the modern state, which is a synthesis with civil society, i.e. the creation of such social conditions in which the Socratic principle of subjective reflexive freedom and Christian individualism can be fully realized⁴. Socrates' grasp is closely situated within this holistic process. He is also the only one among all philosophers to be a "personality of universal and historical significance."

According to Hegel, Socrates' principle of "liberating the inner world for itself" led to the disintegration of the Greek world, but from the perspective of universal history as a whole, it was the turning point initiating the emergence of civil societies. For Hegel, Socrates' speech, despite its great recognition, is only an intermediate link preceding the ultimate form of thought, namely systematic philosophy. The ancient philosopher he most esteemed and with whom he even compared himself was not Socrates, but Aristotle. He argued similarly to Stagyrates that philosophy should always have a systemic po- standing and that it should be given the highest possible rank.

Arendt, unlike Hegel, who positioned philosophy above all other fields of knowledge, religion, art as a comprehensive synthesis of reality and history⁵, under the influence of the horrors of two-decade totalitarianism, proposes a very modest and anti-systemic role for philosophy. Besides, it is not the only one, as it is one of the most dominant tendencies in modern philosophy - on the Popper and Rorty, for example, also reject systems thinking and believe that the modern philosopher is supposed to be a "social engineer," whose role is to be reduced only to piecemeal demands for the improvement of reality - which largely coincides with her idea of combining thinking with political action. When Husserl at the beginning of the twentieth century wrote about the crisis of culture and philosophy, no one yet realized to what extent this crisis would intensify with the end of World War II. In the above con- text, it seems understandable that philosophy takes such a modest form. In Arendt's view, Socrates is the thinker who, throughout the history of European philosophy, best embodies the way of philosophizing that she advocated, that is, the combination of thinking and political action. It values him highly for the fact that he stimulated his fellow citizens to political participation, did not carry out any final settlements, and thus did not impose his views on others. On the other hand, looking from a different perspective than Hegel, he believes that the rise of the nation-state after the French Revolution was one of the main premises for the existence of later European totalitarianism.

⁴ Looking from the perspective of today, many years after the end of World War II, at a time when Marx's theory has also lost credibility, Hegel's vision of a modern state based on civil society understood as the culmination of universal history seems to be still relevant.

⁵ A view that has lost relevance in modern philosophy. A few exceptions are Marx's con- tinuers, mainly coming from the Frankfurt School, in whom the idea of a holistic grasp of reality can still be found, although in much less intensity than in Hegel himself.

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Summary

The main aim of this article is to show how the results of the second world war and European totalitarianism influenced modern philosophical and political thought. Exactly in this context, I explain Arendt's view about Socrates. According to her, he was the thinker who in the whole history of Western philosophy through his life and teaching expressed in the best way the proper relation between philosophy and politics.

In the second part of this article, in order to show how intensely politics makes impact on philosophers' thinking, opinions of history and their world views, I compare Hegel's view about Socrates to Arendt's. While generally speaking Hegel had an optimistic world view, which was influenced by the results of the French revolution, Arendt's opinion of the past, on the other hand, was very pessimistic and formed by the results of totalitarianism.

Arendt's view about Socrates was mostly taken from her last book - *Thinking*. However, during the article other books written by her are mentioned. Hegel's opinion of Socrates was mostly taken from both of his famous: *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* and *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*.

Key words: Arendt, Socrates, Hegel, relation between politics and philosophy, Greek *polis*, national state as a result of the French revolution, absolute idealism, history Western metaphysics, European totalitarianism.