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Thinking about the Institutionalization of Care with Hannah Arendt: A Nonsense Filiation?

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Abstract: In recent decades, some feminists have turned to the writings of Hannah Arendt in order to propose a truly emancipatory ethic of care or to find the principles that could lead to the political institutionalization of care. Nevertheless, the feminist interpretations of Hannah Arendt are particularly contrasted. According to Sophie Bourgault, this recourse to Hannah Arendt is deeply problematic, mainly because of her strong distinction between the private and public spheres. This article discusses the relevance of using Arendt's concepts to think about the institutionalization of care by Joan Tronto. Indeed, the most recent analyses developed on the politics of care are shaped by Arendt's concepts such as power, amor mundi or by her conception of politics as a relationship.

Keywords: care; commun world; plurality



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1. Introduction

Paradoxically, several recent works highlight the relevance of Hannah Arendt's philosophy [1] for understanding and renewing the theory of care [2]. This is the case with Ella Myers [3], who proposes to draw from Arendt's philosophy the foundations of a democratic ethics of care, and Bonnie Mann [4] or Jess Kyle [5], among many others. It is possible to speak of a paradox insofar as Arendt's thought was very badly received in feminist circles in the 1980s. For Adrienne Rich [6], *The Human Condition* [7] is a "condescending and lame book [which] embodies the tragedy of a woman's spirit steeped in masculine ideology" [6] (pp. 211–212). Mary O'Brien turns Arendt into a female adept of male supremacy [8] (p. 9).

It is true that the philosopher Hannah Arendt never carried the voice of feminism. She abhorred any form of identity-based labeling that tends to obscure and distort political discourse. However, this does not mean that Arendt never raised the question of women's place in society. Diane Lamoureux [9] identifies three texts in the Arendtian corpus where the philosopher raises the question of the feminine condition. First, in a book review written in 1933 and published in *Essays in Understanding* [10], the philosopher underlines the fact that the women's emancipation through work places them in a situation of double constraint on their husbands since they continue to ensure the main domestic and household responsibilities, and in their employment, where they are often poorly remunerated [10] (pp. 70–71). Then, the work she devotes to Rahel Varnhagen emphasizes her dual status as a woman and a Jew [11]. Finally, in *Men in Dark Times* [12], Arendt's interest in Rosa Luxembourg evokes the difference that constitutes her femininity in order to understand her trajectory. However, one would look in vain for a developed reflection on feminism in the writings of Hannah Arendt.

The connection between the concepts forged by Hannah Arendt and care would be eminently problematic for Sophie Bourgault [2]. Indeed, she rightly points out that one of the salient features of the German philosopher's political thought is the strict separation between the public domain, the place of politics, the private domain and the place of satisfaction of needs. This separation leads Arendt to denounce the social rise as likely to deviate political action and would invalidate any rapprochement between feminist theories

of care and Arendt's political theory [11] (p. 14). Indeed, for Arendt, the confusion of the politics and the social risks undermining freedom because the prominence of the social might orient politics towards an instrumental logic of satisfying needs. Such logic tends to transform action into doing.

Our contribution aims to propose a reading of the key concepts of Arendt's political philosophy (world, plurality and power) that could shed light on the conciliation between her thought and the theory of care. Several works have indeed outlined bridges between Arendt's concepts and the theory of care. This is the case of those led by Lamoureux [9]. After having restored the difficulties of the dialogue between Arendt and feminism, we will synthesize the main foundations of the theory of care, and then we will see in what way the Arendtian concepts can be particularly relevant for thinking about care.

2. Arendt and Feminism: The Reasons for a Misunderstanding

Hannah Arendt's distinction between the private and the public and her rejection of social interference in political action are at the heart of the criticisms that feminist currents have made of the philosopher's thought.

2.1. *The Private and the Public in Their Political Articulation*

Arendt [7] is firmly convinced that politics requires a strict separation between the public sphere (*der öffentliche Raum*) and the private sphere of the household (*der Haushalt*) devoted to the preservation of life. If the first is the place of freedom and action, the second is that of necessity and life. Man thus belongs to two distinct orders of existence: the private domain with what is proper to him (*idion*) and the public domain that he shares with other men (*koinon*). Arendt draws from the Greek tradition the opposition between the private as domestic sphere (*oikos*) and the public around the city (*polis*). As for Aristotle, Arendt characterizes the economy by the management of domestic affairs. The domestic sphere is that of the satisfaction of vital needs. Additionally, the economy is a means towards the "good life" within the *oikos*.

The private sphere and the public sphere are opposed on several points. The public sphere implies a free meeting of citizens and an equally free exchange of speech. The private sphere is subject to the sphere of necessity and unequal relationships. The public sphere is the place of light, a necessary medium for dialogue and exchanges. The private domain is a place of darkness and intimacy, necessary for birth and death. It also shelters what is considered shameful but necessary, the bodily needs and their satisfaction. It is finally the home of love. Françoise Collin [13] underlines that Arendtian love is to the private domain, what respect is to the public domain. Love is a kind of respect for the other that reveals the identity of the lover because insofar as only a disinterested impulse can be qualified as love, it leads the lover to reveal himself. Love distances those who experience it from the public sphere, and they are only reintroduced to it by giving life, by the child they introduce into the world.

The public domain is public in a double sense: it is the field of appearance, and it is also what is common to all. Public gardens are places where my actions are exposed to the eyes of all. I appear in all transparency. This quality of the public space to be the place where the men show up confers him an objectivity, which results from the multitude of the perceptions printed by subjectivities also multiple. The public domain provides a space where citizens can appear in a face-to-face manner that forbids anonymity and engages their responsibility. Perceived by all, the public domain constitutes a collective memory, which guarantees the permanence of meaning. Public gardens are also public in the sense that they belong to everyone and are not my property. Additionally, they are common because they proceed from men without ever belonging to any man in particular.

The division operated by Arendt between private space and public space was strongly attacked by the feminists. They denounce, in particular, the inoperative character of this distinction. Jean Bethke Elshtain [14] reproaches Arendt for her reductive interpretation of the private space. Arendt turns a blind eye to the fact that, historically, the private

sphere, understood as the domestic sphere, has been attributed to women as a place to ensure the vital necessities and to take care of the family. With access to the public sphere being forbidden to them, they could only exist in the hushed space of what was out of public view. For men, the home was a place of refuge from public life. According to Elshtain, the Arendtian distinction would lead to the endorsement of patriarchal and, more generally, masculine domination. For Couture [15], the example of the struggle of the women in the workers' movements reveals all the fragility of Arendt's thought on this point. Arendt criticizes feminist struggles for not being political struggles. Based on natural attributes (the distinction between man/woman), the feminist claims are directed on social questions—thus not political. Against Arendt, Couture suggests that these struggles proceed precisely from a wrenching from nature. Indeed, if workers fight against the alienation of work, women struggle against their confinement to the role of reproducer and guardian of the home. Feminist demands for emancipation from a so-called "feminine essence" associated with a division of political functions are opposed to an essentialist-inspired alienation. The women thus claim the freedom to belong to the world. Their struggle is, in this sense, fully political, contrary to what Hannah Arendt seems to think. Benhabib [16] comes to wonder if the concept of public space that Arendt borrows from Antiquity is tailored to fit the complexity of the institutions and problems of the modern world. For her part, Hanna Fenichel Pitkin [17] argues that the distinction between public space and private life is totally inoperative in the modern age.

For Clarke [18], it is possible to confront two interpretations of the Arendtian separation of the private and the public. A first register of interpretation would see Arendt as an adversary of modernity associated with the drifts of a productivist and consumerist mass society. A second register of interpretation would underline the influence of Rosa Luxembourgeois thought on Arendt. This influence would be revealed in the interest expressed by Arendt for participatory democracy and in particular for workers' councils.

2.2. *The Rejection of the Social*

The social is defined by Arendt as a space in which men are linked by needs. It derives from the cycle of the vital process of production–consumption. The modern world, which was built around the sacralization of work, saw the emergence of the social question, which Arendt refers to as "the advent of the social". Arendt paid little attention in her work to issues of social justice. In two of her texts, the essay *On Revolution* [19] and her *Reflections on Little Rock* [20], she separates political action from the temptation to use power for social justice purposes. For Arendt, the French Revolution would have failed precisely because its initial goals of citizen political emancipation quickly faded away in favor of the overriding goal of solving the "social question." Providing a solution to manage the misery of the popular masses became a priority concern that overshadowed the initial political considerations of the French Revolution. The Jacobins very quickly sacrificed the search for stabilizing political emancipation to focus on improving the material conditions of life of the people. This urgency would have justified the terror and the confiscation of the democratic word under the pretext that the social question imposed beforehand a collective submission: "It was necessity, the urgent needs of the people that unleashed the terror and sent the Revolution to its doom" [19] (p. 60). For this reason, Arendt contrasts the failure of the French Revolution with the success of the American Revolution in the essay *On Revolution* [19].

For Arendt, the social is thus the place of a kind of deviation from the political. It is even the opposite of politics. While politics is deliberation, plurality and freedom, the social is only the claim of a starving people, the product of vital requirements that send man back to animality. Already in *The Human Condition* [7], Hannah Arendt deplored that the modern era signs the victory of the social over the political. The modern advent of the social makes activities that were once devolved into the private sphere, such as productive work or professional relations, the center of the collective interest. Arendt does not hesitate to interpret this narrowing of the political field as an erasure of what makes man specific.

With the advent of the social, the public becomes a function of the private, and the latter becomes the one and only common concern.

In her reciprocal delimitation of the social and the politics, Arendt faced many criticisms and reactions. Her lifelong friend, Mary McCarthy, questioned her at a conference Hannah Arendt held in Toronto in 1972: "What are we supposed to do on the public stage, in the public space, when we are not concerned ourselves with the social? What is left...? If all the questions of economics, human welfare, racial diversity, if everything that belongs to the social sphere is excluded from the political scene, then I am fooled. All that is left is war and speeches. But speeches cannot be just speeches. They must have an object purpose". According to Mary McCarthy, Arendt's response to this objection did not satisfy most of the philosopher's opponents. In an attempt to counter her friend's argument, Arendt used the question of the right to adequate housing as an example. In her view, each question has a dual political aspect and a social aspect, which should be separated. In the question of the right to decent housing, the political aspect consists of determining whether the granting of decent housing allows the person to be released in order to participate in political life. The social aspect is related to a question of justice, which implies that all members of a community should have the same right to access decent housing. The right to decent housing, understood in this sense, should not be debated because it is self-evident. Politics can only emerge when man is freed from vital necessities. This may have led Margaret Canovan [21] to assert that Arendt's political theory would be elitist because of its lack of consideration for questions of economic and social equality. Indeed, in Arendt's thought, politics can only concern those who can fully dedicate themselves to action by being freed from material constraints.

Hannah Arendt was convinced of the weakness of the notion of the social, affirming that it is an obstacle to the political apprehension of the human condition. According to her, the notion of social is conceived as a vague encompassing which brings together the discourses which attempt to rationalize a posteriori the advent of modern society. For Arendt, the social is the index of the penetration of the private sphere in the political sphere. The economic production becomes the priority of societies, and this prioritization comes to pervert the public space. To speak about the social is to mix the public and the private, to conceive the public space as the place of a gigantic household of which it is advisable to discuss the mode of management. Linked to work and to its organization, the social gangrenes the politics. This is why it evacuates any question relating to the social question by considering that social problems are "matters of administration to be put into the hands of experts, rather than issues which could be settled by the twofold process of decision and persuasion" [19] (p. 91).

How can we explain such a disinterest of Hannah Arendt for these questions that she evacuates out of politics? A rapprochement with the Kantian perspective can be sketched. For Kant, the State's function is to civilize inter-individual relations, not to ensure the happiness of its members. Happiness is to be understood as psychological and ideological aspiration of individuals. For Kant, happiness is the satisfaction of all our inclinations, both extensive, in terms of their variety, and intensive, in terms of degree, and also in terms of their duration. Such subjective aspirations cannot give rise to valid legal rules because the law is not so much determined by content as by the constraint attached to it. The public will must not be oriented by a eudemonic motive. Indeed, the conception of happiness is so relative and indeterminate that, despite the desire shared by every man to achieve happiness, no one can ever say exactly what would make him happy. Happiness is an ideal of the imagination, not an ideal of reason. Therefore, the legislator who claims to act for the happiness of his people should be omniscient. The aim of the legislator is not thus to achieve sensible well-being but rather rational well-being, which is none other than the preservation of the State through obedience to the laws. The paternal or despotic government considers its subjects as minors incapable of making a decision by themselves. It therefore tries to impose its vision of happiness on them. A government that would be founded on the principle of benevolence towards the people, like a father towards

his children, is a paternalistic government, where the subjects are obliged to behave in a simply passive way, like minor children, incapable of distinguishing what is really useful or harmful to them and who must expect simply from the judgment of the head of state the way in which they must be happy, and simply from his goodness that he also wants it, is the greatest despotism that one can conceive [22–24].

The State, as thought by Kant, must not have a social function; it must not intervene outside the preservation of the fundamental political liberties of which it is the guarantor. The interference of the state in private affairs would slow down the vitality of the economic community. Kant is opposed to the institution of permanent state relief for the poorest because it would lead to making “poverty a profession for the lazy”. State intervention in the social sphere destabilizes the normal play (game) of the economy and favors the emergence of perverse effects such as a form of encouragement for the lazy. Arendt’s repugnance for the social question reflects Kantian distrust and the link he makes between political interest in material equality and despotism.

Arendt is hostile to the violence by which the social question manifests itself when it bursts into the political sphere. “Wherever the breakdown of a traditional authority set the poor of the earth on the march, where they left the obscurity of their misfortune and stream upon the market-place, their furor seemed as irresistible as the motion of the stars, a torrent rushing forward with elemental force and engulfing a whole world” [19] (p. 113). We must not forget that it was hunger and misery that led in part to the Bolshevik Revolution, to the Jacobin terror, as well as to many bloody revolutions. Misery can only lead to explosions of anger that swallow up politics with them.

3. From an Ethic of Care to a Political Theory of Care

Since the 1980s, care has become an ethic in its own right. Whether an ethic of the solicitude—concern for others and attention to the other—or an ethic of the ordinary [25], it attempts to understand the concrete moral norms that characterize a society or the community. For representatives of care ethics, morality cannot be constructed in the abstract from hypothetical moral dilemmas or on the basis of universal moral principles [26]. In contrast to a conception of the selfish and rational, autonomous and independent individual carried by deontological and consequentialist moral theory care emphasizes interdependence and places vulnerability as an “original condition” in response to the Rawlsian “original position” [27]. (Rawls proposes to imagine that people determine together, behind a veil of ignorance, the principles of society organization. The veil of ignorance prevents them from favoring their own interests because they know nothing about the position they will occupy in society). “Throughout our lives, all of us go through varying degrees of dependence and independence, of autonomy and vulnerability” [28] (p. 135). Vulnerability is then constitutive of the person, and the ideal of autonomy becomes fictional.

The moral foundations of concern for others, nurturance, compassion, attentiveness and responsibility constitute the values of caring for Tronto [28]. They are opposed to rational ethics and justice. Rather than relying on principles and rules of a theory of justice’s law that apply to all in an indeterminate way, care focuses on the responsibilities and relationships understanding of particular beings in their singularity.

Long focused on gender, care or work issues, care is introduced in the field of politics, especially with Joan Tronto in the 1990s. For the author, feminist theories have not led to political change. Arguments based on the “women’s morality” have proved ineffective, and care has remained confined to the private sphere, a domain attributed to women, and relegated to the rank of secondary activities. For Tronto, moral arguments are to be understood in a political context, in the sense that this latter may affect their acceptability: “Widely accepted moral values constitute the context within which we interpret all “moral arguments” [28] (p. 6) and certain interpretations may limit the consideration of other ideas of morality. This awareness helps us understand how these boundaries shape morality. In *Moral Boundaries, A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*, Tronto [28] analyzes these

“moral boundaries” that have kept care values peripheral. The theory of care she proposes invites not only an ethical practice but a moral reflection by redefining the existing moral boundaries that she has identified between morality and politics—the “moral point of view”—and between public and private life.

3.1. Moral Boundaries, Excluding Care

In recent Western and liberal thought, politics is situated outside the domain of morality. Moral values are introduced into politics only insofar as they correspond to its requirements. The history of the relationship between morality and politics is indeed characterized by two opposite tendencies. For a first tradition, eminently illustrated by Platonic philosophy, politics must be conceived as a kind of enlarged morality. The aim of the politician must be to guarantee an organization that favors fair behavior. For a second tradition initiated by Machiavelli, politics and morality are distinguished both by their ends and by their means.

Fitting into the Aristotelian framework where morality and politics are closely intertwined, Tronto proposes a concept of care having the capacity to describe a moral and political version of the good life, thus escaping the dilemmas of seeing these as separate spheres. “When the world is rigidly divided between the realms of power and of virtue, we lose sight of the facts that power requires a moral base, and more importantly for our present boundary between politics and morality prevents us from seeing that moral theory conveys power and privilege” [28] (p. 93). Tronto then considers that care can play both the role of a moral value and politically found a good society. Politics and morality are no longer thought of in an instrumental relationship or considered as areas of life that should be kept separate but become closely linked. “The practice of care that I have developed and described . . . , can itself be understood not only as a moral concept, but as a political concept as well. Because the practice of care is also a political idea, I do not face the problem of trying to import a moral concept into a political order” [28] (p. 161). Tronto is going to make the crossing between the moral concept and political concept the starting point of his reflection, which is all the more interesting if we note the conception of morality understood as referring to the conduct of our relations with others [29], a domain that Arendt attributes to politics, morality, for the latter, concerning the individual in his singularity. [29] (p. 195).

By describing care as an attitude or disposition, it is easier to assign it to the private sphere. Thus considered by the patriarchal model as a female prerogative, care suffers from traditional gender roles. The idea of a gender-differentiated morality reinforces some of the existing moral boundaries and makes it difficult to transform our conceptions of politics, morality and gender roles.

This association of care/women or care/providers of care, reflecting gender, class and racial inequalities, obscures its complexity and the fact that it is inextricably linked to all aspects of life in general. We can also analyze the exclusion of care from the public sphere in terms of power [30]. The public sphere is of far greater importance than the private sphere, and since political life is identified with public life, care’s reference to a private life means that it is beyond or below political concerns [28] (p. 96).

Considering it also as a practice, Tronto [28] allows care to escape this confinement. By embodying a moral ideal, while already being a contextualized practice, care is no longer excluded from the public sphere and can therefore require a political theory: without a policy of care, the ethics of care is not only deprived of its means, as if the relationship between morality and politics were external, but also of its conditions of existence [30].

Without going back entirely to the moral sentiments of the Scottish Enlightenment, Tronto notes that the care ethic presents certain similarities with this thought because this philosophy gives a different idea of the relationship between moral life and political life than the Kantian approach. Since the end of the 18th century, the Kantian model has been almost completely unchallenged: the Kantian moral theory excludes any analysis of morality that appeals to the emotions, to the circumstances of everyday life, as Kant considers them irrational. Morality, then, becomes a domain located beyond the world of emotions and feelings and belongs only

to reason. It appears universal, where the actor is presented as objective, autonomous, distant and guided by abstract rationality [28] (p. 37). These assumptions divert our attention from the value of care in our lives. However, by being part of a “movement to rehabilitate emotions and feelings in moral theory, the ethics of care legitimizes what is in the private domain as political” [31] (p. 321). Arendt and Tronto agree on the “Kantian error”. For Tronto [28], Kant’s conception of ethical life sets the boundaries around morality understood as an autonomous sphere of human life. There is a requirement that morality be derived from human reason in the form of universal, abstract and formal principles. These boundaries request that the relation of the social and the political to morality is not central to morality itself and suppose that morality is rigorously separated from self-interest, thus reflecting “the moral point of view”, i.e., a set of universalizable, objective principles describing what is right. Kant’s fundamental error, in the Arendtian thought, is that his moral philosophy misses the moral judgment in its confrontation with a singular situation [29] (p. 197). Kantian morality is then a morality of impotence in the sense that man remains a prisoner of himself and is unable to take the risk of commitment with others because he is stuck to an ethic of conviction. However, action implies a constant engagement with others; it is “relationship with”. Kantian morality would therefore be unsuitable for thinking about human action because it forbids any relationship with the plurality of individuals (although Kant is not hostile to plurality) [29] (p. 196).

3.2. *Conditions including Care*

For Tronto, taking account of otherness but also the fact of thinking care in relation to the world and considering it as power are necessary conditions for a political conception of care.

3.2.1. *From Otherness to Plurality*

Tronto argues that unless we abandon our current way of thinking about the boundary between morality and politics, it is not possible to honestly approach the problem of otherness. To think about otherness, then, is to rethink the boundary between morality and politics [28] (p. 63), in particular, by recognizing the partiality (of gender, of class) at work in universalist morality. It is crucial, in any feminist theory, to take into account questions of distance and otherness, to consider what our relations with others, close and distant, should be, to pay attention to situating in a general context the conditions in which others are found, in contrast to “treat morally distant others who we think are similar to ourselves” [28] (p. 13). For Tronto [28], otherness is an inherent element of the human condition in our Western societies, citing Simone de Beauvoir: “Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus is it that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself...” [28] (p. 70). Kohlberg’s theory “masks” this otherness and “makes it impossible for moral reasoners to deal with the ‘others’ they have created” [29] (p. 72), a process that Tronto calls assimilation, for it assumes that people are interchangeable. Tronto suggests considering the position of the other as he himself expresses it: thus, one is engaged from the standpoint of the other, but not simply by presuming that the other is exactly like the self. From such a perspective, “we may well imagine that questions of otherness would be more adequately addressed than they are in current moral frameworks that presume that people are interchangeable” [28] (p. 136). For the author, only the otherness thus conceived makes it possible to think about plurality.

Plurality in Arendt’s philosophy allows confrontation with otherness: a plurality of equal beings and yet radically different from each other [32]. Otherness is an important aspect of plurality; it is because of it that we are unable to say what one thing is without distinguishing it from something else. Plurality is properly the condition of the human existence, and it introduces the otherness by which we can go out of ourself: a human being exists only from the other human beings. World’s plurality is elaborated in this acceptance of the uniqueness of each one. “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live” [7] (p. 7).

For Arendt, politics, the place of action, is based on a fact: human plurality. Plurality is therefore a factual condition of action. “Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality” [7] (p. 176). In *The Life of the Mind*, she writes, “plurality is the law of the Earth” [33] (p. 19). Politics, for Arendt, originates in the space-that-is-between-men and is constituted as a relation; it is what happens between men in the plural [34]. The institution of the common world is realized through action, thought of as activity and as an entire dimension of life—what man does—as a pragmatic requirement of action. The constitution of this intermediate space, this public space, is the precondition for the emergence of politics, so action takes place in the public space.

For Tronto, including care in the public space is a necessary condition for the emergence of a politics of care. Care, as a central aspect of human life, requires a universalist principle: “we must care for those around us and those with whom we form society, this principle requiring a political commitment that contributes to valuing care and reshaping institutions” [28] (p. 178).

Could care, through its practice of otherness and its desire for pluralism, allow the emergence of political action in the Arendtian sense of the term as a co-action in a common world? A world no longer described as the juxtaposition of autonomous and independent individuals, distant and similar, but described in the form of the relationship to the other.

3.2.2. Care as a Relationship to the World

However, Tronto does not limit the care to the interactions that humans have with others, she will include the possibility that it can also apply to objects and especially to the environment. It is a holistic vision that Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto will propose by defining care “as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes not only our identities but also our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” [28] (p. 103). Involving our “environment”, Tronto and Fisher [35] go further than Gilligan, who limited care to the individual needs. Care is here more than a relationship to oneself and to another; care defines the relationship with the world. It thus extends beyond the private sphere and becomes part of the public space; care as a political concept in its own right will allow a parallel with the Arendtian’s care of the world. The latter is a central concept in Arendt, everything brings her back to the “care of the world”, to the “love of the world”: the *Amor Mundi*, defined by taking up and transforming Saint Augustin’s concept of love of neighbor. Equals in front of their destiny, men are also interdependent since they cannot live outside a chain of reciprocal exchanges. *Amor Mundi* determines the being-together of men, that is to say, their worldly and political consciousness. Through love of the world, society becomes the vector of self-conscious solidarity and is no longer an organization based on reasoned exchange. Only by belonging to the world can we feel at home on this earth; it is the moral responsibility of every human being to care for the world in which he or she lives. As such, could the ethics of care allow action and be reconciled with politics?

3.2.3. Care as “The Power of the Weak”

As opposed to life, the world is a stable environment. This stability is essential for Arendt. However, does not the vulnerability of man refer to the vulnerability of the world [36]. If the concern for life is, in Jonas, immediately a concern for the world, the concern for the world in Arendt is a distancing from the question of life, in the sense that the process of maintaining life can be carried out without the assistance of a human world.

For Arendt, there is a rupture between human existence and the biological activity of the living, and politics must remain free of the tasks of biological life [7]. The submission of the society to the condition of the life is done to the detriment of belonging to the world and of plurality.

Care can appear as the privileged site of a government of life, especially if we consider it as a power. Because it is one of the promises of care for Tronto [28] (p. 122). She defines it as one of the “powers of the weak” [28] (p. 122) because it supports life by responding to the satisfaction of needs. In this sense, one might think of care as fundamentally anti-Arendtian politically: the satisfaction of needs, but it is, above all, profoundly anti-capitalist: the satisfaction of needs rather than the pursuit of profit [28] (p. 175). In a world where politics is described as limited to the protection of interests, there is a redefinition of power here, as well as a different conception of the notion of needs. The error of universalism, for Tronto, is to consider needs as commodities [28] (p. 138). For Nussbaum, the concept of need is very useful: By introducing the specific vocabulary of “capabilities” introduced by Sen, she opens a framework in which it is possible to form more objective judgments about needs [28] (p. 140).

Arendt’s idea of power, especially in its distinction between power and domination, can be relevant to the political conception of power and its attributes: power, force, authority and violence. Political domination, which denies any individuality, goes against a power in common, as a capacity to live and act together, the only power able to build a common world. A power that derives from the characteristics of the action: plurality and concertation.

Indeed, Tronto insists on the conditions of a democratic and pluralist care. She affirms that “care, is only viable as a political ideal in the context of liberal, pluralistic, democratic institutions” [28] (p. 158). The socio-economic relations constitute, from now on, an irreducible dimension of the social with an extension of the merchandising to all the fields of life. Power as a capacity to be and to act fades away in front of the preponderance of the market and in favor of a politics reduced to the preservation of wealth, contributing to maintaining vast relations of domination, gender, class and race, inherent to the care and current conditions of power. Ultimately limiting the human being or even the environment to its economic component.

To replace needs in a political context, as Tronto proposes, is not only to extract them from the economic sphere, but also to operate a shift in our conceptions of human nature: connecting “our notion of ‘interests’ with the broader cultural concern with ‘needs’”. A shift from production utility to the care: care of others, care of the planet, care of the world.

4. Thinking about Care with Arendt?

It is important to differentiate care from life, to relate it to the individual, to the other and to the world; to consider it politically, by going beyond the moral boundaries highlighted by feminist studies, by questioning interdependence, plurality and caring, in a theory that could question the Arendtian social, notably in the definition of the “needs” of our current world; and finally to propose a rereading of power, thought in terms of relationship.

4.1. World

The notion of world is central to understanding the specific originality of Tronto’s conception of care. Care, which consists of being concerned about (caring about), must lead us to want to “repair our world”. Let us recall the definition given by Tronto and Fischer: “On the most general level, we suggest that caring be viewed as a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our ‘world’, so that we can live in it as well as possible. This world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web” [28] (p. 103).

Several elements of this definition are worth emphasizing. First, care is not limited to the interactions of humans with each other. It applies not only to others but also to inert objects and the environment [28] (p. 103). Furthermore, care is not a dual or inter-individual relationship. Care is too often described as a dyadic relationship, modeled on the relationship that unites a mother to her child; this representation presupposes that care is

an individual dimension, even though few societies in the world have been able to conceive of the education of children as the sole responsibility of the mother. This dyadic reading of care could only lead to the rejection of the different ways in which care can intervene on the political level. Care, far from being a purely individual disposition, would characterize any practice whose aim is the maintenance, perpetuation or repair of our world.

The notion of the world is also central to Arendt's philosophy through the notion of "world building", "care of the world" or *Amor Mundi*. The world is what allows us to be human. Indeed, Arendt's analysis of the totalitarian phenomenon led her to be convinced of the absence of human nature [37]. Man is characterized by his condition, i.e., his inscription in a state of the world, which is constituted by the whole of the durable works that he makes. The world is thus populated by artificial objects that allow men to go beyond the strict determinations of their biological inscription and to be part of sustainability. The excess of the human claims offered by the technique induces a radical transformation of the world of that we forget to take care of. The world extends between men, and this "between"—much more than (as it is often thought) men or man—is today the object of the greatest concern". The world is not reduced in Arendt to a simple set of functional objects. It becomes a world by offering man a durable living place, in which he can find reference points for his own existence and in which we can find an echo of our own voice. The world is not human because it was made by men, and it does not become human because the voice of man resounds in it but only when it has become an object of dialogue. This notion of world has received recent attention from researchers in philosophy in relation to the Anthropocene. Following the analyses of Arendt, Hyvönen [38] elaborates a notion of "material culture of care" as a modality of mediating human interactions with non-human nature. If the notion of care, as it is used by Arendt, is "usually associated with the narrowly political activities of democratic participation" [38] (p. 98), according to Hyvönen, care should also be applied to human's relationship with nature.

4.2. Plurality

A second point of intersection between Tronto and Arendt is found in the concept of otherness. For Tronto, care defined as a political ideal can only be viable in the context of free, pluralistic and democratic institutions [28] (p. 158). Tronto is more likely to refer to the concept of otherness than to that of plurality, but the two are intimately linked. For Arendt, it is the recognition of human plurality that conditions the very possibility of an authentic political project. In a letter to Jaspers on 4 March 1951, Arendt states: "Western philosophy has never had and has not been able to have a precise idea of politics because it was necessarily addressed to man—that is, to abstract man, in his general idea, not in his particular conditions—and held the reality of plurality to be incidental" [33]. To take into account human plurality, to pose it as a condition of politics, consists not only in recognizing that men are united by their diversity. The world we inhabit is not populated by clones whose essence would be fixed once and for all by their nature. It is populated by unique and irreplaceable identities. According to Arendt, by acting and speaking, men make it clear who they are, actively reveal their unique personal identities, and thus make their appearance in the human world [7]. Politics must be defined as that which allows each man to reveal what makes him irreplaceable. In *The eggs speak up*, Arendt takes up the popular formula according to which "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs" and proposes analyzing the foundations that it reflects. The image of the omelet refers to the transformation of society into a shapeless mass of substitutable individuals, impossible to distinguish in their singular identity. In the omelet, the eggs are always present, but they are no longer identifiable as such [10]. The society thought from the metaphor of the omelet designates the society directed by the tyrant and made homogeneous by terror, as the democratic "mass society", governed in appearance by the principle of freedom, but which does not escape an effort of standardization in which the individuals deny their specificities and are reduced to masses of conforming and interchangeable individuals. This is the case in societies where politics has given way to the economy and its laws of

operation, which demand standardization of behavior. Indeed, the individual reduced to a simple *homo economicus* is thought of as a rational being, totally predictable and anticipable from the understanding of his short-, medium- or long-term interests.

However, politics, according to Arendt, should always be primarily concerned with eggs, with taking care of them, rather than having as a priority objective the success of omelets. We find here a convergence with the principle of care and the very possibility of its extension from the moral to the political field. Instead of aligning individual singularities with a sanitized and homogenized mass, politics must strive to preserve singularity because only it can allow for plurality, the condition of a human world.

4.3. Power

For Sintomer [39] (p. 117), the notion of power constitutes the keystone of Arendtian political philosophy. Power is conceived by Arendt as the result of the interaction between men; it is an intersubjective notion. Power springs up among men when they act together and falls back as soon as they disperse. Power does not translate into the “I want” of an isolated individual but into the “I can”, which results from an action carried out in common. It is thus always uncertain and dependent on a common potential that may disperse. This allows us to understand why power is not owned since it results from common actions. It can either decrease or increase again and again.

Tronto’s conception of power emphasizes the idea of strength and power. The powerful accumulate power, which is distributed in a very unequal way in contemporary societies. Thus, women are virtually excluded from power in political, economic and cultural institutions in the United States.

Yet, moral theories are not designed to take account of these inequalities of power. The “every man for himself” doctrines of universal moral judgment mask the inequalities of resources, power, and privilege that have made it possible for some to succeed and not others [28] (p. 147). These resource inequalities, by preventing citizens from accessing equal power, are important political issues, not mere theoretical dilemmas.

For Tronto, feminist theory stems from the attempt to end the marginal status of women in society, which leads to them remaining on the periphery of power circles. To share the power of those who are central, there are few options, for if it is difficult to be admitted among the powerful, it is even more difficult to cause their fall. To try to obtain power from the margins of the system, to persuade those who have power to share it, the feminist theory puts forward only two options: the recourse to the logic of identity (to become similar to those who are already in place) or to the logic of difference (to have something interesting to offer them) [28] (p. 20). On the other hand, Tronto will propose to see the world differently: to ensure that the activities that legitimize the accumulation of power among the powerful are less valued and that those that could legitimize a sharing of power with the “outsiders” are more appreciated. This process will consist, for Tronto, “in recognizing that the current boundaries of moral and political life are drawn such that the concerns and activities of the relatively powerless are omitted from the central concerns of society” [28] (p. 20).

Referring to the theories of moral sentiments, she shows that care, extended to concern for oneself and others and no longer reduced to the sole experience of women, could be morally central until the 19th century. With the development of trade, the place of care in societies will be increasingly reduced. “Moral sense” proposed by Hutcheson or Smithian “sympathy” will give way to rationality and moral universalism, where only independence and autonomy constitute the essence of life. (Hutcheson, following Shaftesbury, thinks that we can account for our moral evaluations by postulating the existence of a “moral sense”; they conceived the moral sense as a natural organ of moral perception, Hume and Smith argue that this concept has no explanatory value and that our moral judgments are best explained from our propensity to “sympathize” with the feelings of others. They argue that our moral evaluations are generated primarily by our social and affective interactions.)

Tronto wishes to reconnect with this Scottish Enlightenment centrality of care and to present it as the “organization of our world”. Considered as “support for life” (without care, children would not become adults, men would not have children to inherit their fortune, etc.), it constitutes a power, and it is one of the promises of care as the “power of the weak”.

To define power, Tronto will refer to the analyses of C. Wright Mills: “my notion is partly Marxian, that the powerful are members of the class that can command resources, and partly Weberian, that the powerful are those who occupy status positions and can command resources in society” [40] (p. 185). In other words, the decisions that will most affect people’s lives are made by those, and only those, who are in the “command positions” of society. From the perspective of care, Tronto will point out that the institutions that are thus placed at the center of power (government, armies and firms) will shape those that are pushed to the periphery (family, schools, churches, hospitals). Moreover, the conquest and the satisfaction of needs thanks to the work of the subjugated classes will come to serve the political and economic interests of the ruling classes [28] (p. 227). There will be a publicization of the questions of care, notably during the 20th century under the action of the government and the market [28] (p. 173): certain private, family-related care will be assumed by the State (social assistance, etc.), the latter taking on the role of “head of the household” [28] (p. 173), and non-family-related care will be provided by the market. From now on, only those who can afford it receive care independently of their needs, thus creating an unequal distribution of resources. Care thus reveals the ways in which the powerful monopolize resources. If care is used by the powerful to manifest their power and to preserve it, it also makes it possible to reveal these relations of power and to grasp how it is distributed or not in the society, from where the necessity of its confinement: “It is the enormous real power of care that makes its containment necessary” [28] (p. 122).

For Tronto, the ultimate strength of care as a political concept lies in its ability to serve as a basis for political change. Consisting of “a way to collect the “powers of the weak”” [28] (p. 177), care could go beyond a simple renunciation by the powerful of some of their power. Tronto’s differentiation between the weak and the powerful can be understood as that between the dominated and the dominants. According to Arendt, power is not an individual property; one does not possess power. Moreover, domination is individual, and power is common. Arendt’s distinction between power and domination could shed new light on the integration of women as political actors and, more generally, of people who are generally excluded—one of the most important issues to be resolved for care. Power derives from the characteristics of action: plurality and concertation. In this Arendtian conception, the power of care could be born from the concerted action of the “weak” and of the “dominated”, whose aim would be to found a new political body that would allow them to maintain their freedom and power through collective action. It is because the source and the objective of power are identical, namely action in its plurality, that power appears to be its own principle. This conception of power anchored in plurality implies the fact that it cannot be only identified with the powerful. It is an opposition to the values of individualism in the very conception of power. In this sense, the notions of weak and powerful would become obsolete in a politics of care, considered as an alternative to violent domination, a politics at the service of the good of the world.

5. Conclusions

The reconstitution of the reasons that led some feminist authors to reject Hannah Arendt’s thought makes it possible to understand the reasons for this misunderstanding. The question of gender is not considered a relevant question by the philosopher, and its separation of the private and public spheres has been considered an element invalidating any claim to reconcile the fundamental principles of care with Arendt’s conception of the politics. Nevertheless, a careful reading of Arendt’s corpus allows us to assert that a rapprochement between her own philosophy and the theories of care, in particular the thought of Tronto on which we have focused in this study, is possible. If we have underlined the extent to which the notions of world, power or plurality, as conceived by

Arendt, resonated in the perspective of care as opened by Tronto, another rapprochement would deserve to be made in particular on the notion of interest.

By making care exist in the public space, Tronto allows it to become a power, no longer thought of in terms of domination but defined as the capacity of humans to act together. Arendt then allows us to conceive a politics of care linked to action, putting people in relation with a view to a common world, sharing the conditions of plurality in a world populated by interdependent beings. Arendt and Tronto make it possible to pose the concern for the other and the concern for the world at a political level, in a society vector of solidarity and no longer based on the defense of individual interests, thus shifting the notion of interest toward care: the care of the world in the Arendtian sense of *Amor Mundi*.

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