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Why the World Matters: Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of New Beginnings

~ SIOBHAN KATTAGO ~

ABSTRACT *Hannah Arendt's philosophical project is an untiring attempt to argue that the world with all its failures and weaknesses does and should matter. Refusing to succumb to the destructive tendency within modernity, she cultivates creativity, action and responsibility. One way to appreciate the originality of Arendt's philosophy of action and new beginnings is via her reading of two thinkers who were part of what she terms, "the great tradition." If most commentary deals either with Heidegger's influence on Arendt's thought or with her Augustinian origins, my aim is to trace Arendt's lifelong conversation with both thinkers. It is in her doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine that she begins to distinguish herself from Heidegger's understanding of the world, Dasein, and care. Without arguing that her work on Augustine is a hidden key to understanding her philosophy of new beginnings, an appreciation of Arendt's lifelong debate not only with Heidegger but also with Augustine enriches our understanding of why philosophy should pay more attention to the world, rather than try to escape from it.*

"Philosophy," in the words of Novalis, "is properly homesickness; the wish to be everywhere at home." This homesickness, of trying to find one's place in the world, goes back to the longing of Odysseus for Ithaca and to Adam and Eve's wish to return to the Garden of Eden. Thus the desire for a solid place of belonging in the world is part of what it means to be human. In today's modern world, filled with uncertainty and rapid change, individuals are pulled between the twin poles of nihilism and fundamentalism. Nihilism, the belief that nothing matters and everything is permitted, manifests itself in consumer capitalism and narcissistic individualism, while fundamentalism and nationalism feed upon the fierce desire to belong to something greater than oneself.

In the Existentialist school of thought, beginning with Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, questions of meaningful existence in the world were intensely addressed. Crystallizing in Heidegger's phenomenology of being-in-the-world, the modern self is confronted with, and at times, confounded by both absurdity and loneliness. And yet, much of the existentialist emphasis on the angst-ridden individual tends to see the world as an obstacle to authentic existence. In the work of Hannah Arendt, however, the individual and the world are seen in a complementary rather than oppositional relationship. Her philosophical project is an untiring attempt to argue that the world with all of failures and weaknesses does and should matter. Refusing



to succumb to the destructive tendency within modernity, she cultivates creativity, action and responsibility: “Yet out of the conditions of worldlessness that first appeared in the modern age—which should not be confused with Christian *otherworldliness*—grew the question of Leibniz, Schelling, and Heidegger: Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?”¹ This almost primal and innocent sense of wonder that something rather than nothing exists forms the basis of Arendt’s philosophy of new beginnings. Hers is a wonder at the fragility and plurality of human existence in the world, rather than a disdain or desire to escape it. Yet Arendt’s wonder is qualitatively different from Aristotle’s wonder (*thaumadzsein*), from which Western metaphysics emerges. This difference arises from the difference in context: when we ask why is there something rather than nothing, we speak in the context of modern worldlessness, that is, with the awareness that we have the unprecedented technological capacity to destroy all forms of life. “And out of the specific conditions of our contemporary world, which menace us not only with no-thingness but also with no-bodyness, may grow the question, why is there anybody at all and not rather nobody? These questions may sound nihilistic, but they are not. On the contrary, they are the antinihilistic questions asked in the objective situation of nihilism where no-thingness and no-bodyness threatens to destroy the world.”²

One way of gaining a clearer understanding and appreciation of the originality of Arendt’s philosophy of action and new beginnings is via her reading of two thinkers who were part of what she terms, “the great tradition.” While most commentary deals either with Heidegger’s influence on her thought or with her Augustinian origins, my aim is trace Arendt’s lifelong conversation with both thinkers. Beginning with her doctoral dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine (Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin)* (1929) and continuing with *The Human Condition* (1958), the theme that runs throughout her writing is Augustine’s question of how one can love both God and one’s neighbor. It is in *Love and Saint Augustine* that Arendt begins to distinguish herself from Heidegger’s understanding of the world, *Dasein*, and care. As contemporary scholarship has demonstrated, however, Arendt by no means completely separates herself from Heidegger’s thought.³ Rather, in her final, unfinished *Life of the Mind* (1978), she returns to both Augustine and Heidegger. While her early work on Augustine is by no means the hidden key to her philosophy of new beginnings, an appreciation of her lifelong preoccupation with Heidegger and Augustine would enrich our understanding of why, for Arendt, philosophy should pay more attention to the world, rather than try to escape from it.

AUGUSTINIAN ORIGINS: *AMOR* AND *INITIUM*

Love and Saint Augustine contains the early seeds of many of the themes of Arendt’s mature thinking.⁴ Conceived under the supervision of Martin Heidegger and completed under the supervision of Karl Jaspers, her dissertation addresses the Augustinian problem of how one can live simultaneously in two different realms: the city of man (Babylon) and the city of God (Jerusalem). In her introduction, Arendt emphasizes the importance of other people for the self: “The several parts of this essay are linked by the question concerning the other human being’s relevance. For Augustine this

relevance was simply a matter of course.”⁵ Why should another person be treated as a neighbor? What are the philosophical underpinnings of caring for, and loving, another? Love (*amor*) as a craving or desire (*appetitus*) can be both worldly and non-worldly. *Cupiditas* is worldly because it conceives of the object of desire in the world; *caritas*, or charity, occurs between humans, but is still worldless because love of a worldly neighbor is linked with love of an eternal and worldless God. Arendt demonstrates the difficulty in reconciling the two realms of desired existence: love of neighbor and love of God. “This incongruity is pointed up in the question of how the person in God’s presence, isolated from all things mundane, can be at all interested in his neighbor” (7). She is interested precisely in the interdependence of love of God and love of neighbor. In her reading of Augustine, she argues that it is through the complex and contradictory activity of love that individuals encounter the world: “It is through love of the world that man explicitly makes himself at home in the world, and then desirously looks to it alone for his good and evil. Not until then do the world and man grow ‘worldly’” (67).

Love and Saint Augustine outlines how the desire for worldliness changes our everyday existence and affects our orientation to the world: “The quest for worldliness changes man’s nature. This quest transforms him into a worldly being. In *cupiditas*, man has cast the die that makes him perishable. In *caritas*, whose object is eternity, man transforms himself into an eternal, nonperishable being” (18). In Arendt’s examination of love as *caritas* and *cupiditas*, she is thinking both with and against Heidegger. Already in her dissertation, one can sense an early preoccupation with certain themes: gratitude for the existence of world and life in general; a richer understanding of responsibility towards others; and the problem of evil and freedom of the will.

If Heidegger’s care (*Sorge*) is grounded in anxiety, death, thrownness, *das Man*, and everydayness, Arendt’s care, interpreted through her reading of Augustine’s idea of love, is linked to *caritas*, *cupiditas*, birth, friendship, promising, and forgiving. This is not to say that Heidegger simply has a darker view of human nature than Arendt, but is rather a question of the orientation of the subject to herself, the world, and others within the world. Arendt does not dispute the importance of the recognition of death for the self. Similar to Heidegger, this existential awareness of our mortality is crucial for her. However, while Heidegger tends to be solipsistic and oriented towards the self, Arendt is more interested in the relations of the self to others: “Death is the destruction of our natural relation to the world, whose expression is love of the world. In a purely negative sense, death is thus as powerful as separating us from the world as love, which chooses its own being in God” (78). Death is future-oriented, while natality is rooted in memory and the origins of existence. For Arendt, although mortality is a basic condition of human life, natality is even more fundamental because it is related to action and freedom: “the decisive fact determining man as a conscious, remembering being is birth or ‘natality,’ that is, the fact that we have entered the world through birth. The decisive fact determining man as a desiring being was death or mortality, the fact that we shall leave the world in death” (51–52).

Thus natality entails the capacity to initiate or start something completely new. As the capacity to create, natality is necessarily linked with the plurality of the world.

As Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott writes, “In Augustine, Arendt found her central metaphor of ‘natality’ embedded in the power of love (*caritas*) that, following Augustine, replicates creation in each new birth, each act of moral will, and in each new, contingent ‘constituting’ of the world in action.”⁶ If for Heidegger being with others is related to the masses, *das Man*, and an inauthentic mode of being, for Arendt being with others, the fact of human plurality, is the foundation of the human condition. “Action, the only activity that goes directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition—not only the *condition sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life.”⁷

Indeed, one of Arendt’s favorite quotations from Augustine’s *City of God*, which recurs in her political essays, her published dissertation, and in *The Human Condition*, is that the human being is a “beginner” or *initium*. If *in principio* refers to the origin of the universe, *initium* refers to the beginning of human beings, or as she writes in *Love and Saint Augustine*: “Augustine writes that ‘this beginning did in no way ever exist before. In order that there be such a beginning, man was created before whom nobody was’” (55).

What links Arendt’s reflections on Augustine with *Rahel Varnhagen* (1974) and *The Human Condition* is the preoccupation with being at home in the world. “For we call ‘world’ not only this fabric which God made, heaven and earth. .. but the inhabitants of the world are also called ‘the world.’. .. Especially all lovers of the world are called the world” (17). It is not simply that one is in the world, but that one is *impelled* to make the world one’s home. And this kind of attention to worldliness entails responsibility and love for others. As Stephan Kampowski points out “The line of continuity between *der Liebesbegriff* and the Rahel biography is the phenomenological description of a misplaced existence that is in the world but not at home in it.”⁸ In other words, Arendt takes Heidegger’s phenomenological intuition of being-in-the-world much farther. One can only be at home in the world if one is part of it—if one cares genuinely about others, whereas for Heidegger the subject in the world, *Dasein*, is uncomfortable, full of angst and not at all at home in it. If Heidegger emphasizes the orientation towards future death, Arendt, by way of Augustine, turns towards the past, towards origins, rather than to the endpoint of the human life cycle. As she writes in *Love and Saint Augustine*, “Since our expectations and desires are prompted by what we remember and guided by a previous knowledge, it is memory and not expectation (for instance, the expectation of death as in Heidegger’s approach) that gives unity and wholeness to human existence” (56).

FROM BEING-IN-THE-WORLD TO LOVE OF THE WORLD

It is in *The Human Condition* and in “What is Existential Philosophy?” (1948), that Arendt is most critical of Heidegger and begins to argue for the centrality of love of the world. The more political her mature writing becomes, the more she grapples with the most pressing modern problems of totalitarianism, loneliness, world alienation, bureaucracy, the rise of the social and shrinking of the political. Written after

The Origins of Totalitarianism, *The Human Condition* offers a phenomenological reading of the activities of work, labor and action. Arendt argues most vehemently against Karl Marx and his reduction of action to labor. "World alienation, and not self alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age."⁹ Although Heidegger's name is never explicitly mentioned, it is in this book that she thinks both with and against him. It is also the work where she develops her own conception of the world and worldliness. In Heidegger's reflections on care, for example, one is hard pressed to find any real concern for other people. If anything, one senses a kind of Nietzschean disdain for the masses and *das Man*. Heidegger's subject is the aesthete searching for authentic experience, attentive to the traces and remnants of being that are best found in poetry and fragments of thought. The Heideggerian self is uncomfortable living with others and seems utterly incapable of facing the maddening plurality of everyday life.

As Seyla Benhabib has argued, although Arendt's political philosophy is situated in existentialism, it is with Jaspers and Aristotle that communication and worldliness take center stage.¹⁰ In the face of advancing worldlessness, Arendt argues for the capacity to act and create new beginnings. By contrasting *natality* with Heidegger's *mortality*, Arendt avoids the ethical impasse in Heidegger's philosophy and she does so by both appropriating insights from his existential project and transcending the aporias of *Dasein*. Although Arendt's phenomenological reading of the everyday categories of the world, worldlessness, and worldliness are strongly influenced by Heidegger, her emphasis on plurality and natality paints a different understanding of the world. She is far more interested in the moral and political consequences of existence as being-in-the-world than in tracing a history of the forgetfulness of being. In *the Human Condition*, she presents what Dana Villa terms "creative appropriations" of Heidegger: "Heidegger's conception of *Dasein* as primordially both a being-in-the-world and a being-with-others helped her to place worldliness and human plurality at the heart of human freedom rather than at the extreme margins."¹¹ Since she was a student of Heidegger when he taught his seminar on Aristotle (1924) and was in the process of writing *Being and Time*, the centrality of the world, action, freedom and being-in-the-world form the foundation of her thinking. "'Worldhood' is an ontological concept, and stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of Being-in-the-world."¹² Unlike Heidegger, who links individual freedom to our consciousness of mortality, Arendt argues that freedom is linked rather to natality and the miracle of existence. "The new," she says, "therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle."¹³ So by tracing the conflict between philosophy and politics, Arendt argues for the relevance—rather than renunciation—of the world for political philosophy.

The world, as a category, includes all the intersubjective contacts between people: culture, tradition, memory, history and language. It is a kind of lifeworld of shared experience: "because Heidegger defines human existence as being-in-the-world, he insists on giving philosophic significance to structures of everyday life that are completely incomprehensible if man is not primarily understood as being together with others."¹⁴ This "being together with others" creates the possibility for both individual and collective action. Arendt's *amor mundi* goes beyond Heidegger's care in that it does not refer to care on an individual subjective level, but to care or love that is associated with responsibility for others and for the continuity of the

world. Although Heidegger defines conscience as the call of care, he does not specify that it entails responsibility to others: “Conscience summons Dasein’s Self from its lostness in the ‘they.’ The Self to which the appeal is made remains indefinite and empty in its ‘what’.”¹⁵ His call to conscience is self-oriented and finds itself in opposition to the world. Arendt’s understanding of the world, on the other hand, is more nuanced. As Scott and Stark note, “It is *caritas* and its targeted mental faculty, free will, that transforms Heidegger’s anxiety-ridden ‘they’ into the community of ‘neighbors’ in the world, who are loved both for themselves and for the sake of their common Source.”¹⁶ Throughout her writings, Arendt thus constructs a worldly philosophy of natality and action. “In the last analysis, the human world is always the product of man’s *amor mundi*, a human artifice whose potential immortality is always subject to the mortality of those who build it and the natality of those who come to live in it.”¹⁷

One might argue that Arendt’s *amor mundi* is closest to the principle of responsibility articulated by her friend and colleague Hans Jonas.¹⁸ It is precisely because human creativity has the potentiality of becoming destructive that the imperative to care for the world is necessary. Since human action is contingent and unpredictable, it has to be balanced by something stronger than individual self-preservation. Arendt’s use of the phrase *amor mundi* includes concern, care, and responsibility: “For at the center of politics lies concern for the world, not for man—a concern, in fact, for a world, however constituted, without which those who are both concerned and political would not find life worth living.”¹⁹ Likewise, her *amor mundi* shares much with Kant’s cosmopolitanism and sense of hospitality in *Perpetual Peace*, and offers a political reading of the Christian precept of love of one’s neighbor writ large. Paul Ricoeur succinctly summarizes how Arendt thinks both with and against Heidegger: “Whereas in Heidegger there is no category of action, properly speaking, that in connection with care would be capable of providing a base for an ethics and politics, Hannah Arendt has no need to take the road through *Mitsein* to give care, which in *Being and Time* continues to be marked with the seal of incommunicable death, a communal dimension.”²⁰

PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS

For Arendt, philosophy has historically been distinguished from politics for two reasons: the human being in the singular versus human beings in the plural, and rejection of versus concern with the world. If philosophical inquiry tends to contemplate the human being in the singular, politics regards humans in the plural: “Politics is based on the fact of human plurality. God created *man*, but *men* are a human, earthly product, the product of human nature.”²¹ If politics is the sphere of many individuals within the world, from the time of Plato philosophy represents various attempts to escape from the world of clashing opinions to a higher realm of contemplation. Only the human being in the singular is considered worthy of philosophical contemplation, not humans in their maddening plurality: “Human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique being.”²² Yet the abstraction of a universal human being from humans in the plural flattens what is unique to individuals: their difference and plurality.

“Worse still, for all scientific thinking there is only *man*—in biology, or psychology, as in philosophy and theology, just as in zoology there is only *the lion*.” Arendt seeks to preserve difference rather than reduce it to a fictive singularity when she asserts that “Politics deals with the coexistence and association of *different men*.”²³ In *Between Past and Future* (1968) and in her essays “Introduction into Politics” and “Philosophy and Politics,” she traces the history of the philosophical prejudice against politics.²⁴ If philosophy or, at least metaphysics, embodies the pure mind, politics represents the carnal body. Given the historical split between *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*, political philosophy is a curious mixture of the two that somehow never manages to stand up to the purity of philosophy.

The second distinction Arendt makes is a spatial one between realms of existence. If politics is concerned with the world, philosophy has historically tended to run away from it. Beginning with Plato's Allegory of the Cave, she argues, philosophy has ignored everyday worldly life in favor of the better life outside of the cave. “Our tradition of political thought began when Plato discovered that it is somehow inherent in the philosophical experience to turn away from the common world of human affairs; it ended when nothing was left of this experience but the opposition of thinking and acting, which, depriving thought of reality and action of sense, makes both meaningless.”²⁵

In tracing the origins of the schism between philosophy and politics, Arendt reiterates Nietzsche's bold affirmation of life. Indeed, part of her originality lies in her unconventional combination of a Nietzschean critique of the history of philosophy with the Kantian plea for the relevance of morality to politics. Like Nietzsche, Arendt finds that philosophers have been too eager to leave this world behind for a higher realm of existence. In one of her favorite passages from Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, she is inspired by his critique of Platonic dualism. “We have abolished the true world. What has remained? The apparent one perhaps? Oh no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.”²⁶ In his fable Nietzsche describes how, from Plato onwards, philosophy has forgotten its original link *with* the world. Although this inspired both Heidegger and Arendt, it is Arendt who emphasizes the moral consequences of choosing the *vita activa* over the *vita contemplativa*. Whereas Heidegger emphasizes the mystery of *Dasein*, Arendt is drawn towards what is missing in his philosophy—the human capacity for moral judgment and the responsibility that is entailed by individual freedom. She sees the consequences of the philosophical escape from the world as an abrogation of responsibility and the arrogance of privileging the life of the solitary mind over the life with other people. Just as Christianity separated the city of man from the city of God and elevated the mind over the body, this world, the everyday physical world—of the family, of work, of discussion and debate—the world that is shared by individuals is considered secondary to the realm of the mind.

Arendt's unique move is to combine the two forms of existence, the solitary life of the mind with the active life of politics. For her the philosopher as a private individual can also be a public citizen. She wishes to restore the plurality and sense of new beginnings from the political realm to philosophy and thereby to redress the philosophical disengagement from the world: “Escape from the fragility of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and order has in fact so much to recommend it that

the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from politics altogether.”²⁷ But for her this kind of escape involved a greater chance of self-delusion and avoidance of responsibility. The link between morality and responsibility had particular meaning when viewed against the background of totalitarianism which also suggests why Arendt returned often to Kant’s elegant affirmation of the ultimate dignity of man.

Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. He must in all his actions, whether directed or himself or other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end.²⁸

Arendt, like Kant, affirms the dignity of the human being but wishes to combine this insight with the plurality of human beings within the world. Just as Kant argued that each individual is an end in himself and can never be rationalized as a means towards an ideological or political end, Arendt argues that the individual has the right to have rights and commands the respect of others by virtue of his or her uniqueness. For her, Kant’s definition of the person as autonomous and self-legislating means that freedom entails responsibility for others. Thus freedom is not the freedom to think alone, because we always think in the company of others. This conception of the individual entails the ability to think from the perspective of the other person; it entails empathy for and understanding of others.

NATALITY, ACTION, AND NEW BEGINNINGS

Philosophy, from Plato’s *Phaedo* through Boethius’s *The Consolation of Philosophy*, has historically been linked with the endpoint of the life cycle rather than with its origin. The existential realization of mortality has directed philosophers to contemplate leaving the world instead of engaging with it. In light of the totalitarian attempts to recreate the world through its very destruction, Arendt emphasizes the need to care for the world rather than attempting to leave it. Yet the philosophical focus on death has tipped the scales to such a degree that the retreat into subjectivity has led to escapism, nihilism, and relativism. The point she makes is that if there is to be a world at all, one has no choice but to care for it. As she rereads the “great tradition,” Arendt searches for paths that can lead philosophy back to the everyday world. One path is to combine Nietzsche’s affirmation of life with Augustine’s idea of new beginnings: “This new serious engagement with life that uses death as a point of departure does not, however, necessarily imply an affirmation of life or of human existence as such. In fact, only Nietzsche and, in his footsteps, Jaspers, have explicitly made such an affirmation the basis of their philosophical thought, and this is why their philosophical deliberations have found a *positive path* (sic) into philosophy.”²⁹

This “positive path” is what seems to intrigue and motivate Arendt. Eschewing retreat from the world, she seeks ways to preserve the world against the desire to physically leave it through the solipsism of the self. If, for Kierkegaard, the existential realization of death is linked to subjectivity and how each individual is solitary and separate from one another, for Arendt, Nietzsche’s emphasis on life rather than death

has political promise for the contemporary world. "The passion to become subjective is set in motion for Kierkegaard with the realized fear of death. Death is the event in which I am definitely alone, an individual cut off from everyday life. Thinking about death becomes an 'act' because in it man makes himself subjective and separates himself from the world and everyday life with other men."³⁰

Influenced by Aristotle and Jaspers, speech and communication form the heart of Arendt's understanding of human existence. The world is shared between men, not torn apart by isolated egos. Speech is the premise for the very existence of man.³¹ Like Aristotle, who argues in the *Politics* that speech entails knowledge of right and wrong, Arendt emphasizes the link between communication, justice and action. "Speech (*logos*) on the other hand serves to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is right and wrong. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have the perception of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust."³²

Ethical knowledge and conduct is therefore a shared intersubjective activity, rather than an object of solitary contemplation. Unlike her contemporary Carl Schmitt, for whom death and violent conflict between friend and enemy constitute the political, Arendt focuses on the creative capacity of new beginnings, plurality, and action.³³ Natality is, for her, the miracle of human existence, as she writes in *The Promise of Politics*: "every new beginning is by nature a miracle when seen and experienced from the standpoint of the processes it necessarily interrupts." A new beginning might not last long but contains the promise of change and the potential to rectify past differences. Unlike Heidegger and Schmitt, Arendt was less captivated by metaphors of death and argued for a philosophical appreciation of origins and action. "The miracle of freedom is inherent in this ability to make a beginning, which itself is inherent in the fact that every human being, simply by being born into a world that was there before him and will be there after him, is himself a new beginning."³⁴

Arendt brings out the political implications of Augustine's principle of beginning and links it to Kant's notions of autonomy, freedom, and spontaneity. It is almost as if she reveals what they unintentionally contributed to political philosophy: "action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity for beginning something new, that is, of acting."³⁵ Her fascination with the human being as a beginner and initiator of action and spontaneity are prominent in her analysis of the French and American revolutions.³⁶ The capacity for political change entails the past and the future, combining the potential to rectify past wrongs with the promise of a better future; thus, "the extraordinary political significance of a freedom that lies in our being able to begin anew" is the cornerstone of her argument that the world—and not only particular individuals in it—matters.³⁷ Each individual is a new beginning with the capacity for action and speech. As she writes in *The Human Condition*: "With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before." For her, each person is a beginner who can change and learn from his/ her mistakes. Revolutions and the drafting of constitutions are about the change of regime, the establishment of a constitutional state and the independence of a nation. The fact that each person is a new beginning and

possesses the constant possibility to change links freedom to individuality and plurality. “The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted.”³⁸ There is therefore a common thread that links the foundation of the polis in Athens, the foundation of Rome, and the Christian virtue of forgiveness, all of which are crucially important for political thought.

PROMISING AND FORGIVING

In the *Human Condition*, Arendt highlights the two human capacities—of promising and of forgiving—that have important political and moral significance. In many ways, promises, or covenants, are the basis for living with others in the world: “the great variety of contract theories since the Romans attests to the fact that the power of making promises has occupied the center of political thought over the centuries.”³⁹ When individuals promise to start something in the present and continue this action into the future they are bound by common interests. A promise is full of hope, oriented towards the future and the beginning of something new and unknown. It is, however, with forgiveness that Arendt discovers something completely new: the capacity to forgive past transgressions and begin again, first exemplified by Jesus, is, for her, a remarkable act akin to a miracle. In the *Human Condition* and *On Revolution* she links together the power of forgiveness with the political foundation of something new and unprecedented. Forgiveness, like a promise depends on plurality because it can only occur *between* people. Neither a promise nor forgiveness is solitary, but an intersubjective experience. “Both faculties, therefore, depend on plurality, on the presence and acting of others, for no one can forgive himself and no one can feel bound by a promise made only to himself; forgiving and promising enacted in solitude or isolation remain without reality and can signify no more than a role played before one’s self.”⁴⁰

For Arendt, then, the condition of action is plurality and the condition of work is worldliness. Individuals construct an artificial public sphere or common world. The polis is not naturally given. As she writes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, “we are not born equal; we become equal as members of a group.”⁴¹ We experience a kind of second birth when we enter into the polis as citizens. Similarly, equality and freedom can only appear in the public realm, not in the private *oikos*: “With word and deed we insert ourselves in the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance.”⁴² Arendt perhaps comes closest to Rousseau in characterizing the transformation of the solitary thinker into public citizen of the world. Freedom, for her, is not something that can be “found” outside of ordinary life or by retreating into a world of prayer and contemplation: it can only be experienced within the world, and is, indeed, the end or *raison d’être* of politics. “The answer to the question of the meaning of politics is so simple and so conclusive that one might think all other answers are utterly beside the point. The answer is: The meaning of politics is freedom.”⁴³ Whereas philosophers have sought truth outside the cave, politics is the realm of *doxa* and opinion, the very thing that philosophy, since Plato, has tended to distrust.

PHRONESIS AND JUDGMENT

Arendt's reflections on the individual within the world are linked with her preoccupation with the problem of evil and moral judgment. As noted earlier, she retrieves from Kant the concepts of human dignity, spontaneity, and judgment; she retrieves and develops Augustine's idea of man as an *initium*; and she develops Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* by combining it with Kant's concept of judgment. On the basis of her conceptual development of these, she argues that the world does and should matter for political philosophy. *Phronesis* (prudence) was integral to the Greek understanding of how individuals should act in the world: "It is evident, then, that prudence is not scientific knowledge; for it is concerned with the ultimate particular. .. and such is the object of action."⁴⁴ Because *phronesis* is concerned with particulars in the world rather than with universal knowledge outside of the world, it has a political component. Arendt follows the Aristotlian tradition of viewing ethics, politics, and rhetoric as interconnected. They are not isolated activities but part of how the individual lives with other people in the world. Indeed, in the spirit of Aristotle, she argues that *phronesis* is "the insight of the political man." Scientific knowledge (*episteme*) is a separate activity from prudence (*phronesis*). Her interpretation of *phronesis* as a kind of political insight will later be linked with Kant's aesthetic judgment of particulars. *Phronesis* and judgment are worldly activities that demand thinking from the point of view of another person: "Such insight into a political issue means nothing other than the greatest possible overview of all the possible standpoints and viewpoints from which an issue can be seen and judged."⁴⁵

While Arendt rarely discussed morality in hypothetical terms, she often discussed it in the historical context of totalitarianism. Whether one looks at her analysis of Eichmann as one who was incapable of thinking from another person's perspective, or at her more philosophical discussions of morality, she links freedom with the ability to make moral judgments.⁴⁶ In her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, she argues for the hidden political implications of Kant's understanding of aesthetic judgment, and draws the conclusion that political judgment, like aesthetic judgment, is about particulars. She sees Kant's critique of aesthetic judgment as part of his political philosophy: "Judgment deals with particulars, and when the thinking ego moving among generalities emerges from its withdrawal and returns to the world of particular appearances, it turns out that the mind needs a new 'gift' to deal with them."⁴⁷ It is aesthetic judgment, derived from taste that is such a "gift." Moreover, it is only in the Third Critique that Kant argues that aesthetic judgment requires the presence of other people. In his First Critique, Kant defined an analytic judgment as one in which the predicate is part of the subject (e.g., A bachelor is an unmarried man), and a synthetic judgment as one in which the predicate is not part of the subject (e.g., This house is green). In contrast, he defined an aesthetic judgment as the subjective experience of something beautiful or sublime, adding that, although such a judgment is subjective, it has the potential for universal validity. Arendt is fascinated by the fact that it is only aesthetic judgment that requires other people as a *sensus communis*. In her *Lectures*, she emphasizes how aesthetic judgment, rooted in the intersubjective *sensus communis*, displays Kant's hidden political dimension.

There are, according to Arendt, three preconditions for understanding Kant's political and moral philosophy: the individual as a historical being, the individual as a reasoning being, subject to the laws of practical reason, and the individual as part of a community. Human beings can be free because they are historical beings who live within a particular community and thus must choose how they are to live. This means that freedom of choice is not a matter of one's will to do something but involves practical thought on the effects of our actions on others. Moreover, Kant's emphasis on the dignity of the person is closely related to the ability to make particular judgments in the world we share with others. As Arendt writes, "Men are interdependent not merely in their needs and cares but in their highest faculty, the human mind, which will not function outside human society. 'Company is indispensable for the thinker'."⁴⁸ Thus the very act of thinking involves the active participation of others, or in Kant's words, "company is indispensable for the thinker." The act of thinking is less of a solitary contemplative activity than a dialogue of the individual with himself and others.

Linking Aristotle's *phronesis* to Kant's aesthetic judgment, Arendt focuses on two aspects of taste that are relevant to both aesthetics and politics. Judgment requires both imagination and reflection, and imagination encompasses both the ability to bring a particular object to mind and the ability to think from the perspective of another person. It is this ability to think and to imagine how one might feel as the object of one's actions that Arendt wishes to emphasize. It is only after doing so, she argues, that one can truly make a decision and act. Imagination, unlike reflection, does not fulfill the criteria for action because it is primarily future-oriented and not concerned with the past. It is therefore reflection that requires the presence of others. It is one thing to imagine a situation and an entirely different thing to reflect on how the other person might be affected by the consequences of one's actions. Following Aristotle and Jaspers, Arendt emphasizes the central role of speech and communication in judgment: "The criteria, then, is communicability, and the standard of deciding about it is common sense."⁴⁹ Kant's *sensus communis* is therefore both aesthetic and political, and must, as he writes, meet three conditions: to think for oneself; to think from the standpoint of everyone else; and to think consistently.⁵⁰ Similarly, the moral judgment of how to act in particular situations expresses the individual's freedom and reflection, and underlies the process of learning from one's own actions and those of others. Arendt concludes that "Kant's so-called moral philosophy is in essence political, insofar as he attributes to all men those capacities of legislating and judging that, according to tradition, had been the prerogative of the statesman."⁵¹

CONCLUDING REMARKS

By tracing Arendt's lifelong conversation with Augustine and Heidegger, one is made more aware of the nuances of her mature political thinking. Her interest in the human being, living among others, and the importance of others to the individual self, is apparent as early as her dissertation, *Love and Saint Augustine*. Indeed, her *amor mundi* has its early germination in Augustine, as too her belief in new beginnings and action. While not discounting the existential import of death, Arendt's insistence on

the primacy of natality and the human ability to start anew may be understood as part of her critical conversation with Heidegger. But what distinguishes Arendt above all is her continued emphasis on human plurality. Because action is plural and unpredictable, promises and forgiveness provide avenues for new beginnings.

Arendt also breathes new life into the classical ideas of *phronesis*, action, and natality. The originality of her philosophy of new beginnings and its relevance for contemporary political thought is manifested through her plea that we should stop trying to leave the world and instead engage more closely with it. Much like an explorer digging for pearls among the treasure chest of European philosophy, she takes fragments from various philosophers, most notably Augustine and Heidegger, and weaves them together to create not only a critique of the tendency of philosophy to abandon the world but also to explain why the world, despite its frailties, does and should matter. If, as she claims, philosophy began with wonder and then moved out of the everyday world into abstract contemplation, Arendt restores wonder to the political realm of appearance, opinion, and plurality. "Existence itself is, by its very nature, never isolated. It exists only in communication and in awareness of others' existence. Our fellowmen are not (as in Heidegger) an element of existence that is structurally necessary but at the same time an impediment to the Being of the Self. Just the contrary: Existence can develop only in the shared life of human beings inhabiting a given world common to them all."⁵²

NOTES

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1. Hannah Arendt "Introduction into Politics," in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 203–4.
2. Arendt "Introduction into Politics," 204.
3. See Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), and Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt. A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Likewise, Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), and Jacques Taminiaux, *The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker: Arendt and Heidegger* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997). See also Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Also see Martin Jay, "The Political Existentialism of Hannah Arendt," in *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 237–56, and Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's biography remains unparalleled, *Hannah Arendt, for Love of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982).
4. The dissertation was published in Germany in 1929 and later on Arendt worked on its English translation, which, however, remained incomplete and unpublished during her lifetime. The English translation compiled by Scott and Stark (1996) incorporates the revisions she made to the English translation during the 1960s.
5. Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, ed. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 4; subsequent references are cited in the text.

6. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, "Rediscovering Hannah Arendt," in *Love and Saint Augustine*, 181.
7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7.
8. Stephen Kampowski, *Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 4.
9. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 24.
10. Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 35–61.
11. Dana Villa, "The Anxiety of Influence: On Arendt's Relationship to Heidegger," in *Politics, Philosophy and Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 76.
12. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962), 92.
13. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 178.
14. Hannah Arendt, "Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 443.
15. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 319.
16. Scott and Stark, "Rediscovering Hannah Arendt," 142.
17. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 203.
18. Hans Jonas, *Das Prinzip der Verantwortung* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).
19. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 106.
20. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 486.
21. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 93.
22. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176.
23. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 93.
24. See Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," *Social Research* 71.3 (2004): 427–54, and *The Promise of Politics*.
25. Arendt, "Tradition and the Modern Age," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1954), 25.
26. Friedrich Nietzsche, "How the 'True World' Finally Became a Fable: The History of an Error," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin, 1968), 485, quoted in Arendt's "Thinking and Moral Considerations," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 162.
27. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 222.
28. Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1981), 35.
29. Hannah Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?" in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 174.
30. Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?" 174.
31. Arendt, "What is Existential Philosophy?" 186.
32. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair (New York: Penguin, 1962), 28–29.
33. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1976).
34. *The Promise of Politics*, 112, 113.
35. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 9.
36. Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1963).
37. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 126.
38. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177, 247.
39. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 244.
40. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 237.

41. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973).
42. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176–77.
43. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 108.
44. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle (Grinnell, IA: Peripatetic Press, 1975), 24–25.
45. Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, 168.
46. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1963).
47. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 4.
48. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 10.
49. Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, 69.
50. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J. H. Bernard (New York: Hafner Press, 1951), 135–38.
51. Arendt, “Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought,” 441.
52. Arendt, “What is Existential Philosophy?” 186.