

Hannah Arendt's thinking and History: A necessary dialogue

Among the several perspectives from which it is possible to read Hannah Arendt's work, her appropriation by historians is a relevant and challenging one still insufficiently explored. This was the reason for an event jointly sponsored by the Goethe Institut Curitiba, the Paranaense Association of History and the Department of History of Paraná Federal University, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Arendt's birth. It took place in Curitiba (Brazil), in May of 2007. Here some ways in which such reading could be made were explored. Bearing in mind the importance of Arendt's contributions to historical conceptualization, the participants in this symposium sought to examine three concepts: *friendship*, *happiness* and *love*, making links between Arendt's perceptions of these concepts and some specific historical events.

It was a somewhat daring undertaking. Feelings, sensibilities and passions, when expressed in the public space, are, in most cases, received with utmost reserve by social scientists. Many scholars consider this a dangerous interference in the collective action, different from organized thought. Often, such expressions are understood as a symptom of social anomaly such as: extreme veneration of a leader, hatreds, resentments fears, religious fanaticisms – all of them, reactive feelings against real or imagined threats.

Aware of Arendt's belief, that thinking and feeling are indivisible ethical activities, the participants discussed historical events in which feelings promoted solidarity and consensual decision making.

In her *Felicitas romana*, Renata Senna Garraffoni sought to de-construct the modern interpretation of happiness when compared to that of Ancient Rome. She discussed the different perceptions of happiness between the aristocratic and the common people of that distant time. When considering the graffiti and other epigraphic evidence from Pompeii's walls, Garraffoni found, that among the common people of that period, happiness was cultivated and valued in public as well as private life and expressed, among other forms, as erotic love.

In his *Love in politics*, his doctoral thesis, Renato Carneiro Jr. was guided by a historiography devoted to religious feelings. In the book he took as the basis of his studies, Carneiro Jr. identified the opportunity to analyze human existence and the importance of love in men's relations with his Creator and with society, inspired by Hannah Arendt's *The concept of love in Saint Augustine*. As the bishop of Hipona pointed out, to abandon oneself to faith – in men and/or in God –, is to handle public matters from a perspective in which an opponent is not considered an enemy. Instead of coveting earthly things, deal with politics with the Augustinian *caritas*, to help men and women to be open to dialogue, conciliation and the acceptance of their opponents. These attitudes, which could be interpreted in many other ways in the secular world, can, nevertheless influence public actions, as for example, in cases like those of Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, Martin Luther King and Helder Câmara.

Inspired by Arendt's book **Rahel**, Ana Paula Vosne Martins, whose paper was entitled *About the friendship among men and women: culture and sociabilities in the Enlightenment salons*, sought to reconstruct the tradition of the salons as cultural spaces where social and gender distances were reduced in favour of a sociability marked by civility, dialogue, deference and, above all, friendship. Those salons created spaces of unique public/private heterosexual spheres. They came before the feminist movement brought men and women together in art, politics and the free exchange of ideas.

Stimulated by the theoretical suggestions in the studies of "Private Life", Marion Brepohl, in *The falling in love and the separation of lovers*, selected passages of the **Denktagebuch**, written by Hannah Arendt and edited by Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann, aiming at understanding the love between lovers according to Hannah Arendt. Brepohl stated that in the case of that book, Arendt is not confessing her intimacy, but rather ponders intimacy itself as altogether distant from public businesses. Such interpretation, according to Brepohl, is a legacy of her time: In the middle of the twentieth century, love between lovers would also strengthen, according to what Martins stressed, its appearance in the public space. Dialoguing with Carneiro Jr, she also notes that, differently from the love in *Agape* and the love in *Philia*, erotic love is so much more ephemeral as its intensity increases.

Finally, Wolfgang Heuer, with his essay *Political friendship by caring for the world*, goes through several of Hannah's works, with an emphasis on **Human Condition** and **What is Politics?**, to discuss her concept of public friendship. Analyzing the three "lost generations" of twenty century Europe, Heuer concludes that political friendship is the alternative needed for action. As Garraffoni, he turned to the Greek and Roman societies, particularly to the moment when Aristotle suggested the idea of friendship as a basis for building friendly, peaceful communities. Those were rare moments, undoubtedly, but their sheer exceptionality, gives them an exemplary character.

All the contributions to the conference will be published in the journal *História Questões e Debates* n. 46. They reiterate each in their own way an understanding of the past, not marked as worn out individual experiences, but by plural and collective experiences, illuminating the present in moments of danger, just as Arendt, inspired by Walter Benjamin, understood what the work of a historian ought to be.

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