

Two Loves Diverge: Education and A Love that Does Not Expel

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The concept of love is not inconsequential in philosophical and educational scholarship from conceptions in antiquity to modernity. Two contemporary notions of love have greatly influenced the field of philosophy of education in addition to many disciplines and social discourses. Hannah Arendt and James Baldwin's distinct conceptions of love unveil a historical tension that questions where love can exist and what it is for. Here I lean primarily on Arendt and Baldwin's writings on love from the 1950s through the 1960s, acknowledging their thinking shifted throughout their lifetimes.¹ Such senses of love from Arendt and Baldwin can walk side by side for a moment until they diverge in thought and action. Their divergence is evidenced through their convergence in Arendt's 1962 letter to Baldwin in response to his "Letter from a Region of My Mind." Their conceptual deviation from one another is framed by the concept of race in the United States. Through a situated reading of Arendt and Baldwin, I seek to understand a love that either holds one in the world or a lovelessness that expels one from it. The phenomenon of expulsion is significant in discussing the convergence and divergence between their conceptions of love. The risk of expulsion—whether it be understood as school, social, political, or world expulsion—is an existential concern for everyone. All forms of expulsion may be experienced within the school. However, they are often defined as disciplinary. Expulsion becomes a significant concern for folks who are racialized, particularly Black students and students with disabilities as they are disproportionately expelled, suspended, and excluded as a form of punishment.²

In this paper, I question what is revealed when we read love through Arendt alongside love through Baldwin. Where do they converge? Where do they diverge? And why? As a result, I hold my contention that love must not be ignorant to the particular and existential concern of expulsion in regard to race. In what follows, I take up my primary question and develop the resulting claim in three parts. First, I introduce two conceptions of love in the form of apolitical

love through Arendt and political love through Baldwin to discuss the intricacies and distinctions of their thought. Second, I develop an analysis of the two concepts of love as they converge and diverge through personal correspondence. Third, I contend with my claim that a concept of love, positioned as having the ability to hold someone in the world rather than expelling them from it, must not be ignorant to race as it is exposed through the convergence of Arendt and Baldwin. In this third and final section I carry our discussion through an educational realm regarding love of the student. I am grateful to participate in the complicated and nuanced dialogues in philosophy and education concerning love, Arendt, Baldwin, and matters of educational exclusion or expulsion. It is from and within these generative discourses that I am able to engage.³

ARENDT'S APOLITICAL LOVE AND BALDWIN'S POLITICAL LOVE

I was first introduced to Arendt's thinking on love through her claim "education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable."⁴ The new and the young are the children for which we must make a crucial decision. Children encompass the essential natality of the world that must be renewed. Such a decision arises in education where, for Arendt, we must ask "whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world...nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world."⁵ By education, Arendt is referring to the educational realm of the school. Education is apolitical for Arendt. It does not have a seat at the political table insofar as an Arendtian sense of politics contends only with those who are educated.⁶ The child—who will be educated—has not yet entered the common realm of politics and human community. This child is born into an old world which has existed long before them. And they must be prepared (or educated) to renew it.⁷ Our world is new and peculiar to the child who enters it in order to become.⁸ In Arendt's 1954 essay "The Crisis in Education," love constitutes a "responsibility for the world" found in the teacher's authority as they are tasked with conserving the newness of the world for the child.⁹

This particular sense of love is apolitical as read through the Arendtian view of education. Arendt's later thinking on love in the sense of *amor mundi*—love of the world—leans toward the political in that it prepares the child for political engagement in the world. However, *amor mundi* is not political in the sense that it is used for the political act, rather it only prepares one to engage. “If you bring love to the negotiating table [of politics] ... I find that absolutely fatal,” Arendt cautions in her 1964 interview.¹⁰ This is in reference to her famous claim: “I’ve never in my life loved any collective or group... In fact, I only love my friends. I am entirely incapable of any other kind of love.”¹¹ A love that is found between friends rather than through one's affiliations with particular groups or organizations around common interests is an Arendtian love in which someone is “addressed directly, independent of their relation to the world.”¹² The interviewer then asks Arendt if love is apolitical. “I find it apolitical. I find it wordless. And I really find it to be a great disaster,” Arendt replies with a head nod.¹³ To call love wordless is to call it apolitical insofar as it cannot exist within the common realm but only within the private realm. The world for Arendt is the concept of a common, political space which must be continuously remade. It is not the same world understood through Baldwin as a place of life and death. Only some are allowed entry to this world. And it is not through education—like with Arendt—but through the supremacist power of the “white world” that one is accepted or denied entry. Although this world for Baldwin is not unshakable, “the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world's definitions.”¹⁴

Love for Baldwin is distinct from Arendt insofar as it is more worldly. It is more political and more possible in the common world of human persons. Love is not merely private. The timing and context of love in Arendt and Baldwin is significant. Amid Arendt's 1954 essay and her 1964 interview, James Baldwin publishes his “Letter from a Region in my Mind” in 1962. This letter along with a prefatory letter to his nephew is published as *The Fire Next Time* in 1963. One year later, around the time of Arendt's interview, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is enacted, upholding the promise of the Fourteenth Amendment, and striking down the nearly six-decade reign of Jim Crow laws which enforced racial segregation. This constitutes a major political moment in which both

Baldwin and Arendt write of love.

However, unlike Arendt's conceptualization of love as apolitical and only possible between friends, Baldwin's love constitutes a *both and* scenario. Love, at this time for Baldwin, is both personal and private as well as worldly insofar as it contends with race and one's racialized experience in the world. Early in Baldwin's 1962 letter he narrates his understandings of love in the religious realm. He both clarifies and disillusion his reader as he unveils his claim that "neither civilized reason nor Christian love would cause any of those people to treat you as they presumably wanted to be treated; only the fear of your power to retaliate would cause them to do that."¹⁵ Baldwin further clarifies he is not claiming that Black people want to be accepted nor even loved by white people, but it is that they "simply don't wish to be beaten over the head by the whites every instant of our brief passage on this planet."¹⁶ For Baldwin, it is white people in the United States who must learn to "accept and love themselves and each other."¹⁷ It is only when this is accomplished, although it may never be, that there will be no need or existence of the race problem manifested by white people and white supremacy in the United States.

From here, we can ascertain that Baldwin is not enthralled with a Christian love for one's neighbor. Rather, the love he is concerned with is a more worldly, politically, and historically contextual love that exists—or ought to exist—within the public realm. When reflecting on his life in Harlem and reckoning with the church he supposes that there was a binding nature of love. "Perhaps we were, all of us—pimps, whores, racketeers, church members, and children—bound together by the nature of our oppression, the specific and peculiar complex of risks we had to run; if so, within these limits we sometimes achieved with each other a freedom that was close to love."¹⁸ By freedom, Baldwin refers to "the freedom that one hears in some gospel songs...and in jazz. In all jazz, and especially in the blues, there is something tart and ironic, authoritative and double-edged."¹⁹ These are the same songs of which Baldwin suggests that white people misunderstand and seem to believe that the happy songs are merely happy while sad songs are singularly sad.

Later in his letter Baldwin speaks directly to what he means by love. He couches his definition within the context and reality of what the white man

created as a race problem. “The white man’s profound desire not to be judged by those who are not white, not to be seen as he is... [yet to also] be seen as he is, to be released from the tyranny of his mirror.”²⁰ Baldwin continues that this desire of the white man to evade judgment is the reason why “love is so desperately sought and so cunningly avoided. Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word ‘love’ here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.”²¹ This is perhaps a love that embraces “something tart and ironic” like in jazz that also embodies an expansive state of being. Importantly, for Baldwin we witness a complicated divergence from an Arendtian love which is private. For Baldwin, love is not severed from one’s relation to the world and the reality of a love close to freedom.

TWO LOVES CONVERGE AND DIVERGE

Arendt and Baldwin are not wholly contentious in their philosophical claims. Their convergence and divergence are more dialectical than binary. For instance, they share a similar perspective in the relation of action to thought. “To think what we are doing,” is what Arendt advises in *The Human Condition*.²² “One can be, indeed one must strive to become, tough and philosophical concerning destruction and death,” Baldwin reminds his nephew.²³ Arendt’s call to think what we are doing is in reference to totalitarianism where the bureaucratic rule is decreed by no one. Under bureaucracy we no longer appear responsible insofar as when “we all are guilty...no one is.”²⁴ Baldwin’s call to strive for a robust and philosophical concern is in relation to the death and devastation of white supremacist and colonial powers that have “destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives, and do not know it and do not want to know it.”²⁵ In distinct yet similar scenarios, Arendt and Baldwin caution that we must not act without serious thought. We must think deeply and act in concert with such thought.

When it comes to conceptualizations and purposes of love, Baldwin and Arendt converge however briefly.²⁶ For instance, while Arendt’s understanding of love is wholly private and amongst friends, Baldwin does not neglect the interpersonal private love in his more public conception of love. In a letter,

Baldwin addresses his nephew as he writes, “Big James, named for me...here you were: to be loved. To be loved, baby, hard, at once, and forever, to strengthen you against the loveless world. Remember that: I know how black it looks today, for you. It looked bad that day, too, yes, we were trembling. We have not stopped trembling yet, but if we had not loved each other none of us would have survived. And now you must survive because we love you, and for the sake of your children and your children’s children.”²⁷ Here is the power and sanctity of familial and private love that is not detached from one’s context in which they relate to the world. This contrasts Arendt as the interpersonal love for Baldwin is not separate from one’s worldly reality. Recall Arendt’s claim that real love—in the private realm—is when “a person is addressed directly, independent of their relation to the world.”²⁸ For Baldwin, and in particular for racialized folks in the US from the colonization of Turtle Island, through centuries of chattel slavery, forced labor, dispossession of lands and rights, and mass incarceration and punishment, a person is not independent from their relation to the world but is rather understood through it. Therefore, one’s experience of love is not separate from their experience of the world.

This moment of divergence is evidenced in Baldwin’s *New Yorker* letter and in Arendt’s private response to Baldwin. Denying the space for one’s existence in the world is not a natural occurrence for Baldwin. For instance, he writes of the moment he falls at the foot of the alter in church,

The universe, which is not merely the stars and the moon and the planets, flowers, grass, and trees, but *other people*, has evolved no terms for your existence, has made no room for you, and if love will not swing wide the gates, no other power will or can. And if one despairs—as who has not? —of human love, God’s love alone is left. But God—and I felt this even then... on that tremendous floor, unwillingly—is white. And if His love was so great, and if He loved all His children, why were we, the blacks, cast down so far?”²⁹

Baldwin names an exclusionary love, a white love, which denies the terms of existence for Black people. Unlike Arendt, exclusion and expulsion from existence is a distinctly human problem related to the capacity of love and

the power of lovelessness. Recall that for Arendt, it is in the realm of education where we decide “whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world.”³⁰ Arendt does not clarify that it is people involved in education, who make the decision to expel or not. Both the “we” who decide and the “our children” in risk of expulsion are not known subjects. Baldwin does not use the same language of expulsion that Arendt does. However, he holds a similar sentiment about the space for one’s existence in the universe. Baldwin is clear when he describes a human lovelessness which has denied sufficient terms of existence for Black people in the United States. When positioned parallel, Arendt’s risk of expulsion and Baldwin’s terms for existence unveil a differing gravity. Arendt’s risk of expulsion involves expulsion from the political world. While Baldwin’s terms for existence involve the relations and foundations for one’s existence in the universe.³¹ Baldwin’s gravity is strikingly and seemingly more severe as it resides at the universal level which includes possible other worlds.

From here, we witness a conceptual convergence for Arendt and Baldwin. Arendt asks: do we love our children enough not to expel them from our political world? Baldwin asks: will love be enough to make room for my existence within the universe? While similar, the scope of their questioning differs. After Baldwin’s 1962 letter, Arendt sends him a response that reads: “Dear Mr. Baldwin: Your article in the *New Yorker* is a political event of a very high order...it certainly is an event in my understanding of what is involved in the [race problem]. And since this is a question which concerns us all, I feel I am entitled to raise objections.”³² Through this sense of entitlement Arendt raises her objections:

What frightened me in your essay was the gospel of love which you begin to preach at the end. In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy. All the characteristics you stress in... [Black people]: their beauty, their capacity for joy, their warmth, and their humanity, are well-known characteristics of all oppressed people. They grow out of suffering and they are the proudest possession of all pariahs. Unfortunately, they have never survived the hour of liberation by even five minutes. Hatred and love

belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in the private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free.³³

Arendt claims that Baldwin and Black people writ large can only afford love in private and only if they remain unfree. We could try and understand this claim through Arendt's later work in her posthumously published *Life of the Mind*, where she discusses love in the Socratic sense. Arendt clarifies that love as a search for meaning from the Greek *Erōs*, and not the Christian *agape*, is "primarily a need; it desires what it has not. Men love wisdom and therefore begin to philosophize because they are not wise, and they love beauty...because they are not beautiful."³⁴ Perhaps she is claiming that love—as *Erōs*—only exists out of lack. A lack of freedom where a private love can exist. And yet, when Arendt speaks of her capacity to love only her friends, she does not claim love's relation to absence and desire. She does not love her friends because she lacks friendship. It is here that love responds to a lack when Arendt critiques Baldwin. This is not the first instance in which Arendt misses the particularized and racialized context of blackness in the United States.³⁵

FOR THE LOVE OF THE STUDENT

It is within education and the contextual nature of race that I propose we question love. Here we take up love and education in relation to expulsion and through Arendt and Baldwin as they question the love that either holds one in the political world (Arendt) or allows the conditions for one's existence in the universe rather than expelling one from it (Baldwin). When I refer to expulsion in this final section, I mean any act of exclusion that happens within the school—whether it be purposeful, incidental, social, or disciplinary. The risk of expulsion is an existential concern for everyone. However, it is a significant and particular risk for people who are racialized, particularly Black students as they are disproportionately expelled. This varying risk in relation to love and expulsion is visibly absent in Arendt's analysis. Through Baldwin I suggest love must not be ignorant to the particular and existential concern of expulsion in regard to race.

In Arendt's "Reflections on Little Rock" it is obvious that her understanding of race in the United States is lacking.³⁶ She critiques the position of

a Black mother involved in the racial desegregation of schools as she writes: “Under no circumstances would I expose my child to conditions which made it appear as though it wanted to push its way into a group where it was not wanted. Psychologically, the situation of being unwanted (a typically social predicament) is more difficult to bear than outright persecution (a political predicament) because personal pride is involved.”³⁷ There is much to critique in this short piece. However, within the scope of this paper I focus primarily on her point of pride. Pride for Arendt is “that untaught and natural feeling of identity with whatever we happen to be by the accident of birth.” This pride is not about inferiority or superiority. “Pride...is indispensable for personal integrity, and it is lost not so much by persecution as by pushing...one’s way out of one group and into another.”³⁸ Arendt’s primary critique is that school desegregation “unfairly, shifted the burden of responsibility from the shoulders of adults to those of children.”³⁹ She continues to question what her response would be had she been a white mother in the south. Arendt describes how she would “deny that the government had any right to tell me in whose company my child received its instruction.”⁴⁰

In turning to Baldwin, we recognize that it is not the case that the Black mothers functioned to “push” their way into another group, supposing that by this Arendt means pushing into the white school. And yet, Baldwin details how it “demands great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater whose foot is on your neck” as the students weather the white mobs to enter the desegregated schoolhouse.⁴¹ For the United States was not rushing to educate Black students. And so, Baldwin continues that it was “these black men and women [who] knew that the job had to be done, and they put their pride in their pockets in order to do it.”⁴² It was persecution that required the bottling of pride. In contrast to Arendt, pride was not lost when Black families supported their children walking into a desegregated school. Pride was held close in their pockets. Baldwin refers to the histories of oppression, neglect, and harm in which Black students have had to hold their pride “in order to acquire a new roof for the schoolhouse, new books, a new chemistry lab, [and] more beds for the dormitories.”⁴³ Against Arendt’s assumptions, Baldwin clarifies that it is not the case that Black families wanted to push their way into a white norm, but rather desired to enter a realm

of education they were never afforded.

Baldwin offers a caution that we should take up today about the meaning that lurks behind calls for “diversity” and “inclusion” in schools. In the letter to his nephew, Baldwin writes: “You were born where you were born and face the future that you faced because you were black and *for no other reason...* You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity...that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity...Please try to be clear, dear James, through the storm which rages about your youthful head today, about the reality which lies behind the words *acceptance* and *integration*.”⁴⁴ In direct contradistinction from Arendt’s supposition that Black families wanted to push into a group that was not theirs during desegregation, Baldwin challenges this fallacy as he writes, “there is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis whatever for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing...is that *you* must accept *them*...You must accept them and love them and accept them with love.”⁴⁵ In the contemporary example of continuous and performative calls for “diversity” and “inclusion” in North American schools, we ought to unveil those calls and question what diversity really is and who is being included into what. It is not a just value to claim diversity and force the assimilation of racialized students into a white normative. Diversity and inclusion are not the same as justice.

For Baldwin writes, “if the word *integration* means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.”⁴⁶ To love in this way is to reckon with the reality of an educational institution that assumes a white supremacist normative and calls for diversity and inclusion while expelling, excluding, punishing, and harming racialized students. Such a love that holds one in the world, in the universe mustn’t forget one’s relation to and within the world. One’s capacity to love and be loved is not independent from the worldly, political reality of oneself. I contend with my early suspicion that a concept of love that is positioned as having the ability to hold someone in the world, rather than expelling them from it, must not be ignorant to race as it is exposed through the convergence and divergence of Arendt and Baldwin. For some may not have

the luxury of being addressed “independent of their relation to the world.”⁴⁷

1 For James Baldwin see: *Giovanni's Room; Collected Essays* ed. Toni Morrison; *Jimmy's Blues and Other Poems*. For Hannah Arendt see: *Love and Saint Augustine; Men in Dark Times; The Life of the Mind*.

2 Renee Ryberg, Sarah Her, Deborah Temkin, and Kristen Harper, “Despite Reductions Since 2011-2012, Black Students and Students with Disabilities Remain More Likely Experience Suspension,” *Child Trends*, 2021, <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/despite-reductions-black-students-and-students-with-disabilities-remain-more-likely-to-experience-suspension>.

3 Adi Burton, Gert Biesta, Kal Alston, Winston Thompson, and Bryan Warnick to name a few.

4 Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1969), 193.

5 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 193.

6 Arendt, 173.

7 Arendt, 174.

8 Arendt, 182.

9 Arendt, 186-189.

10 Hannah Arendt, interview by Günter Gaus, *Zur Person*, 1964, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=370EATBtPHs>.

11 Arendt, *Zur Person*.

12 Arendt, *Zur Person*.

13 Arendt, *Zur Person*.

14 James Baldwin, “Letter from a Region in My Mind,” *The New Yorker*, November 9, 1962, 26.

15 Baldwin, “Letter from a Region in My Mind,” 5.

16 Baldwin, 5.

17 Baldwin, 5.

18 Baldwin, 14.

19 Baldwin, 14.

20 Baldwin, 38.

21 Baldwin, 38.

22 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 5.

23 James Baldwin, “My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hun-

dredth Anniversary of the Emancipation” in *Baldwin Collected Essays* (The Library of America: New York, 1998), 292.

24 Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement*, ed. Jerome Kohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 21-31.

25 Baldwin, “Letter to My Nephew,” 292.

26 Their convergence could also be understood through the biographical realities of sexuality for Baldwin and Judaism for Arendt, which could be said to have influenced their engagements with the concept of love. The same could be said for my own biographical tensions in relation to and from Baldwin and Arendt.

27 Baldwin, “Letter to My Nephew,” 292-293.

28 Arendt, *Zur Person*.

29 Baldwin, “Letter from a Region in My Mind,” 9.

30 Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 193.

31 To take up Baldwin’s discussion here into the more particular realm of the school we might look toward Lisa Delpit, *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (The New Press: New York, 2006).

32 For contemporary purposes, I have opted to shift both Arendt’s and at times Baldwin’s language in reference to Black people in the US, instead of using historically situated terminology.

33 Hannah Arendt, “A Letter by Hannah Arendt to James Baldwin,” November 21, 1962, *Journal for Political Thinking* (2006): <http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/article/view/95/156>.

34 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Harcourt Books, New York, 1978), 178.

35 There is evidence that Arendt later acknowledged her misunderstandings, see Kathryn Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2014).

36 Michael Burroughs, “Hannah Arendt, ‘Reflections on Little Rock,’ and White Ignorance,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 3, no. 1 (2015): 52-78.

37 Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (Schocken Books: New York, 2003), 193.

38 Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” 193-194.

39 Arendt, 194.

40 Arendt, 195.

41 Baldwin, “Letter from a Region in My Mind,” 40.

42 Baldwin, 40.

43 Baldwin, 40.

44 Baldwin, "Letter to My Nephew," 293-294.

45 Baldwin, 293-294.

46 Baldwin, 294.

47 Arendt, *Zur Person*.