

The Conceptual Realm of Human Rights in Hannah Arendt's Thought

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Received: 02 Nov 2024 ; Accepted: 20 Dec 2024

Abstract

Hannah Arendt was one of the most prominent thinkers of political philosophy in the twentieth century, and the views of many scholars in the field of political philosophy in the present century are still inspired by her thought. She is the author of books such as *Totalitarianism*, *Revolution*, and *The Human Condition*. In the intellectual system of Hannah Arendt, the manner of formation and functioning of totalitarian states has been explained, and Arendt, with subtlety and precision, depicts the accompaniment of the masses with the state machinery in the creation of totalitarianism. She explains that the totalitarian current, by riding on the wave of the emotions of the masses and penetrating into the minds of human beings, carries them along with itself. Profound and unique concepts are seen in her political philosophy, including the political matter resulting from human action in the public realm which, alongside civil society, can bring about the liberation of the citizens of the modern world. The concept of theoretical challenge between the two concepts of moral evil and human rights finds meaning precisely at this point. Arendt faced a set of events and incidents which she tried to describe under concepts such as totalitarianism and human rights and, of course, also expressed her own solution. With the current understanding of Arendt's political thought, it can be said that her solution in human rights lies in the concept of citizenship rights, plurality, freedom, the public sphere, political participation, and so on. With the critiques that Arendt directs toward the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it can be concluded that her understanding of this concept is very different from what is heard today, and therefore her words may not only be incomprehensible but may even lead to misunderstanding and mental confrontation. Therefore, addressing this subject can, while enlightening the audience, create a ground for the recognition of Hannah Arendt's political thought, particularly her ideas in the field of moral evil, human rights, and the relation between these two in her thought. In addition to all this, finding an answer to the causes and factors of the phenomenon of evil and violence is of great theoretical and also practical importance, and the recognition of Arendt's thought can be an important step in this direction.

Keywords: Hannah Arendt, Human Rights, Conceptual Realm, Totalitarianism

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Introduction

Hannah Arendt was one of the most prominent thinkers of political philosophy in the twentieth century, and the views of many scholars in the field of political philosophy in the present century are still inspired by her thought. She is the author of books such as *Totalitarianism*, *Revolution*, *The Human Condition*, *The Life of the Mind*, and *Between Past and Future*. In the intellectual system of Hannah Arendt, the manner of formation and functioning of totalitarian states has been explained, and Arendt, with subtlety and precision, depicts the accompaniment of the masses with the state machinery in the creation of totalitarianism. She explains that the totalitarian current, by riding on the wave of the emotions of the masses and penetrating into the minds of human beings, carries them along with itself. Profound and unique concepts are seen in her political philosophy, including the political matter resulting from human action in the public realm which, alongside civil society, can bring about the liberation of the citizens of the modern world.

The concept of theoretical challenge between the two concepts of moral evil and human rights finds meaning precisely at this point. Arendt faced a set of events and incidents which she tried to describe under concepts such as totalitarianism and human rights and, of course, also expressed her own solution. With the current understanding of Arendt's political thought, it can be said that her solution in human rights lies in the concept of citizenship rights, plurality, freedom, the public sphere, political participation, and so on. With the critiques that Arendt directs toward the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it can be concluded that her understanding of this

concept is very different from what is heard today, and therefore her words may not only be incomprehensible but may even lead to misunderstanding and mental confrontation. Therefore, addressing this subject can, while enlightening the audience, create a ground for the recognition of Hannah Arendt's political thought, particularly her ideas in the field of moral evil, human rights, and the relation between these two in her thought. In addition to all this, finding an answer to the causes and factors of the phenomenon of evil and violence is of great theoretical and also practical importance, and the recognition of Arendt's thought can be an important step in this direction.

The issue of violence is one of the most important topics which, despite the existence of many discussions, thoughts, and studies around it, has not only not diminished but, in past decades, has even increased in various forms. Examples of such violence are the world wars, the Vietnam War, Afghanistan, the first and second Gulf Wars, and later violences such as the actions of al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and ISIS, and so on. Now the issue of violence is no longer merely a political issue and has taken on various psychological and social forms, each of which has become the subject of extensive studies. For example, gender violence which, despite all human progress, is still increasing, or verbal and ethnic violence seen in different regions, and such issues which can still be studied. Therefore, the issue of violence is one of the most central fields of study and is of particular importance.

Therefore, for Arendt, the issue of moral evil and its strategies and solutions is considered one of the most important intellectual

concerns, and she, in her writings, tries to examine, analyze, and explain the concept of moral evil and its causes so that, while identifying the factors preparing its ground, she may provide a final solution for it. This analytical field is a subject that, in many writings of the contemporary era and also writings that analyze the thought of Hannah Arendt, has been neglected. Therefore, considering the fact that the issue of moral evil and presenting a solution and strategy for it was one of Hannah Arendt's concerns and, more generally, of the Frankfurt School, this research seeks, while examining Arendt's political thought and the concept of moral evil in her thought, to pursue the solution and strategy that Arendt presented for this phenomenon.

Therefore, in this article we will answer these questions: What challenge exists between moral evil and human rights in Hannah Arendt's political thought? And what place do the concepts of human rights and citizenship rights have in Hannah Arendt's thought?

Hannah Arendt, in her intellectual system, by defining the concept of moral evil as a kind of act resulting from mere ignorance, has confronted those theories that considered moral evil to be something inherent in politics. Hannah Arendt also considers human rights as a strategy for confronting moral evil. From Arendt's perspective, human rights mean the possibility of political action for all citizens regardless of race, color, gender, religion, and so on. In fact, human rights are the collection of citizenship rights that political citizens possess for the production of political power and presence in the public sphere.

Research Background

Keshishyan Siraki (2019), in a book titled *The Banality of Evil from Arendt's Perspective*, writes that the subject of political thought, according to Arendt, is the experience and free political activity of the human mind; but today, with the emergence of welfare as happiness and as the substitute for freedom in the realm of public action, economics has attacked politics, and politics has become nothing but private and family life. Haji Agha and Paknia (2018), in an article titled *Explaining the Place of the Public Sphere and the Political Matter in Hannah Arendt's Political Thought*, attempted, by using a text-oriented method, to explain the public concepts of Hannah Arendt's political thought, namely the public sphere, the political matter, and freedom. Therefore, with a correct understanding of the public sphere and also its transformations in the modern era, a new definition of the political matter can be provided which opens the ground for the creation of deliberative democracy. Ali-Hosseini and others (2017), in research titled *Hannah Arendt's Methodology in Understanding Political Phenomena*, believe that although it seems that Hannah Arendt never clearly mentioned her own research method, and even her interpreters have not emphasized this point, Arendt, in her own way, made use of the interpretive method. Arendt, from an interpretive perspective and approach, proceeds to understand the world and political phenomena and affairs, and in this way, she employs special and unique techniques that belong to the framework of her intellectual system and her specific philosophical-political apparatus. By rejecting and criticizing metaphysical fallacies and the reductionist and deterministic methods of modern sciences, she adopts special methods for

understanding the world and human beings, which include storytelling, the imagination of the researcher as a positioned and impartial spectator, differentiation and distinctions, paradoxes and their analysis to reach understanding, and the use of taste, judgment, and imagination in understanding. These are among her most unique ideas in understanding. Tadayon Rad and others (2015), in an article titled *Hannah Arendt's Philosophical Hermeneutics in Accordance with Heidegger and Gadamer's Interpretive Approach*, discuss the methodology governing Hannah Arendt's political thought and try to discover the relation between Arendt's interpretive approaches in politics and philosophical hermeneutics. For this reason, these authors have tried to interpret Arendt's thought in the context of the hermeneutic tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer. Emphasis on the uniqueness and novelty and initiatory character of every human being, critique of essentialism, reductionism, scientism, and historicism, emphasis on the importance and significant place of presuppositions in understanding, situational practice, and the worldliness of understanding, and perhaps most importantly the will to confront phenomena themselves, are among the most important common aspects of the approach of Arendt, Gadamer, and Heidegger toward understanding, and thus, Arendt's approach to understanding, in connection with her philosophical and intellectual backgrounds, counts as philosophical and phenomenological hermeneutics. Bashiriyyeh (2006), in an article titled *Hannah Arendt: The History of Political Thought in the Twentieth Century*, provided a brief review of Hannah Arendt's political thought and attempted to explain the most important political concepts in her thought. Jahanbegloo also (2006), in an article titled *Hannah Arendt and*

Modern Politics, briefly tried to examine Arendt's critiques concerning modernity and presented a collection of Arendt's views and opinions in this regard. This research, in fact, is a short introduction to Arendt's political thought. However, all of these works, in some way, have made references to the ideas of Hannah Arendt, the twentieth-century philosopher, but have paid less attention to the subject of human rights from Arendt's perspective, which is the subject this article seeks to address more thoroughly.

Research Method

This research is of the type of fundamental and philosophical studies which is carried out using a meta-analysis. Therefore, the research method of this article is descriptive and analytical, which is implemented using the model of the formation of idea and political theory. The description and analysis are based on a specific philosophical system that makes it possible for all data to be organized around a particular logical order. In this article, the method of text-centered approach is used for analyzing and examining Hannah Arendt's thought. In the method of text-centered approach, what is important is the argument and the rational way of confronting various evidences. In the formulation of Arendt's general thought as well, we will use the philosophical connection between ontology, epistemology, and political philosophy, which today has turned into a more widely applied method in philosophical discussions. The method of data collection has also been library-based and through excerpting from the thoughts of Hannah Arendt and books, articles, and scientific writings related to Hannah Arendt's political thought. In this article, an attempt will be

made to analyze the concept of human rights from Arendt's point of view.

Limitations and Problems of the Research

One of the most important problems and difficulties of this research was the complexity and difficulty in understanding Hannah Arendt's political thought, which is clearly observable in her writings. This ambiguity and complexity, alongside the various interpretations and commentaries that have been presented in the past few decades in relation to her thought, have increased even more, and this very issue has doubled the difficulty of understanding Arendt's thought. Furthermore, the research gaps regarding the key concepts existing in Hannah Arendt's thought were also among the limitations that this research was faced with. Because these concepts have not sufficiently entered into political science studies and research, and unfortunately, there are not many works in this regard. Moreover, the understanding of the importance of Hannah Arendt's political thought has been realized with much delay, which itself has caused there not to be much attention and interest toward her political thought. This issue has brought about the ground and context of the shortage of sources in relation to Arendt and her thoughts, which to some extent has affected this research as well, although much effort has been made so that these gaps be remedied to a very large extent relying on the existing sources.

Hannah Arendt's Political Thought

Hannah Arendt was one of the most prominent thinkers of political philosophy in the

twentieth century, and the views of many scholars of political philosophy in the present century still remain inspired by her thought. She is the author of books such as *Totalitarianism*, *Revolution*, *Violence*, *The Life of the Mind*, and *The Human Condition*. In Arendt's intellectual system, the manner of the formation and functioning of totalitarian states is explained, and Arendt, with delicacy and precision, portrays the cooperation of the masses with the state machine in creating totalitarianism. She explains that the totalitarian current, by riding on the wave of the emotions of the masses and penetrating the minds of human beings, makes them accompany it. Deep and unique concepts are visible in her political philosophy, among them the political that results from human action in the public realm, which, alongside civil society, can bring about the liberation of the citizens of the modern world. Arendt, by attending the Eichmann trial and her analytical reports of the trial process, showed that, in addition to political philosophy, she also had an unmatched proficiency regarding the political issues of the day. The profound concept of "the banality of evil" was the result of this effort of hers. (Keshishian, 2019, p. 45)

Hannah Arendt's thought is attracting more attention day by day, and this is to a large extent because of the innovations in thought that exist in her work and writings. Of course, Arendt, like every other thinker, is also confronted with challenges and at times conceptual contradictions, which in the same way have given rise to many debates. One of these debates, probably more recent, is the connection and relation between the two periods in the life of her thought. In this regard, she presented the duality of the life of action and the

life of the mind, or the life of practice and the life of contemplation, of which the second type itself has been one of the most important factors of neglect and lack of importance of the life of practice. Thus, Arendt presented the duality between philosophy and politics, which stood in opposition to each other. In recent years, and especially because Arendt's life did not last long enough for her to provide a clearer explanation herself, an important controversy has arisen in this regard, as to how her two inconsistent parts of thought can be interpreted and explained, and whether these two stages of her thinking are in opposition to each other or, on the contrary, are consistent. (Ansari, 2021, p. 43).

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt's most important American student, has a book entitled *Why Arendt Matters* (Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, 2009). In this book she has tried to explain the most important elements that made Arendt into such an important political theorist even in the period after her death. In her view, Arendt's most important work has always been that she tried to discover the unique and singular nature of phenomena—something that did not even exist in the conventional philosophical language of the time. For example, the very concept of totalitarianism, although existing as a word, it was Arendt who tried to use it to describe a type of political system completely different in nature and function.

Margaret Canavan, another one of the most important later Arendt scholars, in her books has tried to explain Arendt's importance for our thought and even for our political life. In her view, Hannah Arendt's political thought cannot be classified according to common labels such as political science, history of ideas,

or ideological manifestos. (Canavan, 1985, p. 102). On the contrary, she tries in a classical manner to arrive at an understanding of politics that is consistent with the human experience of political activity and to explain the place of politics in the course of human life. Therefore, according to Canavan, the style and content of Hannah Arendt's political thought are in opposition to the orthodox academic system. In the contemporary era, politics has been placed under sociology, while in Arendt's view these two categories are fundamentally different, and therefore she tried in her political thought to separate them from each other. According to Arendt, politics is the realm of freedom, and defending politics against sociologism is tantamount to defending freedom and human dignity against determinism and pure submission to fate. (Canavan, 1985, p. 86).

According to Canavan, Arendt's works, although not at all vague and ambiguous compared to Hegel's works, are difficult because she passes through unknown paths of thought and her sayings are subtle and complex. Students who, for the first time, refer to her writings may be confused with difficulty at the first moment. The only way out of such a problem is to reread her thought. Her theories are fundamentally unconventional and controversial, and various interpretations can be derived from them. (Canavan, 1985, p. 89).

Canavan, in response to the question of why Arendt's works are important, introduces the concept of innovation. In her view, the mistaken assumption is to think that innovation means creating something that never existed before or raising an issue that is heard for the first time. This, according to her, is incorrect. In her view, innovation consists of discovering

new categories and ways of seeing things or replacing a new set, in place of the old set. Innovation casts light on experiences that have mostly not been consciously considered. The result of such a situation is that the writer can be completely innovative and yet her readers may react in such a way as to say: "Yes, exactly, this is what I always knew but I never had the power to express and articulate it." (Canavan, 1985, p. 103). In this sense, Arendt tries to find appropriate alternatives for the categories by which we experience the world. As a political theorist, Arendt articulates experiences that no one has described before and challenges them through new ways of looking at the world. The result of such a method is that we must always challenge the common categories, and Arendt's main art must truly be found in this very challenging. In this way, while she deals with experiences that were previously unknown to human beings, her thoughts usually consist of: "explaining a subject in the sense of illuminating its various aspects and drawing countless distinctions and in this way preparing and offering a rich map of categories by which she depicts the experience. One of the predominant characteristics of the dominant intellectual discourse is that it targets some points that seem important and leaves out the rest." (Canavan, 1985, p. 79).

Among the most important features that make Arendt's work important is that she makes a particular use of history, especially the history of ancient Greece and Rome. Of course, history is not only to present examples, but in a sense, history for Arendt is like a tool for obtaining an Archimedean point outside the present age. In Canavan's words, Arendt uses history as the cemetery of human experience in which we encounter human possibilities of

endurance that are far more extensive than the possibilities we currently know in our own culture. History, and especially the history of ancient Greece and Rome, set up a court of appeal against the modern age.

In addition to what has been said so far, Arendt's importance can also be considered from an extra-discursive perspective. Canavan, from within Hannah Arendt's political thought, tried to show us its importance, while her importance is not only internal to thought, but the important question regarding Arendt's importance can be: what does Arendt do with her thought? When we pose the question in this way, the practical and more concrete aspect also becomes more prominent. According to David Watson in his short and readable book *On Arendt*, much of the power of Arendt's writings—which at times include the most abstruse topics—derives from her tangible experiences in life. Regarding the war in Europe, its origins and consequences, what she said were the opinions of someone who came from the front line. Such a position brought Arendt under the attention of significant groups, and she gradually gathered important supporters around her: Jewish refugees, German émigré intellectuals, and American political liberals. (Watson, 2006, p. 58). In this sense, it can be claimed that Arendt, with the power of thought she had, was able to place the objective world more explicitly before our eyes, and thus, unlike many intellectuals who were accused of sitting in ivory towers and philosophizing, Arendt herself was present in the field of action and turned her lived experience into the subject of her own thought, and in this way was able to transcend intellectual boundaries. Irving Howe, about Arendt's influence and impact on himself and his generation, writes: "She had an extremely

strong influence on intellectuals, on those who were purely American and were astonished by the grandeur of German philosophy. But I always suspected that perhaps her influence on individuals was more due to her way of thinking than to her thought itself. Arendt was full of intellectual charisma, as if she could turn anyone within the scope of her gaze into an alert and prepared student. Any space she was in was filled with her great will; indeed, she always seemed larger than the environment in which she was present. Rarely have I encountered a writer who, like her, was endowed with the power of mastery and domination over others." (Watson, 2006, p. 66).

Political Action: Unpredictability and Irreversibility

According to Arendt, the roots of the hegemonic approach of the social sciences to formulate all human actions and deeds in the framework of fixed rules and laws go back to the time of Plato. Plato defined action as a kind of making or production, and the political actor — the philosopher-king — could, like an artifact that he wanted to make, see it before acting and engage in designing and planning before building. In this way, the knower and the agent become separated from each other, and action merely becomes an instrument for actualizing an end. According to Arendt, this predictability of action is reflected in the "behaviorism" of the modern age, which ultimately contradicts human freedom for initiating and human plurality of individuals. (Arendt, 2000, p. 87).

Modernity and the Death of the Public Sphere

One of the most important subjects of debate among twentieth-century thinkers has been the meaning and concept of "modernity"; the understanding and comprehension of modernity occupied a vast part of the tradition of political philosophical thought of the past century (the twentieth century). Great thinkers such as Heidegger, Habermas, Foucault, and others have reflected upon the manner of its occurrence and its comprehensive effects on human existence and life. Each of these approaches and diverse perspectives, which they opened before human understanding, are in their own turn noteworthy, and they must be examined in detail elsewhere. Hannah Arendt, as has been said, reflected upon modernity in the context of the thought of the public sphere. Therefore, here an effort is made to present a correct understanding of Hannah Arendt's interpretation of modernity.

Arendt, in almost all of her works, refers to the features of modernity, which itself shows her particular importance and attention to it, and she strives, according to the context of discussion, to define its characteristics. But her best discussions concerning modernity should be found in her famous book *The Human Condition* and especially in its last chapter. Arendt, in answer to the question "What is modernity?" provides a multi-faceted response; a response that is based upon an ideal state, namely politics in the age of ancient Greece. In her view, modernity is the age of the loss of tradition, religion, and authority; the age of modernity is the age of the absence of meaning, identity, action, and value; modernity is the age of the destruction of the common world, the public sphere, and the sphere of

appearance; modernity is the age of the domination of the inner and personal world; modernity is likewise the age of mass society; modernity is the age of the emergence of the “social” and the effacement of the old spheres of the “public” and the “private”; modernity is the age of the victory of the laboring and toiling animal over the making human; modernity is the age of the decline of man as a “political animal”; modernity is the age of the dominance of the administrative and bureaucratic system and automatic labor; modernity is the age of the destruction of politics and action; modernity is the age of the victory of economy over politics; modernity is the age of the domination of statistics; modernity is the age of the domination of behavior over action; modernity is the age of the domination of historical thinking as a natural process instead of history as a kind of spontaneous and accidental event; modernity is the age of the domination of conformists and equality; modernity is the age of the destruction of plurality and human freedom; modernity is the age of the victory of “organized loneliness” over all forms of spontaneous human relations; modernity is the age of the domination of totalitarianism; modernity is the age of the collapse of individuality; modernity is the age of the destruction of humanity.

Arendt, in her discussion of modernity, turns to three great events as historical and theoretical factors influencing the emergence of the modern age. Three events that changed man’s outlook on fundamental ontological, epistemological, and even anthropological categories: the discovery of the American continent and, after that, the discovery of the entire surface of the earth, the Reformation, and the invention of the telescope and the development

of the new sciences, heralded the beginning of the new age. But this does not mean that these events were “ours”; rather, they still belonged to the pre-modern world. In the same way, one cannot consider Galileo, Martin Luther, the discoverers, or the navigators of this period as modern individuals; their motivations and intentions were still rooted in tradition. Moreover, the occurrence of these three events themselves was not something accidental and instantaneous, but rather each had taken shape over several centuries and only now, on the threshold of the modern age, had reached fruition. The final discovery of the earth had a history as old as human life itself, and, like pieces of a puzzle, over several centuries was in the process of being completed, and now, it seemed, with the discovery of the American continent, the last pieces of it had been found. Only now had man fully taken possession of his mortal dwelling place. (Arendt, 2009, p. 127).

Arendt considers the historical event of the “Reformation” to be another of the decisive events in the occurrence of the modern age, and in it she proceeds to clarify and expand its conceptual and justificatory dimensions. In her view, Max Weber, with the term “worldly asceticism,” well described the effects of the Reformation movement upon modern man. One of the persistent tendencies in modern philosophy since Descartes has been the increasing attachment and interest in the “self,” in distinction from soul or person or human in general; that is, the effort to reduce all experiences with the world and also with other humans to the experience between me and myself. In Arendt’s view, Max Weber’s interesting analysis is attention to this very issue of the self as the source of capitalism. Therefore,

estrangement from the world — and not self-alienation, as Marx thought — has become the distinctive sign of the modern age. In addition to this, the Reformation movement engaged in expropriation and dispossession, which caused large groups of people to be deprived of their property. (Arendt, 2009, p. 143).

The Distinction of Human from Animal: The Birth of Human and Human Rights

Michael H. Lessnoff, in his book entitled *Twentieth Century Political Philosophers*, introduces Arendt's distinction between labor, work, and action as the most original and unique scheme of Arendt. (Lessnoff, 1999, p. 126). Regardless of the judgment about this perspective, it must be acknowledged that these threefold distinctions are for Arendt in the position of a conceptual master key. She herself writes somewhere that the discovery, or more precisely, the rediscovery of these distinctions caused her to notice a fundamental deviation in the tradition of Western thought. Arendt, for differentiating between the two concepts of labor and work, does not go to theories, because in her view, in theories one cannot arrive at the truth. For such a differentiation, there exists a very valid and reliable testimony, and that is this simple fact that "in all European languages, ancient or modern, etymologically there exists a different term for that which we now think is one kind of activity" (Arendt, 1958, p. 198).

Labor, or toil, in distinction from work, is an activity the ultimate aim of which, or in Aristotelian expression its telos, is the satisfaction of vital and biological needs of human beings and the survival of humankind. The activity of subsistence labor, in this respect, resembles

the biological activity of animals, and in Arendt's view, to describe this kind of human effort one can use the term "animal laborans"; because humans, too, just like animals, are subject to "necessity." The human condition of this activity is life itself. Moreover, the products and outcomes that are prepared through labor are immediately consumed, and apart from the continuation of human life, no trace of them remains (Arendt, 1958, p. 175).

In this sense, all economic activities of humankind that are consumed immediately fall under this type of activity. That which for the "animal laborans" is placed as the highest goal is attaining comfort and ease. Labor or subsistence toil is not a meaning-giving or identity-creating activity, but rather an activity directed toward life. Arendt defines for subsistence labor two general qualities: "futility" and "worldlessness." In the two activities of work and action, humans add durable objects and things to the world—things that outlast human beings themselves and bear the mark and imprint of humans upon them. Subsistence labor in this sense is not world-building, and it does not contribute to the fundamental problem of humans for endurance in history and in the world. Labor and subsistence toil are carried out in relation to violence. In ancient Greece, the gods and the heads of families, in order to satisfy their needs, forced women and slaves with violence to prepare them. The condition of entering the agora, that is, the public sphere, was liberation from necessities (Arendt, 1958, p. 164).

Work is the second human activity which, although like labor is carried out in relation to nature, is not subject to it and enjoys more freedom and independence from nature, and it can even be said that its ultimate telos is

“dominion” over nature. Humans extract raw materials from the heart of nature and then, with invention and creativity, manipulate them and produce a new object which is different from what existed in nature before, both in terms of material and in terms of form. Work has a close connection with human invention and creativity, and Arendt uses the term “homo faber” for distinguishing this type of activity. If we want to name one of the defining features of the human in Arendt’s thought, it is undoubtedly the “capacity for initiative.” “Homo faber,” like Aristotle’s term “zoon logon echon,” can serve to define the essence of man. Therefore, work creates a world of man-made and artificial objects which, compared with the activity of labor, have greater durability, and unlike them, they do not arrive at “immediate consumption,” and humans use them as intermediary means. In this sense, whatever is created by humans and used by them are the products of work, whether technology or works of art such as Picasso’s paintings. Therefore, work can be defined as the human “civilization-building” activity (Arendt, 2009, p. 189).

Everything that falls within the domain of human civilization is the product of homo faber. According to Margaret Canavan, when archaeology excavates in ancient ruins, it never forgets that human beings who once lived in that place spent a large portion of their energy and time on satisfying primary needs and providing subsistence, but what is important for this archaeologist are the durable products and artifacts which these humans left behind as self-made objects. Labor or subsistence toil is not the subject of archaeology. Archaeologists want to discover the works of humans of earlier times. Another feature of work, in

contrast with labor, is the clear beginning and end of the process of making. In the activity of labor there is no beginning and end (Ansari, 2000, p. 143).

Action, or praxis, as acknowledged by figures such as Margaret Canavan and George Kateb, is very difficult to explain in its Arendtian sense of “political action.” In Western philosophical thought, there exists no concept like political action at all. Arendt’s discussion in this field is entirely original and innovative. Arendt begins her discussion by mentioning this point that Augustine “was the first who formulated the philosophical implications of the ancient idea of freedom of action.” The meaning of political action, in Arendt’s view, must be rediscovered in “non-philosophical literature... dramatic writings, poetry, and the historical and political works of the Greeks and Romans,” which, of course, are not very systematic. The hostility of Greek philosophers after Socrates’ death and the philosophical ineffectiveness of the Romans largely consigned the original meaning of political action to oblivion, and throughout the Christian era, except for the period of the Italian Renaissance and Niccolò Machiavelli, no philosophical conception of the meaning of action took shape. Arendt, in order to present a philosophical account of political action, resorts to the non-philosophical literature of the Greeks and Romans. Therefore, any precise description of political action requires attention to the historical context and to the philosophical and existential dimensions considered by Arendt.

Two fundamental features of action in Arendt’s thought are freedom and plurality; freedom in liberal definitions means being free in the private sphere and non-interference of the state in personal and private affairs (negative

liberty), and also freedom in its democratic meaning is the provision of conditions for private and individual independence equally among individuals (positive liberty). Whereas in Arendt's view, freedom means the ability to begin, to initiate something new and unpredictable. This ability for beginning is closely connected with the birth of human beings. Action, as the actualization of freedom, is rooted in natality. In fact, every birth is a new initiation. Plurality, the other feature of action, means that action cannot take place in isolation from others, that is, independently from the presence of multiple actors who, from different perspectives, can judge about what is being done. Action without others loses its meaningful quality. Arendt defines plurality as the reality that "men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world." In this sense, "nobody is ever the same as those who lived, live, or will live on the earth" (Arendt, 2009, p. 126).

Given the three concepts or activities that Arendt describes under the titles of labor, work, and action, the ontological difference between animal and human must be sought only in action. It is action that transforms the human into a human. This definition of human, as we shall see, helps Arendt to be able to speak of human rights in its precise sense. In Arendt's view, in today's world, to the same extent that politics does not essentially exist, there also does not exist anything called human rights. Because human rights pertain to the activity of human action, and therefore in the absence of action there will essentially be no human rights. Or more precisely, it can be said that what today is called human rights is in fact the rights of the laboring animal or of homo faber (Arendt, 2009, p. 173).

For understanding the concept of human rights from Hannah Arendt's perspective, in addition to focusing on these three human activities, one must also pay attention to her other conceptual classification: the classification of the private and the public spheres. With attention to this classification, it can be specified to which sphere human rights belong, and on this basis, the conceptual domains of human rights can be defined and explained. Therefore, below we will briefly address this classification and its role in determining human rights.

The Private Sphere and Human Rights

In Arendt's view, in antiquity in Greece and Rome, the public and private spheres were separated from each other: life entirely private, from the viewpoint of the ancients, was primarily synonymous with "privation," "privation of those things whose existence was essential for a truly human life." In the private sphere, man was not able to attain anything more enduring than life itself. Furthermore, reality manifests itself in the heart of the public sphere; therefore, entirely private life was never able to discover the realities of the world and of existence. The private sphere is the sphere of labor and toil, whose products are consumed as quickly as they are produced, and work too cannot be the source of meaningfulness of the private life of an individual. Thus, the intelligent man in the Aristotelian sense steps out from the circle of the solitude of the private sphere into the vast expanse of the public sphere in order to free himself from the "privations" of private life (Arendt, 1958, p. 123).

The private sphere in modern terminology is reduced to "the economy"; the economy in

ancient Greece was the science and management of the household and never belonged among public-political concerns. In Arendt's view, the most important transformation that took place in the modern era is the displacement and replacement of "the economy" with politics. What is apparent and evident in her thought is that the term "political economy" is nothing more than a ridiculous contradiction; politics was the phenomenon pertaining to the public sphere, and the economy was the phenomenon pertaining to the private sphere. The distinction and separation between these two spheres was very fundamental. But this distinction was broken with the emergence of Christian ethics, because in Christian ethics the attribute of privation was removed from the private sphere. In Christianity, "it has always been emphasized that everyone should be concerned with his own trade and work, and political responsibility in the first place requires bearing the burden of responsibility." The aim of politics is the welfare and salvation of those who avoid involvement in public affairs (Arendt, 1958, p. 135).

The private sphere, from Arendt's perspective and based on the image of it that she presents from the period of ancient Greece, was the center of satisfying primary human needs through the two activities of labor and work, and therefore was fundamentally the sphere of inequality. The heads of families, as free men who could enter the public sphere or the agora, were the only free individuals. In this sense, the private sphere was clearly the sphere of inequality and unfreedom, and the master of the household could only, through violence—in contrast with power—compel his dependents into obedience. This understanding of the private sphere is essentially in opposition to the concept of human rights, and therefore, in the

theoretical reconstruction of Arendt's thought that we have presented so far, one cannot in any way speak of human rights in the private sphere. Thus, the concept of human rights in this sense can only be applied to the public sphere in which citizens exist. Where human beings have not yet become citizens, one cannot speak of the concept of human rights (Arendt, 1958, p. 156).

The Public Sphere as the Place of Human Rights

In the meaning that we explained of the private sphere and the public sphere, it is clear that the concept of human rights can only be applied to the public sphere. That is, the place where man is free and equal and can enter into action or political deed. Of course, this does not mean that Arendt defends any kind of injustice in the private sphere. Certainly, Arendt does not support any kind of violence, but in the precise conceptualization that she presents, man becomes man only in action, and of course all human beings have the right to enter into action. With this logic, the problem of possible contradictions in her thought is also resolved. According to Arendt, the public sphere is the main place of the manifestation of human rights. Therefore, here we briefly explain the concept of the public sphere.

According to Arendt, such definitions of politics, in both the liberalist and Marxist conceptions, possess non-political or economic traits and do not reflect the essence of politics. In her view, politics in its real sense has never been the servant and protector of society or of private interests, but rather the issue of politics has been the establishment of a public space for action. And in principle, wherever the

public sphere exists, one can speak of politics in its real sense, or in Arendt's expression, in its Greek sense (Ansari, 2000, p. 124).

Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, begins her discussion with emphasis and focus on the incorrect understanding of the Greek/Aristotelian term *Zoon Politikon* ("that is, the political animal"). In Arendt's view, the feature of being "political" distinguishes human beings from animals. But in the Latin translation—first in Seneca and then in Thomas Aquinas—Aristotle's "man is a political animal" was transformed into "man is by nature political, that is, social," and this distorted translation of the Greek and Aristotelian term shattered the authentic foundations of politics and ultimately overshadowed the Greek distinctions (Arendt, 1958, p. 145).

In the city-state, unlike the family, equality prevailed. Only equal individuals could participate in the activities of the city-state and engage in political action. In the Greek city-state, individuals possessed the characteristic of *isonomy* in the Greek expression; that is, individuals who engaged in the activities of the city-state, although they could be unequal from psychological or sociological aspects, as soon as they entered the political arena, they automatically became equal. Therefore, "freedom as a political phenomenon arose simultaneously with the emergence of the Greek city-states and was interpreted, since the time of Herodotus, as a condition in which citizens could live together without anyone ruling, and without any difference between rulers and the ruled" (Arendt, 1982, p. 156). Moreover, "equality... was the essence of freedom." Unlike contemporary thinkers who consider equality and freedom as two separate values, and even those like Max Weber who spoke of

a value-discord between the two, and unlike contemporary political foundations such as liberalism and socialism which are formed on the basis of emphasis on one of them, what can be understood in Hannah Arendt's thought is that freedom and equality are necessary and inseparable from each other. Only equals could be free, and freedom was the natural right of equals. Politics, which was formed in the public sphere, was the realm of equal individuals—that is, freedom—within which ruling and being ruled did not exist (Arendt, 1958, p. 164).

Conclusion

Hannah Arendt uses the term *public realm* in two senses: as a "space of appearance" and as a "common world," which, while closely related, were not identical. According to Arendt, the public realm is the location where political activities take shape; it's where individuals can meet, exchange ideas, debate their differences, and find collective solutions to their problems. Politics, in this sense, is the discourse of people who belong to a common world, in which public concerns can manifest and be articulated from various perspectives. From Arendt's point of view, for politics to occur, it's not enough for a collection of individuals to vote separately and independently based on their personal beliefs. Instead, politics happens where these individuals can engage in dialogue with one another in the public realm and appear to one another.

According to Arendt, political action is not a means to realize a particular end or goal. Rather, she believes that this is fundamentally "an end in itself." Engaging in political action is not merely for the sake of achieving

prosperity, but for the realization of the principles inherent in political life. To clarify this, one can mention examples like freedom, equality, justice, courage, and virtue—all of which serve as the main pillars of human rights. Global politics has its own specific values and ends, which are realized through public action and dialogue. In one of her final essays, "Public Rights and Private Interests," Hannah Arendt discusses the distinction between a person's life as an individual and the same person's life as a citizen. She writes: A person is constantly moving between two different kinds of existence throughout their life: within a realm that belongs to them, and also in a realm that is shared between them and other human beings. The "common good" and citizen concerns are in fact a "shared good" because they belong to a realm that we share collectively without owning it. The common good is in direct opposition to private interests.

Based on what has been stated so far, the concept of *human rights* only finds meaning in the public realm and is exactly synonymous with the action that occurs in this realm. Therefore, it is in complete opposition to the concept of privacy that is widespread today. According to Arendt, a person only becomes a true human being when they become an actor, and this understanding of a person is given meaning by the concept of human rights. It is only by understanding the concept of the public realm, as well as her notion of politics and political action, that the concept of human rights can be understood within Hannah Arendt's thought. It might not be an exaggeration to say that human rights in Arendt's thought are synonymous with the very concept of the public realm and its realization. Therefore, as soon as the public realm is formed and realized, the concept of human rights is also realized.

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