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The Concept of Love in Arendt

Antonio Campillo, *El concepto de amor en Arendt (The Concept of Love in Arendt)*
Madrid: Abada, 2019, 156 pp.

Hannah Arendt never developed a structured theory of love. However, the topic of love traverses her work from the beginning to the end. Many scholars have overlooked this journey and tend to consider her reflections on love a secondary issue within the framework of her philosophical and political thought, characterized by a whole series of distinctions between diverse spheres of human life.

These distinctions are rooted in her own encounter with totalitarian violence, which destroys borders between “public-political” and “private-apolitical” realm and tries to dominate human beings from within. Moreover, they are connected to her own experience of love marked by her turbulent relationship with her professor and lover Martin Heidegger, that an eighteen-year-old Hannah Arendt had to keep it in secret until he joined the Nazi party in 1933. As she recognized years later, both events represent a double “shock”, of thought and reality, that would lead her to politicize her work.

This recognition fostered the separation between the young German Jew student who was in love with her professor and interested in introspective topics, and the mature political theorist, forced to look at the world and relegate love to the private life. Campillo's book, *The Concept of Love in Arendt*, begins by questioning this discontinuity. Not only he confronts the tradition of scholars who consider her treatment of love a juvenile or private subject, but he considers it “the invisible black hole around which the luminous Arendtian galaxy gravitates”.¹ In just ten chapters, the author delves into this galaxy in order to show how the experience of love is “the keystone that allows us to understand the close link between what she lived and what she thought”.²

The three first chapters are particularly focused on accounting for this link. After a brief exposition of the classic positions from which her reflections on love have been interpreted, Campillo dedicates the second chapter to dismantling the temporal division between the young woman in love and the political thinker. Through an analysis of her youth writings in which the theme of love has greater presence, he shows that they are not restricted to that first period and accompanied her all her life.

The third chapter call into question the spatial distinction that Arendt herself established between the public-political and the private-apolitical realm of *vita activa*, as well as the psychic division between passion and mental activities of *vita contemplativa*. On this occasion, the author takes her biographical experience into account to demonstrate the continuity between the personal/intimate and the political. A continuation that goes from “love without world” —or the love passion that deletes the distance between lovers— to the “love of the world” shared with others in the experience of plurality that equals us in the ability to differentiate ourselves as unique beings.

¹ Antonio Campillo, *El concepto de amor en Arendt*, (Madrid: Abada, 2019), p. 136.

² *Ídem*

Going through some of the most important affective ties in Arendt's life, Campillo finds in her reflections on the construction of the “microworld” between lovers an intersection point between private and public life, and he also discovers in the expression “love of the world” a “bridge between the modalities more intimate and public of plurality”.³ Both discoveries come to account for the continuity between love and politics present in her work, despite her deliberate attempt to separate them.

In the fourth chapter, Campillo recovers Arendt's *Philosophical Diary* where she surprisingly considers love as the fourth sphere of activity included in *vita activa* together with labor, work and action, and it is in the same diary where she defines love as “the bond of reciprocity in which lovers satisfy their mutual need, from which «the third» can be born and, with him/her, human plurality”.⁴ Taking this surprising fact as a key point, the author delves into a double task that articulates the rest of the book.

On the one hand, he analyses the biographical, historical and ethical-political, but also structural causes that eventually led Arendt to exclude love from the phenomenology of physical activities explored in *The Human Condition*. Likewise, Campillo examines how this exclusion is reproduced years later in her phenomenology of mental activities, which she develops in *The Life of the Mind* and includes thinking, willing, and judging. The author shows that including love in any of these phenomenologies would have introduced a great difficulty to sustain her rigid distinctions between activities, spheres, and both dimensions of human life. In addition to blurring borders between the public and the intimate/private sphere in which love is restricted, this rereading enables us to highlight the transversal nature of love to the distinctions established by Arendt, as well as its articulating character between *vita activa* and *contemplativa*.

The second task precisely consists of accounting for this articulation. Campillo deals with this work through a reconstruction of the fragmentary phenomenology of love hidden in her work. From loving passion as “love without world” to the “love of the world” as gratitude for what has been given and for life on the Earth, going through conjugal and maternal-paternal-filial love; fraternal compassion towards those who are neglected or damaged; charms and dangers of love for homeland; and forgiveness as sustenance of human coexistence, linked to civic friendship and public happiness that emerges from common action in the political space and encourages us to think with an “enlarged mentality”, Campillo provides and original analysis of these assorted modalities of love interwoven throughout Arendt's work.

The careful reconstruction of this hidden phenomenology of love leads him to conclude that “the experience of love, in its triple ethical, political and cosmic dimension, is the secret source that feeds her vital potency and her intellectual lucidity, the radicality of her existential commitments and the originality of her philosophical thought”⁵ as a “philosophy of human plurality”, and this plurality as a “love relationship” that crosses all areas of human life, by problematizing the same border between the personal and the political.⁶

³ *Ibid.* p. 74.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 55.

⁵ *Ibid.* p. 136.

⁶ *Ídem.*

This is how this lucid essay of “philosophical interpretation” presents to us an Arendt more flexible than the one who has been traditionally criticized because of her “art of establishing distinctions”; an Arendt for which love is no longer what must be excluded from the public sphere in order to safeguard politics, but rather what must be embraced precisely to preserve our political condition as gratitude for the company of others and the common world, but also our ethical and cosmic condition, as gratitude for our singular existence and earthly nature. And only by gravitating the “Arendtian galaxy” in an incessant round trip from “love without world” to “love of the world”, can we celebrate, as she did, plurality as human condition and as the condition of the reality of the world that we inhabit with others.

As Arendt says in her *Philosophical Diary*, if “in love we are not exactly met by a “potency”, but a reality, with which we have to cope without fear”,⁷ it is necessary to add that this reality is intersubjectively built in the experience of plurality. And for this reason, we should avoid the identification between hiding and being sheltered. If we want to be “at home in the world”, even in a common world in dissolution, we should keep in mind what Arendt never stopped defending: “we can only take shelter by showing ourselves, risking showing ourselves. We withdraw ourselves from others through concealment; but only the others, *their love*, can save us”.⁸

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⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Diario filosófico. 1950-1973*, translation Raúl Gabás (Barcelona: Herder, 2006), book I [18], p. 14. (Spanish edition).

⁸ *Ibid.* p. book VI [14], 129.