



AN ARENDTIAN READING OF POLITICAL  
ACTION AND *AMOR MUNDI* IN THE PUBLIC  
SPACE

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**ABSTRACT:**

The present article is guided in tracing a political-philosophical study and is dedicated to articulating the nuances of the arendtian concept of action, about understanding human action within public space. Observing the nuances and unpredictability by which human action is expressed in the face of the coexistence between equals and different people in the public space is to see the way in which human singularities and the phenomenon of the revelation of identities become evident. In this way, the general objective of the present work is to analyze the political dimension of the Arendtian concept of action linked to the search for the individual's freedom in the public space. In this way, we seek to understand interpersonal interactions in the midst of human plurality and the search for freedom in the world of appearances.

**KEY-WORDS:**

Action. Policy. Amor Mundi. Public Space. Hannah Arendt.

UMA LEITURA ARENDTIANA SOBRE AÇÃO POLÍTICA E *AMOR MUNDI* NO  
ESPAÇO PÚBLICO

**RESUMO:**

O presente artigo busca traçar um estudo político-filosófico e se dedica a articular as nuances do conceito arendtiano de ação, sobre o entendimento do agir humano dentro do espaço público. Observar as nuances e a imprevisibilidade pela qual a ação humana é expressa frente à convivência entre iguais e diferentes no espaço público é enxergar a forma com a qual as singularidades humanas e o fenômeno da revelação das identidades se tornam evidentes. Dessa maneira, o objetivo geral do presente trabalho se perfaz em analisar como a dimensão política do conceito arendtiano de ação está ligada à busca da liberdade do indivíduo no espaço público. Dessa forma, busca-se entender as interações interpessoais em meio a pluralidade humana e a procura pela liberdade frente ao mundo das aparências.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:**

Ação. Política. Amor Mundi. Espaço Público. Hannah Arendt.

**1 Introduction**

When developing the totalitarian experience in the work *Origins of Totalitarianism* (2012), Hannah Arendt points out that one of the characteristics of totalitarian governments is the prohibition of thinking. The category of thinking is conceived by Arendt in *The Life of the Mind* (1994), in order to make up one of three basic spiritual activities, together with wanting and judging. It is in the ‘stopping-to-think’, exercised during the reflective act, that thinking takes place, in order to precede any behavior of the subjects.

The desire for rationality, to consider actions based not only on knowledge, but on experience, is realized in the *vita contemplativa*. In order to proceed with political actions, the act of thinking must take precedence. It is in ‘being alone’, from a perspective of intellectual duality, the individual accompanied by their consciousness, temporarily, that one can understand issues pertaining to the world in which one is inserted. (ALMEIDA, 2010). There is no concrete end linked to the activity of thinking, the end falls on the act of thinking itself. Even if ‘absolute truths’ are released, (re)thinking and questioning is necessary.

Based on such notions, the problem that guides the work is structured as follows: how is the political dimension of the Arendtian concept of action linked to the search for the individual's freedom in the public space? Thus, it will be possible to elucidate how the Arendtian concept of action and discourse are associated. The questioning is born with the second volume of *The Life of the Mind*, in which the

contributions of Hannah Arendt (1994) emphasize the value of this exterior gesture with the concept of will and its extension, the problem of freedom.

This research herein focuses mainly, in a more intimate way, in the sense of a) understanding how Hannah Arendt seeks to encompass the concept of action in the discursive dimension of plurality within politics; b) analyze the dynamics between discursivity and plurality presented to Hannah Arendt in the concept of action; c) to present how the political dimension of action is worked within discursivity and plurality for Hannah Arendt.

As this is a political-philosophical study, the data collection instrument will be defined by the exercise of content analysis (BARDIN, 1977), and by the interpretation of Arendtian scientific productions on action built through previous bibliographic research. The theoretical framework related to the author sets the basis for the use of the Content Analysis technique.

## 2 Introductory notes on Acting

Action expresses nothing more than the condition of knowing an essence of human nature, “how to jump over our own shadow” (ARENDR, 2007, p.18), showing individuals their singularities and identities in response to a public space that relates and separates their beings at the same time. The being that acts are always an initiator of reactions, which, in their multiple initiatives, create the “web of human relationships” that always manifests itself in an idea of novelty, in view of the lack of control of the future and the new semantic chain rearranged in the public space.

As it is part of the public sphere, the action “corresponds to the human condition in plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on Earth and inhabit the world”. And she adds: “All aspects of the human condition have some relation to politics, but this plurality is specifically the condition – not just the *sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* condition – of all political life” (ARENDR, 2007, p.15), recalling the favorable idea of sociability within politics.

### 2.1 Implications between Action and politics

We inhabit. Not by choice, since the mother’s womb. Housing is the environment, the place we call “habitat” and where we create our identity, an idea of singularity within plurality. Existing appears to the extent that being and object come into mutual contact in the plurality of life, respecting the individualities of beings through the possibility of action and discourses. Concisely:

The human condition is not an optimal, definitive and complete state, from which one starts or arrives. It is, rather, a task that is understood in opposition to manufactured products and an artificial and already existing world, since the human condition is what must be accomplished, and its accomplishment is inseparable from the fundamental ways in which man appears in the public domain of the common world, and these fundamental modes of appearing are action and speech. (ARENDR, 2007, p. 230).

Speech and action distinguish men from inhumans, going beyond mere physical or biological issues, as opposed to mere corporeal existence. It becomes apparent, embodies the unmistakable identity given to each individual incorporated through his narrative, unfolded throughout his life by action and speech. The association recalls the *zoon politikon*, Aristotle's expression to describe the nature of man, a rational animal that thinks and speaks (*zoon logikon*), in necessary interaction with the collectivity - in this case, the *polis*.

The Hellenic creation of politics concerns and derives from the term *polis*. The reasoning and eloquence of oratory in the Greek *ágora* are thereunto recalled, which transforms discursive action into a factor of visibility of entities and representation of citizenship. This statement may be exemplified in the light of the religious narrative of the *daimon*, which signifies the human essence by the very project of action in the space of plurality, when remembering that it "followed each man throughout his life, looking over the shoulder, so that it was only visible to those in front of him". (ARENDR, 2007, p. 192).

The world, as a space for coexistence, is the environment in which subjectivities are exposed, as well as contact with the variety of human phenomena in the environment of plurality of appearances. The idea of action follows a developing narrative, becoming a political experience, insofar as it makes possible the existence of beings within a meaning. The essence of all action, in particular politics, means forming a cognition that allows people of action, and not those of contemplation, ways that make it possible to learn to deal with what has passed and that may reconcile with what still exists.

This timeless course of action gives it the characteristics of unlimited, unpredictable, irreversible and instantaneous, given that action is the narratives exchange recurring to a modality that provides substrates for the activity of understanding the human world. Thus, in Teles' (2002) considerations, the influence of such characteristics resorts to a notion of temporality pertinent to Walter Benjamin's narrative. Understanding the narrative about the forms of collective organization provides the recognition that action encourages the full exercise of freedom over the factors of history and politics, while transforming thought into activity.

Such a situation only becomes feasible with discursive manifestation, dialogues, exchanges of opinions and inter-human interactions. Arendt (2007) portrays that if we were not equal, we would not be able to understand each other through dialogue. To the same extent, if we did not have our asymmetries,

we would not need discourse and action in the communicative process as a means and end for the continuation of the plural space.

According to Arendt, the phenomenological conception of human activities is understood in the categories and human developments that reveal the position of being conditioned in the space of appearance, a place where true politics and the creation of identities are carried out. (AGUIAR, 2004, p.11-12). The simple fact of being with others makes man communicate and gain meaning. However, it is worth noting that distinguishing oneself from others does not determine it, after all, even without realizing it and with all the faculties of acting, the individual does not control the other person and time, indefinite faculties of historical action.

By resorting to the book *De Anima* (2006), by Aristotle, Hannah Arendt demonstrates how the construction of human particularities is done through identity. This process does not exist for animals, in view of the absence of meanings – appanage of the spirit –, giving free rein to impulse issues and the direct response to instinct. (LOYOLA, 2010). The difference between men and animals, according to Loyola, lies in the reflective attitude, which gives man the choice, among the affections of the spirit, to demonstrate himself through action in the space of appearance. Human beings are intensely influenced and impacted by judgment, not only of their own, but also of others, demonstrating man as a product of politics and an agent in their categories of sociability.

It is worth remembering that the criteria of capacity and sociability appear in several of the author's works, but it is in *The Human Condition* that they are related to the triad of the so-called *vita activa*: work-labor-action. The first two are the activities assigned to *homo faber* and *animal laborans*, respectively, and would be undergoing a value inversion, with the secularization of action, more specifically political action.

With the core of social relations revolving around work and what Arendt calls the loss of the natural world due to the artificiality that the world has conceived, it is possible to focus on the fissure that opens in the public space. Naturalness is only provided by action, in which all individuals have the ability to perform the unexpected in the midst of their equals and differences, the public space.

According to Correia (2013), the man who takes the product of work from nature and transforms it into something new, starting to live according to it, ends up leaving the character of a political agent in the background. Therefore, it is possible to touch what Hannah Arendt conceptualized in *Origins of Totalitarianism* (2012) as mass society, men engendered as mere receivers and not transformers.

In *The Life of the Mind* (1994), Arendt deals with the importance of the individual transforming what is received by the world as an inheritance. The act of assuming for oneself what the men of the past left us insists on taking an action and a judgment in relation to it. If nothing contests, it does not bring about

changes to the world that welcomed it. Based on this example, the secularization of political action in the common world becomes evident. And from this double-exchange relationship between action and discourse, to be approached, initially, through the bias of silencing, one can punctuate the importance of public space.

Silva (2011) points out that each citizen, endowed with particularities and pluralities, perceives that each individual-self becomes the completeness of a whole when he is in coexistence in the collectivity. The search for the individual's uniqueness makes it possible to contemplate the internal and external shock between the particularities and pluralities of each being. Through exchange, in the unstable and public space, beings will approach and move away according to the similarities and divergences.

The purpose created within each human being is the result of the experiences brought with them by being incorporated into the space of appearance. In addition to walls and pilasters, this space of communion is made up of people endowed with wills and responsibilities, in order to give continuity to the foundation that received them.

## **2.2 Will, free will and aloofness: the faces of action**

The will is the strength of the spirit. Fate may only be built by will, and in life the absence of will is a will, so there is no inaction. In *The Life of the Mind* (1994), Hannah Arendt upholds that the will begins to guide the will, to take the reins of life for itself and oppose obedience. In effect, similar to the author's thoughts, Adeodato (2016) demarcates that Aristotle established three necessary laws of intelligibility of human action as categories: the necessary, the contingent and the impossible.

What it is necessary is everything that always happens in the same way and by its internal nature, it could never happen otherwise. Thus, it may be seen in the leaf that falls, in the water that wets and in the fire that burns. On the other hand, the impossible is what happens and could never happen for its own reasons, except for the implementation of external forces, such as technique, for example. The middle ground between the two categories is the contingent, which consists of the doubt about what never happens and what always happens.

For Matos (2011), contingency in the political world and in human relationships and chance, which depends on action and free will, may only be actualized in the individuality between the principle and the cause. These elements are subject to becoming, given that human life is subject to the sublunar, that is, to the movement of *physis* and to the transformations in ethical, political and historical life, to the unstable and to the categories of uncertain time.

Although there is no consensus on the concepts of will in the Greek philosophical context, there are several terms that designate the various degrees of will. It is worth complementing that the ancients widely accept the idea of not using the notion of will as the medieval world saw and understood, through the idea of freedom. (AGAMBEM, 2018). For Arendt, the Greeks did not present in their dictionary any word that considered the notion of free will. It was the then newly created idea of Aristotle that brought the notion of acting closer to a position precedent to the idea of action as freedom to act. The Aristotelian word *proairesis* means the possibility of choosing between possibilities, or rather, the preference that makes one choose between one action and another. (ARENDDT, 1971, p.16).

This notion was reinforced by the Augustinian concept of love in Arendt's doctoral thesis on the history of conversion in the work *Confessions*, of Augustine. In *The Life of the Mind* (1994), she emphasizes that the engagement of men with the world is examined in the reflection on will, spontaneity and freedom. (MANTOVANI, 2015).

Arendt's artifice to explain action by reading Augustine is added by the idea of habit, by revealing that sin is in the control of life when practiced and reinforced. (ARENDDT, 1996, p.81). In the words of Augustine (1961, p. 175), "habit not only connects us to the world by obscuring our wills, but also hides our nature". In this context, the idea of the exteriority of these movements is based on an ethical logic, while prudence emerges as excellence, as it reveals the limitations of the human condition. (CORREIA, 2011). In each situation, the message is the same: the will has no natural guidance, for which its direction on the act takes place in a similar way, as a way of exposing the will.

The essential thing is to understand that, although our will is free, it is free only to the extent that it is capable of choosing. Doing what we want is not genuinely up to us. We remain susceptible to outside influence and the challenge of obedience. For Arendt, characterizing men as conditioned beings is a complex activity. In *The Human Condition* (2007), men are seen as beings in intense resignification.

This situation arises insofar as the human condition represents a characteristic of man as a being determined in an existence. Man is not born ready; their preparation to cohabit is necessary. The learning brought by those around him in his home and the learning with the masters in the transition space are the engines of the purposes of life in appearance. However, these experiences do not demarcate the spontaneous and unexpected way in which individuals express the phenomenon. Action does not fit in boxes.

### **3 Spontaneity and freedom in the *praxis* of Acting**

The action is unpredictable. An action is taken like a shot arrow, irremediable. It is worth noting that, according to Arendtian thought, it does not mean that for freedom to exist, it must be split from the

will. Once performed, there is no way to go back and scale its effects. The will cannot be used in such a way as to delimit the acts of action aiming at a certain end, an objective from the beginning, a predictability. For Rubiano (2010), the action must result in something alien to the will of individuals and directed to the common world. It fosters the contours for the way of the world, independently of the particular wills.

From this notion brought by Rubiano (2010), it can be understood how action is assimilated, in fact, in Arendtian thought. Irreversible. What can be observed is that, for an action to exist, an initiator is needed. To the same extent, the existence of a public is necessary. Therefore, there is a relationship between action and public space, in which political men exercise their freedom. From the clipping of the work *The Human Condition* (2007), it is observed that the Greek and Latin languages have two distinct verbs to give meaning to acting, which makes understanding even more difficult and reinforces the idea of subjectivity and plurality of action. We note:

[...] both languages had two verbs to designate what we uniformly call acting. The two Greek words are *árkhein*: to begin, to lead, and finally to rule; and *práttēin*: to carry out something. The corresponding Latin verbs are *agere*: to set something in motion; and *gerere*, which is difficult to translate and which, in a way, expresses the permanent and sustaining continuation of past acts whose results are the *res gestae*, the acts and events that we call historical. (ARENDDT, 2005, p. 214).

The return to the question of Greek philosophy about what is under our power and what escapes us, through the categories of the illegibility of action, is associated with spontaneity, like the autonomy of will and freedom in Hannah Arendt. Depending on the perspective launched on reading, considering the factors of human sociability, it can be understood that the choice to assume certain postures, or not, within the political sphere of public space may not be interpreted as a possibility of isolation and evasion in the face of demands echoed by the world common to those who must preserve it.

In the words of Bittar (1999), in a common way in Arendtian thought, without freedom in the action of everyone who makes up the public space, there is no true freedom. The ground for expressing freedom within human facts is, for Arendt, the dubiousness of what would be true freedom, the political field, and which, in modernity, has been deeply associated with free will, moving away from the provisions of the ancients. It is added, in the words of Silva (2011), that “the experience of joint action only takes place through freedom”, and it is important to pay attention to the threat of silencing.

If we revisit the past, both in Greece and in ancient Rome, we could recover a freedom with a different connotation from the one we take today. Being free in antiquity was intended for those who were present in political life, relativizing the possibilities of public participation for women, infants, slaves and foreigners, a situation portrayed as limited citizenship – a definition that differs from that of the current context, in which freedom is free will are considered synonymous.



Such phenomenon began to be consolidated when the ability to cohabit in public space began to be withdrawn from the individual, causing him to seek freedom within himself. Freedom in this environment requires the power of choice. Therefore, it is necessary for the individual, a living component of the public space, to choose responsibility towards the community. Arendt (1994) reinforces that “being alone” provides the connection with duality, that is, maturation in the reflective process. But the contemplative process only takes shape through its exteriority, which takes place through action and discourse.

One of the debates about the action of political life in Arendt is inserted thereafter. Within the public space, the recognition of others as similar to themselves and, at the same time, as a plural being, each with the appropriate and specific particularities to foster their identity, are the generators of the action. The public space is the locus of action, the territory so that it can happen. It is in this public space that citizens deal with pluralities, political action and freedoms. For Benhabib (2006), action is equally constituted by natality, plurality and narrative.

As throughout the text much has been touched on the tangency between plurality and narrative, it is worth treating, even in a synthetic way, the notion of natality. For Arendt (2007), as much as it can be confused with birth, it is not the same thing. Birth concerns the birth of the being to the world, but not a generic world, but the political world, the common world of citizens, the public space. It is the reception of these individuals for action, political action. In this sense, newcomers enter the political sphere of the world so that, involved with the notion of *amor mundi* and responsibility for the political path of the society that inserts them, they can act.

Only the idea of *amor mundi* – that is, the creation of the habit of love for the world, which is done with practice in the sphere of human actions – can build singularity in difference. The semantics of the term action in Arendt points out the way to an ethical understanding of human life. After all, first of all, ethics from the Greek *ethos* means habit.

By means of the relationships’ web, the bond of affection not only circumvents but crosses the individuals who, leaving aside any type of violence, use words in their way of exercising power. Differences cannot speak louder than the need to care for the world in community and care for the other, as someone kept for me – not in a way that suppresses differences, but that these are not an obstacle to the coexistence between individuals.

The criticism of the Greek perspective of action and discourses in the political environment arises when commenting on the space of isolation. Such criticism is observed, in fact, with the problem of the artificiality of institutionalization in politics, understood as a result capable of surviving its actors and being

renewed by other generations. In this matter, it is worth commenting on the passage from Greece to Rome between *The Human Condition* and the writing of *On the Revolution*.

The scenario crosses between the Roman and North American republican experiences, demonstrating the institutional need to present greater representation in public action. This situation enables the development of politics in a common world. In this sense, for Rubiano (2011), the Arendtian vision of freedom is associated with “acting in a publicly organized space”, a notion that meets the ideal of freedom taken in the face of artificiality and human plurality.

These notions lead us to question the functioning of such Roman political institutions, public spaces, turning them into a stage for political juggling. Thus, institutional authority renders the unpredictability of the action incapable, plastering it and making the “power of the people” an argument for the demagogic hierarchy of their will.

#### **4 Final remarks**

The action-discourse interrelation, primordial to the one who inhabits the appearance, belongs in a particular way to humans. Unaccompanied by discourse, action not only loses its characteristic of revealing itself to equals, but also loses, in the exchange environment, the subject-actor. The “change” action does not exist, and its actor disappears. The revelation of actions is done through the exchange of words and power is given to it through the voice. In this sense, Arendt (2007) asks the newcomer: “Who are you?”.

It is not new to say that the understanding that Hannah Arendt seeks in the discursive dimension of action is found within politics. Speaking of action, however, refers to the commitment to related issues, which are historical, political and social. Arendt launches her punctual analysis of the problem of action thereafter, the study of human behavior itself and the practical science of action, that is, ethics.

What is meant, in other words, is that not only appearing in the collectivity makes the individual part of the community. At this point, there is the ethical idea of action, inserted in the importance of politics. It is their task to adapt the activities of the *polis* and the subjects who make it their home to achieve something palpable for the community, considering that all the good coincides with the good of the parts.

In fact, it must be said that man is a gregarious being in the sphere of a political/social animal by nature, through which the formulation of ethical judgments is consented. It is from this experience that the concepts that border the notion of defining without constraining the human were extracted, by leaving open the flexible ethical variability, that is, from person to person. In the space of appearance, there is no greater relationship of interdependence between action and speech.

It is in speaking that individuals reveal their being, until then, directed to the private sphere, and bring to the public space the flowering of their unique personal identities. Here, we are not talking about any kind of action within the community, but about ethical action. This raises a question: how to combine the three dimensions of action with so many particularities inherent to political individuals? In any case, life in the plural environment needs something beyond the sense of responsibility. Something that can be called poetic – in this space, love takes the reins that guarantee the future.

Moreover, the right middle between dignity and difference is found between two poles and is balanced by the conditions of singularity and difference. This balance resides in the fact that both share the human world, the civic body, not invading the field of will. It should be noted that the community member relates to the public space through action and its results imply the lives of “others”. In that aspect, the idea of freedom to act is intertwined with the idea of responsibility.

The responsibility lies in the concern to demonstrate, through action, that *amor mundi* is a human notion and, therefore, humanly realizable. In the same way that in the common world we deal with the different and the same, it is in the exchange processes that identities are shaped over time. The path to such turmoil? To act in the community as yourself, that is, to love the other as yourself. In this aspect, there is a broad relationship between the private sphere and the full realization of human potential.

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