SAINT AUGUSTINE AND HANNAH ARENDT ON LOVE OF THE WORLD:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO ARENDT’S RELIANCE ON AND REFUTATION OF AUGUSTINIAN
PHILOSOPHY

A Dissertation

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This dissertation argues that Hannah Arendt’s first study of Augustine in her 1929 dissertation, Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin, had an enduring and significant influence on the development of her political theory. It was in her dissertation that she first became interested in “the relevance of the other,” or what she would later call the human condition of plurality. Arendt’s concern for human plurality guided her inquiry into the origins of totalitarianism, namely anti-Semitism and imperialism, as well as her analysis of totalitarianism in power. Her first study of Augustine also provided key theoretical resources that she later reappropriated to develop her more mature political theory in The Human Condition. There she drew upon Augustinian resources to develop her concept of the man-made world, labor and work, plurality and natality. She also critiqued what she views as Augustine’s worldlessness and the anti-political character of Christian charity. Ultimately, what is most interesting about Arendt’s persistent reliance
on Augustinian resources, is that she used these resources to develop a political theory that is decidedly in opposition to Augustine’s own. Her political theory admonishes us to create meaning in the here and now and in being with others in the world, while Augustine countenances us to look not to this world, but to eternity as the source of meaning for human existence. Finally, this dissertation agrees with Arendt that Augustine’s thought does not provide adequate resources for understanding the significance of human plurality, but also argues that Arendt discounts the great value an ethic of love can provide as a guide for political action.
To my loving husband, without whose support this would not have been possible.
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INTRODUCTION

Hannah Arendt’s dissertation on the subject of *Love and Saint Augustine* was written under the supervision of Karl Jaspers and published in 1929. In 1996, Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark published, for the first time in English, a revised and edited version of Arendt’s dissertation, in the hopes of stimulating new research regarding the influence of Augustine on Arendt’s political theory. My own project is intended to be a direct response to Scott and Stark’s interest in sparking “new conversations” regarding the relevance of the dissertation to Arendt’s later work. The argument of my dissertation is that Arendt’s original reading of Augustine had a significant and enduring influence on her political theory. The initial research question of her dissertation concerning “the relevance of the other” remained her primary motivating concern throughout the duration of her intellectual career, although it takes a much more concrete and urgent form after her experience with totalitarianism. Furthermore, she relies upon concepts initially discovered in her first study of Augustine in order to build her own original political theory. Most interestingly, Arendt uses these Augustinian concepts *against* Augustine. In this way, this dissertation also follows in the path paved by the work of Dana Villa, whose study of the intellectual relationship between Heidegger and Arendt argues that *The Human Condition* is a work “deeply
influenced by Heidegger” but which “uses Heidegger against Heidegger, in the service of ideas he would have condemned” (Villa 1999, 75, 77). My argument here maintains that Arendt re-appropriates Augustinian resources for her own decidedly anti-Augustinian ends. Her political theory posits a shared political life in the world as the location of freedom and meaning, whereas Augustine admonishes Christians to consider such a life as pride, and eternal life, not mortal life, as the true meaning of being.

Arendt’s Intellectual Beginnings

When asked why Arendt, a Jewish student of philosophy, would choose to write on Augustine, Hans Jonas, who studied with Arendt under Martin Heidegger and also at Heidelberg, remarked that such a topic was not at all unusual in the German universities at the time. Jonas himself, also Jewish, chose Augustine as the topic of his dissertation: *Augustin und das paulinische Freiheitsprobem* (Scott and Stark 1996, xv). Indeed, there was a resurgence of interest in the great father of the Christian Church surrounding the fifteen hundredth anniversary of Augustine’s death. Not long after her dissertation, Arendt wrote her own article in honor of the anniversary published in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* entitled “Augustine and Protestantism” (1930). This short essay echoes themes found in her dissertation and prefigures her consideration of Augustine in *The Human Condition*. Furthermore, Arendt studied under the philosophers Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers who were both attracted to the existentialist elements present in Augustine’s *Confessions*. Arendt captures the essence of these elements when she writes in her essay: “In Augustine, the individual who confesses is thrown back into the
loneliness of his own inner life and stands with that inner life revealed before God” (Arendt 1994, 27).

Arendt’s first love was philosophy, reading Kant as an adolescent, but she also had an early interest in theology. After all, she began her intellectual journey not at Marburg and with Heidegger, but in the classroom of Romano Guardini, a Catholic priest, theologian, and Christian existentialist. Arendt’s biographer Elisabeth Young-Bruehl recounts how, after Arendt had been expelled from her Gymnasium in Königsberg for leading a student strike against a teacher who had offended her, her mother had arranged for her daughter to take classes at the University of Berlin, where she attended Guardini’s lectures (Young-Bruehl 2004, 34). Guardini introduced her to the work of Søren Kierkegaard, and she became so interested in Kierkegaard that she decided to make theology her major field of study when she went on to be an officially enrolled student at university (Young-Bruehl 2004, 36).

Though she changed her subject to philosophy when she entered Marburg University in 1924, it was there that Martin Heidegger first sparked Arendt’s interest in Augustine. Martin Heidegger had also made his entry into philosophy via theology. It was his religion classes that had stimulated him the most at Gymnasium, and after graduation he had entered the Society of Jesus as a novice, though he later withdrew because of heart trouble (Safranski 1998, 14-15). Heidegger then enrolled at the

1 Augustine also figures prominently in Albert Camus’ dissertation on Christian Metaphysics (1936).
Freiburg Theological Seminary, where he studied with the antimodernist theologian Carl Braig, though he again had to leave due to his fragile health (Safranski 1998, 16-17). Despite the interruptions of his study, like his later student Arendt, Heidegger’s first encounter with philosophical inquiry had been by way of an interest and training in theology. Indeed, during their first meetings, Husserl was initially reserved in his contact with Heidegger as he regarded him as a Catholic philosopher which, to Husserl, made him less interesting (Safranski 1998, 83).

After completing his Habilitation on Duns Scotus (1915), Heidegger’s interest in Christian thought persisted. Though he had written to his friend and priest Engelbert Krebs in 1919 that he would no longer continue as a practicing Catholic, it did not keep him from giving several lecture series on St. Paul, Augustine, Luther, and Kierkegaard (Safranski 1998, 107, 109). After his appointment to the university at Marburg in 1922, Heidegger became the friend and colleague of theologian Rudolf Bultmann. The two attended each other’s lectures, and mutually influenced each other’s thinking (Young-Bruehl 2004, 48). Arendt also studied the New Testament under Bultmann, and she includes a reference to his work on the Gospel of John in her dissertation (Young-Bruehl 2004, 61; Arendt 2003, 66).²

Heidegger’s recently published lectures on The Phenomenology of Religious Life (2004), given during the years 1920-21, reveal a Heidegger deeply immersed in Christian

² Another interesting project worth investigating is the influence of Bultmann on Arendt’s reading of the New Testament.
theology. His lectures on Paul’s letters demonstrate a sustained inquiry into the primordial nature of Christian belief and practice. His lectures on Augustine are clearly demonstrative of the influence of Augustine on Heidegger’s philosophy. There he focuses his attention on primary themes within the Confessions, namely, the quaestio, the being of “having-been-created,” memoria, forgetfulness, the beata vita, dispersion, the world, and love (Heidegger 2004, 115-184). As we will see, these are all important themes that reappear in Arendt’s own analysis of Augustine in her dissertation.

We can see the indebtedness of Heidegger to Augustine most clearly in his philosophy during the 1920s, when Arendt was his student. Augustine figures prominently in Heidegger’s 1924 The Concept of Time (Capelle 2005, 121-122). Young-Bruehl also writes “The ‘Time’ of Being and Time owes, in its turn, a great debt to Augustine’s Confessions, as great a debt as ‘Being’ owes to Greek ontology” (Arendt 2004, 76). While Being and Time has few direct references to Augustine, Matthias Fritsch argues that “fallenness” is a reincarnation of Augustine’s sinfulness, and that the inwardness of Augustine’s love (cura) becomes “care” for Heidegger (Fritsch 2006, 12-13). Furthermore, Cyril O’ Regan argues that the “existential structures that make possible a genuine response to the disclosure of Being (Sein) bear a positive correlation with the more experiential articulations of the Christian faith” (O’Regan 2012, 137). He

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3 For a more thorough treatment of Augustine’s influence on Heidegger see The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology (Edwin Mellen Press 2006).
also agrees with Fritsch that cura in Augustine becomes Sorge (Care) in Being and Time (O’Regan 2012, 138).

Given her background in theology, as well as her attendance at the lectures that provided the basis for the manuscript of Being and Time, Arendt would have been well aware of the Augustinian connections in Heidegger’s philosophy (Young-Bruehl 2004, 48). Furthermore, Arendt and Heidegger’s early letters demonstrate an ongoing engagement with Augustine. In one letter, Heidegger included the words “Amo means volo, ut sis” (I love you means I want you to be what you are), which reappear in Arendt’s Origins of Totalitarianism (Arendt 2004, 382). In another letter, Heidegger remarks on a reference to Augustine Arendt had made in a previous letter to him, and in another letter he writes that he is currently reading Augustine’s de gratia et libero arbitrio. In other letters he discusses Arendt’s present study of theology and recommends works of theology to her (Arendt and Heidegger 2004).

Scott and Stark argue that Arendt’s interest in Augustine was sparked by Heidegger’s argument, in his own words: that the “thread of tradition was broken” making it possible to “discover the past anew” (Scott and Stark 1996, 117). In her dissertation, Arendt does indeed discover Augustine anew. At the same time, they argue: “Although heavily indebted to her mentors Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, Arendt’s dissertation is her own respectful declaration of independence, which points

\footnote{See Letters 15, 18, 25, 28, 37 in Letters 1925-1975: Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger Ursula Ludz ed.}
the way to her later, explicitly political works” (Scott and Stark 1996, viii). Arendt’s departure “immediately abandons Heidegger’s death-driven phenomenology with Augustine as her guide” (Scott and Stark 1996, 124). Arendt uses Heideggerian deconstruction to uncover the biases of Augustine’s metaphysical commitments in his considerations on love of neighbor. However, it is her study of Augustine that provides her with the resources to break free from both Heidegger and Augustine’s preoccupation with Being in favor of being-with-others in the world.5

Although Arendt was introduced to Augustine by Heidegger, she completed her dissertation under the advisement of Karl Jaspers, who was also influenced by Augustine. Augustine appears in several places in Jasper’s Psychologie der Weltanschauungen (1919), where he specifically focuses on Augustine’s longing for Being and also his transformative religious experience (Jaspers 1919, 201, 362).6 Furthermore, we see the influence of Augustine in Jasper’s notion of “limit situations” (Situation der Grenze), both in terms of the limits of our conditioned existence, specifically our habitual form of existence, and in terms of a specific existential experience that allows us to break free from our limited consciousness into a higher form of consciousness (Jaspers 1919, 261). Compare this to Augustine’s “habitus” and

5 The key question is not, as it is for Heidegger, “why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?” For Arendt, it is, as she said in one of her lectures, “why is there anybody at all and not rather nobody?” (Arendt 2004, 204).

6 Presently, there is no study of Augustine’s influence on Jaspers, and unfortunately no English translation of Psychologie der Weltanschauungen.
his transformative experience in the garden described in Book VIII of the *Confessions* that allows Augustine to break free from habit, both of which Jaspers alludes to specifically in *Psychologie*.

Several years after Arendt’s completion of her dissertation, Jaspers published his own short explication of Augustine’s philosophy and theology in *Plato and Augustine: From the Great Philosophers Volume I* (1962). Jaspers agrees with Arendt’s conclusions in her dissertation concerning Augustine’s essential worldlessness. He writes:

“Augustine...stands radically and fundamentally remote from the world, because with God and the spiritual community he sets himself in opposition to it” (Jaspers 1962, 94).

The section entitled “Love” reflects many key ideas and raises similar questions to those concerns found in Arendt’s dissertation. Jaspers asks: “Does real love in the world tend in Augustine to transform itself into an extramundane love that is consequentially unreal in the world?” (Jaspers 1962, 98-99). He ultimately leaves this question unanswered, but does say that, for Augustine, salvation takes priority of place in neighbor-love (Jaspers 1962, 99). It is clear that acting as the advisor to Arendt’s dissertation influenced Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine, and also had a lasting effect on Jasper’s own thought.

From briefly looking at Arendt’s early studies and the chief interests of her foremost academic influences, namely, Heidegger and Jaspers, it is now clearer why Arendt would select Augustine as a topic for her dissertation. Arendt’s interest in Augustine was sparked by Heidegger and encouraged by Jaspers, who were themselves both fascinated and influenced by the work of Augustine in significant respects. But, it
was in her own study of Augustine that Arendt discovered resources that she would later rely upon to develop her original political theory.

Augustine in Arendt’s Writing

The lasting and important influence of Arendt’s first study of Augustine on her political theory can be clearly demonstrated by examining her more mature political theory in light of a careful reading of her original dissertation. References to Augustine and reliance on Augustinian concepts are replete throughout Arendt’s work, in texts as diverse as The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951), The Human Condition (1958), Between Past and Future (1961), Men in Dark Times (1968), On Revolution (1973), and in the essays written during the last ten years of her life collected in Responsibility and Judgment (2003). Arendt’s last project, which was intended to be three volumes but went unfinished due to her death in 1975, ended her fruitful intellectual journey as she had begun it—in conversation with Augustine. In the second volume of The Life of the Mind (1978), it is Augustine who Arendt calls “the first philosopher of the Will” (Arendt 1978, 84).

Arendt’s dissertation investigates the “problem of love” in the thought of Saint Augustine (Arendt 1996, 3). Arendt’s sustained study of this problem is guided, first and foremost, by “the meaning and importance of neighborly love in particular” (Arendt 1996, 3). As the Christian commandment to loves one’s neighbor is tied to love of God and love of self, Arendt addresses each in turn: first, love of self, then, love of God, and finally, love of neighbor (Arendt 1996, 3). Arendt concludes her dissertation with evident
dissatisfaction with Augustine’s account of neighborly love. According to Augustine, she writes:

> I never love my neighbor for his own sake, only for the sake of divine grace. This indirectness, which is unique to love of neighbor, puts an even more radical stop to the self-evident living together in the earthly city...This indirectness breaks up social relations by turning them into provisional ones. (Arendt 1996, 111)

In her dissertation Arendt finds that Augustine’s philosophy of love is essentially worldless, and thus rejects the independent meaning and inherent value of being with others in the world.

Arendt’s dissatisfaction with Augustine is the beginning of her theoretical investigations into the meaning and significance of human plurality. This eventually entails a refutation of Augustinian worldlessness, and of all political philosophies in the Western Tradition that have viewed politics as a necessary evil or merely useful to serve some more important end. Despite her rejection of an Augustinian transcendence of the world, it is precisely Augustinian concepts, in particular “natality,” that constitute the basis of her formulation for an alternative in *The Human Condition*. Arendt draws upon theoretical resources first discovered in her original study of Augustine to develop a phenomenology of a distinctly political realm. She uses her dissertation on Augustine against Augustine—as a resource for a refounding the *civitas terrena*.

Arendt’s first book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, is a monumental work that combines historical, sociological, and theoretical methodologies in its account of “an entirely new form of government” (Arendt 2004, 478). Themes found in the dissertation
appear throughout Origins, especially in Arendt’s discussions of equality and individuality, the ties that form the “in-between” uniting and separating plural men, the isolation and loneliness of the masses, and her account of memory, as well as her analysis of totalitarianism’s contempt for the reality of the world. Totalitarian movements depend “on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man” (my emphasis; Arendt 2004, 612). In Origins, Arendt affirms an inalienable human right to belong to a shared world, built together and held in common. Significantly, Arendt closes a second edition of Origins with a quote from Augustine: “That a beginning be made man was created” (Arendt 2004, 616). Beginning, she writes, “is the supreme capacity of man...guaranteed by each new birth” (Arendt 2004, 616). Because human beings are beginners, we have the possibility of founding new political communities that protect and promotes human plurality. Thus a book that plumbs the depths of terror and evil does not end with despair but with hope—a hope inspired by Augustine.

In Augustine, Arendt locates an antidote to the basic experience of loneliness and worldlessness. This basic experience, Arendt argues in Origins, is not the disease, but rather the symptom of a much more pervasive phenomenon that characterizes modernity. What we find, Arendt insists, is that, “Under the most diverse conditions and disparate circumstances, we watch the development of the same phenomena—homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth” (Arendt 2004, xxix). The more immediate circumstances that have given rise to the modern experience of not feeling at home in the world is the rise of the social and the
loss of an authentic public realm to government as administration, but the roots of worldlessness, for Arendt, can be traced all the way back to the beginning of political theory.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt accounts for the loss of an authentic public sphere and the experience of human freedom in the world. She describes the devaluation of the *vita activa*, as a public-political life, as beginning the moment when the *vita contemplativa* was judged to be the only truly free way of life (Arendt 1998, 14). This phenomenon began with “Plato’s political philosophy, where the whole utopian reorganization of polis life is not only directed by the superior insight of the philosopher but has no aim other than to make possible the philosopher’s way of life” (Arendt 1998, 14). Still, for Plato this way of life was limited to a few. It was only with Augustine and Christianity’s “claim to be free from entanglement in worldly affairs,” that “what had been demanded only by the few was now considered to be a right of all” (Arendt 1998, 14-15). Arendt lays the blame squarely on Augustine for turning government into a necessary evil. From Augustine onwards, political theorists viewed public life as a burden, merely instrumental to serve a more important goal.

Arendt relies on concepts derived from her first work on Augustine to reclaim an authentic public sphere and the experience of human freedom. Arendt finds in Augustine the human condition of plurality, by which she means the basic human condition of human equality and human distinctiveness. Arendt references Augustine’s account of the creation story in *The City of God*, Book XII: “To Augustine the creation story offers a welcome opportunity to stress the species character of animal life as
distinguished from the singularity of human existence” (Arendt 1998, 8). Human beings are singular in that men are not endless “repetitions of the same model” (Arendt 1998, 8). If they were, “Action would be an unnecessary luxury, a capricious interference with general laws of behavior” (Arendt 1908, 8). Arendt’s conception of “natality,” as the basis for her account of human action, also finds its theoretical foundation in Augustine. At the start of the penultimate chapter in The Human Condition, Arendt writes, “To act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin...Because they are initium, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action” (Arendt 1998, 177). Here Arendt quotes from City of God, Book XII, “that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody” (Arendt 1998, 177). Similarly, Arendt’s articulation of “a world of men and of man made things,” also known as the public sphere, in The Human Condition is also first recognizable in her presentation of Augustine’s Christian conception of the meaning of “world” (Arendt 1998, 22). As will be shown in the following chapters, Arendt’s affirmation of human plurality and natality, her concept of world, her concern for the devaluation of the vita activa vis-à-vis the vita contemplativa, and her conclusions regarding love and politics all originated in her first study of Augustine.

Scholarship on the Subject of the Relationship of Arendt to Augustine

Few scholars have considered Arendt’s reliance on Augustine or the relationship of her dissertation to her mature theory. One of the primary obstacles to gaining access to this connection in Arendt’s work was the fact that her dissertation remained
unpublished in English until 1996. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark did a great service for Arendt and Augustine scholars alike by editing and preparing for publication the 1929 dissertation, including the revisions Arendt made to it in the early 1960s. With the availability of the revised dissertation, gaining greater insight into the full extent to which Arendt relied on, adapted, or critiqued Augustinian ideas became possible. In the preface to *Love and Saint Augustine*, Scott and Stark offer likely explanations for the long neglect of the dissertation:

One possible reason for the omission in political science is that a critical appraisal of the text requires familiarity with both medieval and contemporary philosophy, which is not common among Arendt specialists. Another reason is that the seriousness with which Arendt engaged Augustine in the dissertation and the obvious resonances of the text with her American works disturb the status quo in the field. (Scott and Stark 1996, xi)

Scott and Stark, however, are not discouraged by the general lack of recognition of Augustine’s impact on Arendt, and they argue persuasively in their essay that the dissertation should be viewed as the first formulation of Arendt’s basic “metapolitical paradigm” (Scott and Stark 1996, 128). In this vein, they maintain: “Reading the dissertation out of Arendt’s work distorts as well as contracts the scope and nature of scholarly discourse on her contribution to political thought” (Scott and Stark 1996, 130).

More recently, even though several publications on the topic of Arendt and Augustine have enlarged and contributed to the discussion, Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott, in a 2002 article, still saw fundamental prejudices in Arendt scholarship as a persistent obstruction to furthering our knowledge of how and in what ways Arendt appropriates Augustine. Scott points out that the editor of *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (2000), Peter
Baehr, did not include selections from the dissertation because he was concerned about exaggerating its significance for Arendt’s mature thought (Scott 2002, 21). In particular, Scott sees the connection the dissertation has to Heidegger as a stumbling block for those who wish to distance Arendt from her early mentor (Scott 2002, 21). Mark Lilla, for example, sees Arendt’s early work, insofar as it was under the influence of the nascent Nazi Martin Heidegger, as fatally contaminated (Scott 2002, 21). Scott explains: “Given the Heideggerian aura which radiates from the surface of Arendt’s discussion of the ‘Creator’ and ‘natality’ as surrogates for ‘Being’ and ‘death’ in Heidegger’s work, some initial caution is understandable” (Scott 2002, 21). In reply to Lilla, however, Scott sees the dissertation not as “an ode to Heidegger, but a respectful declaration of independence both as a thinker and in her ‘given’ identity as a Jew” (Scott 2002, 21). Instead of worrying about the dissertation’s connection to Heidegger, scholars should be more concerned about overlooking important insights that are to be gained by recognizing the clear connections between Augustine’s thought and Arendt’s political theory.

Prior to the publication of the dissertation, two articles in 1988 dealt with Arendt’s indebtedness to Augustine—specifically, on the topic of Arendt’s interest in the will as a human faculty. Suzanne Jacobitti maintains that as Arendt was well aware that the concept of the will had undergone “rather devastating criticism by recent philosophers such as Ryle and Wittgenstein,” her insistence on the will in the face of such criticism “seems quite bold” (Jacobitti 1988, 54). Working within the tradition of phenomenology, Arendt argues that what matters is our direct experiences of the will,
such as that first reported by St. Paul, rather than what philosophers have said about it (Jacobitti 1988, 54, 56). Jacobitti sees Arendt as deriving her idea of the will from the thought of St. Augustine, Duns Scotus, and Kant, though, ultimately, not accepting their positions (Jacobitti 1988, 59). In regards to Augustine, Jacobitti writes that Arendt was impressed with three points: that Augustine emphasized the self-determined nature of the will (meaning that human choice is radically free); in interpreting Paul’s struggle, Augustine suggested the will’s power to say ‘no’ to existence itself; and finally, that the will was the source of each man’s ability to create something new in the world (Jacobitti 1988, 60). Jacobitti, however, views the will in Arendt’s thought as an “expendable” aspect of her philosophy insofar as it “slips into metaphysical thinking of the sort she criticizes in others” (Jacobitti 1988, 65, 67).

Also in the February 1988 edition of Political Theory, Bonnie Honig argues that it is in the second volume of The Life of the Mind, on Willing, “that Arendt enhances her theory of action with an explication of her views on identity and a revision of the earlier account of the will” (Honig 1988, 77). In contrast to other accounts, including Jacobitti’s, which view Arendt’s concept of the will as inconsistent with her earlier work, Honig hopes “to show that Arendt’s account of the will in Willing and the concept of the self upon which it relies are internally coherent and importantly consistent with her earlier accounts of action and identity” (Honig 1988, 77). Honig sees Arendt as adopting Augustine’s “initium ut esset homo creatus est”—man has the capacity for beginning because he himself is a beginning—as the basis for her conception of the will (Honig 1988, 79). According to Honig, a shift, but not an inconsistency, has taken place from
Between Past and Future (BPF) to The Life of the Mind (LOM), and that the best way to understand this shift is to focus on Arendt’s indebtedness to Augustine and Kant:

In BPF, Arendt adopts an Augustinian view of the will as divided and self-sabotaging...This much is unchanged in LOM...But Arendt now sees this view as incomplete and she criticizes Augustine for not having gone further. Augustine should have allowed his belief, that “every man, being created in the singular, is a new beginning by virtue of his birth”’ to inform his view of the will. Had he done so, Arendt argues, “he would have defined men, not, like the Greeks, as mortals, but as ‘natals’ and he would have defined the freedom of the will not as the liberum arbitrium...but as the freedom of which Kant speaks...the freedom of spontaneity.” (Honig 1988, 82)

Though the will does not feature specifically in earlier works such as The Human Condition, after this explication, one can see how Arendt’s concept of natality can be related to her idea of willing.

Though Scott is correct that not nearly enough work has been done in this area, the conversation about Arendt and Augustine has been enlarged since the publication of the dissertation and several new avenues for further research have been identified. However, the scholarly work has been primarily in the form of book reviews and in critiques of Arendt’s account of Augustine. Furthermore this work has been done by theologians and not by political theorists. In his 1997 review of Love and Saint Augustine, Charles T. Mathewes seconds the point Scott and Stark made in their interpretive essay about Arendt using Augustine as a resource to critique Heidegger:

In her work Arendt asked not about the meaning of being, but about the meaning of freedom, about the place of human agency in the world. In this Augustine—whom she called “the first philosopher of freedom”—was her teacher, perhaps more decisively than were Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger. (Indeed,
her revisions critique Heidegger from an Augustinian perspective, contrasting Augustine’s account of plurality and natality with Heidegger’s elitism and depiction of authenticity as being-toward-death.) (Mathewes 1997, 490)

Mathewes, however, ultimately sees Arendt’s argument in Love and Saint Augustine as “implausible” (Mathewes 1997, 490). Ironically, Mathewes says, it is Augustine, the subject of the dissertation, who is least engaged in Scott and Stark’s essay. According to Mathewes, Arendt sets up a straw man in order to use Augustine for her own purposes. This leads Mathewes to call for “a thorough investigation into how Augustine’s thought has been appropriated in the twentieth century by constructive thinkers” (Mathewes 1997, 490).

George McKenna makes a similar critique of Arendt in his First Things review from the same year, but shows how Arendt’s use of Augustine is not unique to the dissertation. In regards to the Augustine quote from the last page of the Origin of Totalitarianism, George McKenna says:

Inspiring as it is, Arendt’s quotation from Augustine’s City of God (Book XII, Ch. 20) is taken out of context. In that section Augustine was not talking about any ‘capacity of man’ but the capacity of God to start something new in the universe; he was refuting the Platonic theory of souls eternally coming in and going out of the world. To find in his remark a celebration of man’s capacities or even a glimmer of hope for some sort of secular renewal is to find something that is not there. (McKenna 1997, 44)

According to Thomas Breidenthal, Arendt’s critique of charity in Augustine should be taken as more than a simple reminder that Christians have often held political life, and the temporal concerns it entails, as insignificant when viewed in light of the eternal. Arendt’s critique goes much further than this. If politics is the possibility to
appear before others in word and deed, and if charity prevents this possibility, then charity is a principle that prevents politics from occurring (Breidenthal 1998, 490). The conclusion of Arendt’s dissertation, Breidenthal argues, is to claim that “it is of the essence of Christianity to be anti-political, just as some have suggested that it is of the essence of Christianity to be anti-Semitic” (Breidenthal 1998, 490). Breidenthal does see a shift in Arendt’s thinking from the dissertation to The Human Condition. In The Human Condition, Arendt admits that the Christian concern for the neighbor manifests itself in “good works,” as opposed to her view in the dissertation where Christian concern for the neighbor is represented as merely the task of directing the neighbor’s attention away from the world and toward eternity (Breidenthal 1998, 494). Still remaining, however, is Arendt’s view that Christianity is subversive of politics. Christians “cannot with integrity participate in an enterprise which, from the Christian point of view (as Arendt understands it) is based on a lie” (Breidenthal 1998, 494).

Breidenthal claims that Arendt’s views stem from her misunderstanding of the doctrine of the incarnation. Breidenthal relies on Augustine’s Tractates on the Gospel of John, a reflection on the act of God coming near to us, or, in other words, God becoming our neighbor. Christ’s arrival in history means that love of God does not stand in between love of neighbor, but that loving neighbor and loving God coincide. Because of Christ’s humanity, engagement with the earthly neighbor opens the door to engagement with the eternal God. Alternatively, engagement with Christ, the Word incarnate, directs us to further engagement with our neighbor (Breidenthal 1998, 498). This engagement, Breidenthal affirms, can take place in politics.
Joshua Mitchell’s review also counsels readers to have some hesitance before embracing the presentation of Augustine by Arendt, noting in regards to her dissertation: “One of the striking features of this work is its insistence that Augustine be treated as a philosopher rather than as a theologian” (Mitchell 1999, 700). This methodology “is important for the obvious reason that the Augustine who emerges into view through the lens of philosophy is likely to look somewhat distorted” (Mitchell 1999, 700). This leads Mitchell to propose another interesting possibility for further research: “Worth pondering is not simply whether setting up the problem in this ‘pure’ way predestines certain conclusions and forecloses others, but whether doing so precludes the kind of answer Arendt herself sought to find” (Mitchell 1999, 700). Mitchell advises: “It would be well to remember that while Augustine was a philosopher, he was, by profession, a bishop—with all that that entails about the tension between theory and practice” (Mitchell 1999, 703).

More recently, in Politics and the Order of Love (2008), Eric Gregory has also attempted to address Arendt’s critique of charity. Like Breidenthal, Gregory reflects on the implications of Augustine’s theology of the incarnation for neighbor-love. Gregory also sees in Augustine the coincidence of love of God and love of neighbor as made possible through the appearance of Christ (Gregory 2008, 328). Because the Word became flesh, there can be no separation of love for God and love for neighbor (Gregory 2008, 328). Failure to love neighbor, is, in each case, failure to love God (Gregory 2008, 330). Though salvation in Christ directs the self toward God, salvation also grants the Christian the capability to share in God’s love for humanity (Gregory 2008, 329).
Furthermore, Gregory believes Arendt misunderstands Augustine’s reliance on “use” as a way of describing how the Christian should love the neighbor. The Christian is not called to love the neighbor simply as a means of loving God; rather, “Augustinians ‘use’ their neighbor for their neighbor’s sake” (Gregory 2008, 19). Comprehended correctly, use, as opposed to enjoyment, serves as a way of protecting the neighbor from the self’s tendency toward idolatry (Gregory 2008, 380). Loving the neighbor for the sake of God protects the neighbor from the temptation to see the neighbor as existing solely to fulfill one’s own ends (Gregory 2008, 221). To “enjoy” the other or to “enjoy” the political community would mean to desire of the neighbor or community what they cannot fulfill. Augustinians, Gregory argues, are grateful for the accomplishments of politics and can be committed to its ends, but cannot view the neighbor or the political community as “the final site of human wholeness” (Gregory 2008, 381). To do so, would be dangerous. Instead, Augustinians generously love the neighbor when they do not expect more from him than he is capable of providing.

Gregory also contests Arendt’s conclusion that Christian charity is concerned solely with the neighbor in their singularity—their salvation or their lack thereof. For Augustine, Gregory writes, love of neighbor necessarily recognizes individuation as a gift of God. Indeed, this plurality of persons is part of the goodness of creation (Gregory 2008, 261). Furthermore, Christians should not only be concerned with their neighbor’s

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7 Gregory acknowledges that although Augustine eventually abandons the precise distinction between “use” and “enjoyment,” which has long irritated his critics, the “spirit” of the distinction can still be found throughout his writing (Gregory 2008, 323).
salvation. Rather, “love entails solidarity with others not exclusively in terms of their spiritual welfare” (Gregory 2008, 289). Gregory cites a passage in *De doctrina Christiana* in which Augustine admonishes his readers to be anxious for their neighbor’s physical well-being and safety (Gregory 2008, 289). Gregory also addresses Arendt’s concern regarding the limitlessness of the ends of charity. Again referring to *De doctrina Christiana*, Gregory points out that while Augustine insists that the Christian is to love all people equally, he is careful to acknowledge that it is physically impossible to do good to every person. For this reason, Christians are to have particular concern for those closest to them (Gregory 2008, 294). Gregory also references *De Diversis Quaestonibus Octoginta Tribus* and *De vera religione* in order to show that Augustine advises against allowing excessive compassion to interfere with prudence and judgment. Augustine advises his readers when extending a hand to one in need to be careful that he also not bring himself so low that both are lying down, but extends his hand in order to lift up the other (Gregory 2008, 292).

Both Breidenthal and Gregory challenge Arendt’s claims, originating in the dissertation, that love is anti-political, is preoccupied with the neighbor only in their singularity, and that the aims of Christian charity are limitless. Still, the focus of recent scholarship on Augustine and Arendt has been primarily in the form of a defense of Augustine, rather than on how Arendt’s political theory drew on positive resources made available by her first study of Augustine. Between 1996 and the present we have only seen one full book-length study of the influence of Arendt’s dissertation on Arendt’s later work. An excellent and provocative study by Stephan Kampowski, *Arendt*,
Augustine, and the New Beginning (2008), focuses on the influence of Augustine on what Kampowski takes to be Arendt’s moral philosophy, particularly in The Human Condition and The Life of the Mind. Kampowski’s argues that Arendt’s concern for evil in history and the possibility of judgment and action originate in her first study of Augustine. He also traces the themes of temporality and conditionedness from her dissertation to her later political theory. By reflecting on the relationship of Augustine and Arendt in this way, he provides his readers with new and provocative reflections on the moral motivation for action. He maintains that, for Arendt, what makes an action “great” is its inherent meaningfulness. He does, nevertheless, argue that we also must include an understanding of moral virtue in a theory of action. The Life of the Mind, he says, posits virtues as an impediment to spontaneity. For Kampowski, “virtue increases freedom as it opens up new possibilities” (Kampowski 2008, 224).

Kampowski is to be commended for returning to the dissertation and retracing its impact on Arendt’s later thought. By putting them in conversation with each other in the way he does, he demonstrates how fruitful such an exercise can be. He articulates an understanding of moral action that relies on both the Christian tradition and Arendt’s political theory. This is the best kind of outcome of such a study. Given the fact that most of the scholarly work on the topic of Arendt’s dissertation has focused on a rebuttal of the arguments she makes there, my contribution will be valuable. My primary interest is not in defending Augustine. Rather, like Kampowski, I hope that by reading Arendt’s later works from the perspective of her dissertation, we can shed new light on her political thought. Unlike Kampowski, I focus more attention on The Origins
of Totalitarianism and The Human Condition. There I hope to demonstrate the continuity between the concern for being with others that Arendt developed while she wrote her dissertation and her concern for plurality in her mature political thought.

In my conclusion, I also focus attention on the importance of love for a political community. I hope my brief considerations there provoke further inquiries into the relationship of Christianity to the public realm and the relationship of love and emotion to politics. John Perry has argued that, as of late, moral theologians have neglected the primacy of love in Christian political thought, while in her new book on Political Emotions (2013) Martha Nussbaum has demonstrated the bias against emotion in political theory. I hope my project will spark further inquiry into both these important areas of study. I also hope that studies like my own and Kampowski’s can encourage an on-going dialogue between Christian and non-Christian political philosophies. Arendt herself noted that Christianity is an underused resource for political theory:

The discoverer of the role of forgiveness in the realm of human affairs was Jesus of Nazareth. The fact that he made this discovery in a religious context and articulated it in religious language is no reason to take it any less seriously in a strictly secular sense. It has been in the nature of our tradition of political thought (and for reasons we cannot explore here) to be highly selective and to exclude from articulate conceptualization a great variety of authentic political experiences, among which we need not be surprised to find some of an even elementary nature. (Arendt 1998, 238-239)

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8 I owe the insight concerning love and moral theology to on-going conversations with my friend John Perry, who is presently the Lecturer in Theological Ethics at the University of St Andrews.
In understanding the theological roots of Arendt’s political thought, we can see how certain potentially fruitful ideas may have been ignored by political theorists because of a secular bias.

Also, as a broader inquiry into the nature of the relationship of the theological to the political, this dissertation will be addressing one of the enduring questions of political theory.

In the prologue to *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes that it is “thoughtlessness” which is “among the outstanding characteristics of our time” (Arendt 1998, 5). Against this thoughtlessness, Arendt proposes that we “think what we are doing” (Arendt 1998, 5). Given that both Augustine and Arendt ask us to acknowledge the habits we are caught up in, to recall our essential humanity, and to consider thoughtfully the way we live our lives in the world, a thorough reading of their works and a careful consideration of their theories is well worth the effort.

**Interpretive Challenges**

Even though Arendt is considered a political theorist, while Augustine would more properly be described as a theologian, readers of Augustine and Arendt alike encounter similar interpretive challenges. Like Augustine, whose political thought is often located in unexpected places and in writings with an altogether different purpose, Arendt did not write a systematic political philosophy. Instead, her political theory is to be found in numerous essays and lectures, and in the key texts *The Origins of*
Arendt’s writing style “symphonic,” as it does not present a straightforward argument, but rather interweaves and develops themes often “saying more than can be comfortably digested”—much like Augustine (Canovan 1992, 3). Interpreters have made the mistake of considering *The Human Condition* Arendt’s definitive political treatise, but this is a misguided approach. *The Human Condition* is not Arendt’s systematic statement of her political theory, but rather it is her attempt to articulate the human “predicament from which politics must start” (Canovan 1992, 99-100). In this way, *The Human Condition* represents a kind of prolegomena to political theory. In the mid-1950s Arendt did have plans to write what may have been a more systematic statement of her political thought entitled *Introduction to Politics*, intended to examine, as her proposal states, “chief traditional concepts and conceptual frameworks of political thinking,” but that project was put aside due to Arendt’s commitment to *On Revolution* and then later the Eichmann trial (Canovan 1992, 100-1).

But it was not only that Arendt could not find the time to write her *Introduction to Politics* that leaves her political thought unsystematic in nature. The lack of a system was fundamental to Arendt’s approach and was quite deliberate. For Arendt, it is in the

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9 Note what Arendt writes (quoted by Canovan) in her research proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation, where she describes her previous work: “the central political human activity is action...in order to arrive at an adequate understanding...it proved necessary to separate action conceptually from other human activities with which is it usually confounded, such as labor and work...*[The Human Condition]* is a kind of prolegomena to the book which I now intend to write. It will continue where the other book ends” (Canovan 1992, 100).
very nature of authentic political thinking to be both tentative and flexible, arising in
response to real political events, and willing to change in the face of these new realities
(Canovan 1992, 5). Arendt represented her method as a process of seeking her own
understanding. Her first concern was to understand a phenomenon, whether or not she
expressed her thought process adequately in writing was secondary (Arendt 1994, 3).

In a recent book (2011), Steve Buckler argues that, Arendt writes in “an eclectic
style, involving a mixture of idioms...with elements of paradox and perplexity” (Buckler
2011, 4). Nevertheless and despite these challenges, Buckler argues Arendt’s
methodology offers a unique way of theorizing politics. In sharp contrast to traditional
and contemporary theorizing, which seeks conceptual finality and explanatory closure,
Arendt adopts a “discursive disposition,” that does not lead us to “final results” or “solid
axioms,” but instead offers us contingent meaning (Buckler 2011, 40). Her dialogic
method of theorizing politics, while at times making it difficult or frustrating to try to
discern her meaning, remains faithful to “the authentic nature of politics, which she
thought of as an intrinsically spontaneous and unpredictable engagement” (Buckler
2011, 2). This absence of a systematic statement poses a challenge to Arendt’s
interpreters. It means interpreters have to carefully read her writings with an eye to
overarching themes that appear and then reappear. This I attempt to do in the following
chapters.
Chapter Outline

In my first chapter, my purpose is to provide an interpretation of Augustine’s political theory. This interpretation will provide the context and background we need to understand Arendt’s dissertation. Furthermore, I highlight key themes in Augustine’s thought that appear in her dissertation, as well as those that she opposes in her more mature theory. It will be especially helpful to have underscored the essential elements of Augustine’s political thought when we read the last chapter of my dissertation. Because of what we have already done in this first chapter, it will be much clearer how Arendt uses resources discovered in her first study of Augustine precisely to develop an anti-Augustinian political theory. In Chapter One, I demonstrate that Augustine’s political thought is essentially focused on providing for the needs and security of the body, so that Christians are free to practice and witness to their faith in Christ. This is true even when Augustine’s thought is read in context, which I make a concerted effort to do, and which, in her dissertation, Arendt explicitly avoids. For Augustine, the possibilities of political life are necessarily limited by sin. The responsibility of a Christian citizen is to obey the law, while loving his neighbor within what Arendt would identify as the private sphere. When a Christian takes up a public position, he should do so in humility and remember that he performs his duty as an obligation of love. He should be wary of the pride of position that could jeopardize his eternal salvation.

In Chapter Two, I provide a close and careful reading of Arendt’s original German dissertation. I do not make my own argument in this chapter, but rather endeavor to make clear Arendt’s guiding research question, show how she proceeds to answer this
question, and then explain how she reaches her conclusions. It is vital to my project to provide this careful reading of her dissertation because it will allow me to demonstrate how the questions, concepts, and concerns of this first study of Augustine appear in both *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. What we find in reading her dissertation is that Arendt is first concerned with “the relevance of the other” in Augustine’s philosophy of love. She pursues her query in three contexts in which love of the other appears: love as desire, love as return to Being, and love as shared past. In all three contexts, she finds that Augustine, first and foremost, is concerned with eternal salvation. She argues that this relativizes the meaning of being with others in the world, and makes our social relationships merely provisional.

In Chapter Three, I begin to formulate the argument of this dissertation, which is that Arendt’s original study of Augustine had an enduring and significant influence on her later political theory. I demonstrate how Arendt’s concern for the significance of the human condition of plurality began in the dissertation. I show that it appears in her chief research question: what is the relevance of the other? It also appears, however, in her interest in her query into the “inter se” or the “in-between” that connects us to other human beings in their “concrete worldly existence” (2003, 110, 111). In other words, she is interested in how unique human beings can be united together in a community. We also see what she later describes as the “two-fold character” of human plurality first take shape in her dissertation. In her dissertation, she argues that, for Augustine, men have a “two-fold origin.” They have a unique being as created beings coming from God, and they have a historical being in their generation from Adam. The former gives rise to
their individuality, and the latter to their equality. Finally, we see Arendt demonstrate a concern for human plurality in her dissatisfaction with the transcendence of the world and being with others that Augustine’s philosophy of love requires. This concern for plurality becomes much more concrete after her experience with totalitarianism.

In Chapter Four, I begin to examine the first of the two principle works that are regarded to be Arendt’s most original contributions to political theory: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). I endeavor to show that Arendt’s concern for human plurality intensified as a result of her encounter with totalitarianism, but that this did not mark a fundamental shift in her thinking as some scholars, such as Margaret Canovan, have argued (Canovan 1992, 8). Instead Arendt’s original concern for plurality became concretized and made all the more urgent in light of the horrors perpetrated by what Arendt believed to be the newest and most terrifying form of government. In her study of the historical and philosophical developments that made the rise of totalitarianism possible, we see her studying the relationship of the Jews to the modern European nation-state and bourgeois society. She argues that their exclusion from the equality guaranteed to nationals by the body-politic put them in an extremely vulnerable position. Furthermore, once they were granted equal citizenship late in the 19th century, they were admitted to society only under certain conditions. They were not permitted to express their individuality authentically, but rather had to play the part of “the Jew”—an image that long-standing prejudices in European society had cultivated. We see in Part I of *Origins* that when there is no common body-politic that unites and separates legal equals—a body-politic that grants legal equalities to all persons while
still allowing individuals, in their differences, to appear—“pariahs” within society
become vulnerable to disgust, hatred, and potentially murder.

In Chapter Four, I also look at Arendt’s concern for human plurality as it appears
in her study of imperialism. There she argues that in their unlimited pursuit of
accumulation, the bourgeoisie sought new territories and new peoples to exploit, and
the new ideology of racism developed in order to justify this exploitation. Europeans
argued that black Africans did not share a common origin with whites, and that they
could be used and slaughtered as animals. In order to rule over a people not fit to
govern themselves, imperialists transported government by bureaucracy to their foreign
possessions. In Arendt’s study of the rise of Anti-Semitism and in the rise of what she
calls the “pan-movements,” we see the results of ostracizing another group of human
beings, disregarding their fundamental equality, and basing a political community on
“sameness” rather than legal equality. In her study of the “origins” of totalitarianism,
Arendt continues to pursue the question of the relevance of the other, but in the
concrete context of the 19th century European nation-state and its society. She
continues to be concerned with human equality, the greatest demonstration of which
she believes to be “a common origin” (2004, 301). However, she believes we cannot rely
on our equality before God; rather, equality must be guaranteed by the law.
Furthermore, we see Arendt arguing that the public sphere must allow genuine human
distinctiveness to appear. This stands in contrast to Augustine who, as we see in
Arendt’s dissertation, admonished believers to transcend their worldly individuality. In
Chapter Four, I show that Arendt’s concern for plurality, begun in her dissertation,
continues, but that she also begins to develop a political theory that provides a response to her dissatisfaction with Augustinian worldlessness.

In Chapter Five, I examine Arendt’s theory of the totalitarian movement and totalitarianism in power. It is here that we see Arendt relying on the Augustinian concept of the man-made world, the human artifice and the realm of human affairs, for her own conception of the common world. What we discover in her analysis of the rise of totalitarianism is that it requires the isolation and atomization of each and every human being and the loss of a common world. Once totalitarianism is in power, it seeks to dominate human beings in order to deny the reality of the world for the sake of the complete consistency of an ideology. In Chapter Five, I argue that Arendt is deeply disturbed by totalitarianism precisely because its ultimate aim is the total eradication of human plurality from the earth, but that she uses a concept derived from the dissertation, the concept of the common world, in order to argue against totalitarianism’s own brand of worldlessness. She argues that the only inalienable human right is the right to belong. In contrast to Augustine, who wants us to belong not to the world, but to eternity, Arendt affirms our fundamental right to belong to a common world and to a body-politic that we have founded together in the world. In addition, she demonstrates what kinds of horrors may result from the loss or abandonment of this world.

In Chapter Six, we are finally able to see how Arendt uses ideas derived from her dissertation to counter not only Augustine’s worldlessness, but the loss of a common world that prepared the way for the rise of totalitarianism. Arendt writes *The Human*
*Condition* because she believes that isolation and loneliness, as well as the loss of a common world, still characterize contemporary society. She argues that we must reconsider the human condition in light of our newest experiences and greatest fears. She does so ultimately to reaffirm a life lived in public together with others as the freest and highest possibility of being human. To do so, she relies extensively on resources drawn from the dissertation. Her account of the *vita contemplativa* depends to a great degree on her account of the return to Being in her dissertation. She also makes use of Augustine’s two-fold concept of the world to articulate the distinction between labor and work. Most significantly, she explicitly points to Augustine as introducing “natality” into the Western tradition: “*Initium ut esset homo creatus est*—‘that a beginning be made man was created’ said Augustine” (Arendt 2004, 616). She grounds her theory of action in the principle of natality, which she defines as the capability of man to introduce something new into human affairs. This, she argues, is the essence of human freedom. In Chapter Six, I argue that Arendt uses ideas present in her dissertation, including also *memoria*, to develop a political theory that affirms that freedom can be found and meaning created in the human world built and shared with others. From her dissertation we know that this is precisely what Augustine identifies as pride—a sin that deprives one of the ultimate meaning of being lying ahead of us in eternity. It is finally in *The Human Condition* that Arendt’s original question concerning the relevance of the other is answered, but in a profoundly anti-Augustinian way. Without being with others, we could not verify the reality of the world, discover the “who” of who we are, express
our individuality, or know freedom and meaning. All of this requires a world that we share in common with our fellow equal, yet distinct, human beings.

Finally, in my conclusion I address Arendt’s claim that love is essentially anti-political. I ask whether or not Arendt misread Augustine, or if she misunderstood the meaning of Christian love. Additionally, I ask whether or not there is room for a political conception of love, a love that would affirm being with others in the world, and that would not necessarily degenerate into the terror she believes was demonstrated in the French Revolutionaries’ “compassion.” In regards to both these questions, there are no easy answers. Nevertheless, I offer some initial considerations on the possibility of “civic love” and its nature, as well as its role in public life.
CHAPTER 1:

AUGUSTINE’S POLITICAL THEORY

The purpose of this first chapter is to identify the major themes of Augustine’s perspective on government and politics, on love, and on new beginnings so that in the next chapters we are better positioned to consider the accuracy of Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine and, especially, to better understand where and how Arendt is influenced by her own reading of Augustine. A general introduction to Augustine’s political thought provides a helpful background for understanding Arendt’s dissertation on Augustine’s philosophy of love and social life.

This chapter will also allow us to see how Arendt appropriates Augustinian concepts for her own theoretical ends, and also to demonstrate the ways in which Arendt’s political theory is in opposition to what Augustine argues is the only right attitude toward politics. In this chapter, I will highlight significant points of distinction between Arendt and Augustine that will be further explored and elaborated on in Chapters Five and Six. Outlining the main contours of Augustine’s political thought will also permit me the opportunity, in the final chapter of this dissertation, to indicate what my own position concerning the relationship between love and politics shares with Augustine’s, as well as where it departs.
Augustine spent the greater part of his youth studying the Platonists and the writings of Cicero, and, as a result, he was well versed in Greco-Roman philosophy. An ambitious young man, Augustine embarked upon a career as a professor of rhetoric, first in Carthage and then in Milan, Italy. Trained in the art of persuasion, his students would soon take their places as the Roman Empire’s newest members of the political elite. After his conversion to Christianity in 386 A.D., he endeavored to live a life of contemplation at his home in Italy surrounded by like-minded friends. His intention was to study the scriptures, removed from the contingencies of the necessarily political life he had led as a rhetorician in Milan.

Nevertheless, despite his best intentions, Augustine was compelled to abandon the life of the mind when he was ordained a pastor, and then later the Bishop of Hippo, leaving Italy forever for his childhood home of North Africa in 395 A.D. While he distanced himself from his worldly pursuits, Augustine’s training in rhetoric prepared him well to become one of, if not the greatest of, the Christian faith’s apologists. At the same time, his extensive study of philosophy made him one of the most formidable critics of Greek and Roman metaphysics and ethics. His position as Bishop of Hippo afforded him the platform he needed to combat the most dangerous (at least in his mind) Christian heresies of the day. In Arendt’s dissertation, she will argue that her philosophical interpretation of Augustine is justified precisely because, even though Augustine converted, he always remained, above all else, a philosopher. Her perspective is probably most easily defended in a reading of On Free Choice of the Will (387-389 A.D.).
One of Augustine’s early writings, *On Free Choice of the Will* is written in dialogue form and is still heavily influenced by the Platonic and Ciceronian philosophical style. But it is not long before the demands of being Bishop are clearly visible in his writings, and we see Augustine writing as a pastor responding to the needs of those in his spiritual charge. His writing becomes increasingly reactionary, as he now writes on an *ad hoc* basis in response to the crises and controversies of his time. Though he relies on reason to make sense of scripture, in stark contrast to Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, it is his faith in the divinely revealed word of God and in the incarnation that provide the starting point for his answers to any question in the realms of both religion and politics.  

While Augustine wrote more systematic expositions of Christian theology, for example the *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love* (420 A.D.), all of his political considerations arose in response to the chief political crises and major theological controversies of the late Roman Empire. For this reason, Augustine does not provide us with a methodical treatment of the relationship of the Christian and Christian community to the political world. This makes the task of interpreting his political thought difficult as his ideas about politics are always discussed in lieu of another topic of a theological nature and of greater import for Augustine.

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10 See, for example, *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 1, where Augustine says he will make his argument by appealing first to divine authority, but also by “employing such powers of reason as we can apply for the benefit of unbelievers.”
In her own dissertation on Augustine, Arendt acknowledges similar challenges in identifying and interpreting Augustine’s philosophy of love: “The parallel trains of thought to be shown here defy systematic conjunction. They cannot even be joined in antithetical form, unless we wish to impose on Augustine a systematic and logical exactitude he never had” (Arendt 1996, 4). Nevertheless, she chooses to ignore the context and the development in Augustine’s thought in order to systematize his philosophy of love along three “thought trains” (Arendt 2003, 24). Unfortunately, Arendt does not read Augustine as a Christian theologian, but only as a philosopher. As we will see, Arendt interprets Augustine’s teachings on love out of context, which, as critics have pointed out, remains the primary weakness of her interpretation.\(^{11}\)

Recognizing the hermeneutical challenges posed to any interpreter of Augustine, in the next section I will attempt to identify the major themes of Augustine’s thinking on

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\(^{11}\) In the final comments on his student’s dissertation, “\emph{Das Dissertationsgutachten von Karl Jaspers},” Karl Jaspers finds serious fault with Arendt’s reading of Augustine. While he says her endeavor to present Augustine’s thoughts on love systematically and clearly was overall successful, he writes that she neglected the specific particularities of the different contexts in which Augustine talks about love. Sometimes, he says, this causes Arendt to imbue Augustine’s words with a meaning that cannot be found in his text. He says that she also ignores the development in Augustine’s thoughts on love. Her inquiry is set up so that she does not always present an authentic Augustine, but an Augustine that fits an artificial system of her own creation (Arendt 2003, 129-130). In one of the first reviews of the revised English edition of Arendt’s dissertation, Charles Mathewes is critical for the same reason as Jaspers. Mathewes finds Arendt’s conclusions unqualifiedly incorrect, and he chides the editors for not addressing, more directly, Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine. He writes: “her argument is implausible, and it is ironic that Augustine, the putative subject of the dissertation, is the author least engaged in this book” (Mathewes 1997, 490). Like Jaspers, Mathewes critiques Arendt for not engaging Augustine’s reflections on love in their proper context. Jaspers critiqued Arendt for creating a system that predetermined her interpretation, limiting her analysis only to what would fit the system. Similarly, Mathewes argues that Arendt’s interpretation was guided by her determination to show that Christian love does not permit an authentic commitment to the public sphere. Mathewes rebukes Arendt for engaging a mere caricature of Augustine in order to attack a straw man (Mathewes 1997, 491).
the relationship of the Christian and the Christian community to government and politics, while endeavoring not to divorce these themes from the context which gave rise to these considerations. The major themes within Augustine’s political thought that will be discussed below include justice and virtue, the distinction between the “two cities,” the proper role of politics, and the attitude of the Christian to politics. Finally, I will examine more closely Augustine’s theology of love and also of “beginnings,” as these two topics will be especially relevant for our considerations of Arendt’s appropriation of Augustine in the coming chapters.

1.1 Augustine on Justice and Virtue

While the question “what is justice?” was of the greatest import for classical political philosophers, Augustine’s answer to this question is found buried in a much larger argument, which is not chiefly concerned with political philosophy at all, but rather with apologetics. City of God (De civitate Dei) is the greatest source, among all of Augustine’s writing, for discovering Augustine’s political philosophy. Still, De civitate Dei is a work dedicated not to questions of political philosophy or the nature of justice. Rather, it was written both to comfort Christians suffering as a result of the destruction of Rome at the hands of the Visigoths in 410 A.D., and, more importantly, to respond to pagans who blame the fall of Rome on the conversion of the empire to Christianity and the abandonment of the worship of the traditional Roman deities. In order to defend the faith, Augustine employs his skills as a rhetorician. To see how he reaches his
definition of justice, it is necessary to first follow his line of argumentation in *De civitate Dei*.

In Book I, Augustine speaks directly to his first concern, comforting those who experienced firsthand the cruelties of the invaders and admonishing them to be grateful for whatever mercies were shown for the sake of Christ. Book II begins Augustine’s long rejoinder to those pagans who accuse Christians of causing the ills that have befallen the empire and who long with nostalgia for Rome’s glory days. In order to make his reply, Augustine engages in a revisionist retelling of Roman history, demonstrating that it was the worship of their pagan gods, and not the one true God, that, in fact, made the Romans wretched—a view he had presented in a letter to his friend Nectarius a year before the sack of Rome: “For nothing renders people so unfit for human fellowship by corrupting their lives as imitating the gods in the way their characters are described (and recommended!) in their literature” (Augustine, Letter 91 to Nectarius; Atkins and Dodaro, 3). *De civitate Dei* reaffirms and expounds this earlier view, but now in regards to the whole of Roman history, “the worshippers and lovers of those gods, whom they delighted to imitate in their criminal wickedness, are unconcerned about the utter corruption of their country” (Augustine, *City of God* 2.20). Because of the worship of pagan gods, the citizens of Rome valued material wealth, sensuality, and all manner of perversions, weakening the moral fabric of society and, in turn, the stability of the state. For a society that worships and imitates these gods, as the Romans did, will fall from the “heights of excellence to the depths of depravity” (Augustine, *City of God* 2.19). This, says Augustine, was the experience of the Roman republic, and later the empire.
Augustine continues in this vein by arguing that the vast empire that Rome acquired was not a result of the worship of the traditional gods, but rather was granted to Rome by the one true God. No earthly kingdom, despite their pretentions to independence and self-sufficiency are independent of God’s design and foresight. God is the master of history, and he gives earthly dominion to the bad as well as to the good. He does this so that the good are not good merely for the sake of earthly rewards, and to test the faith of Christians who live under evil reigns (Augustine, City of God 4.33). To be sure, the Romans would have had a “better dominion” on earth if they had given up their gods and worshipped only the one true God. Furthermore, they would have been granted the promise of the eternal kingdom (Augustine, City of God 4.28). Because the Romans chose to worship pagan gods they sealed their fate in this life and in the hereafter. Unfortunately, Augustine does not explain specifically what he intends by a “better dominion.” Augustine, unlike Aquinas centuries later, does not offer us an independent standard by which to judge and evaluate earthly regimes. As I will demonstrate, for Augustine earthly regimes are all measured by the standard of eternity.

Besides demonstrating the depths of depravity to which the Roman gods caused both Rome’s citizens and government to sink, Augustine also wants to show that even at her pinnacle of power and glory, when Roman citizens were considered to be at their most virtuous, justice was absent in Rome and true virtue was lacking in her citizens. In Book II, Augustine presents Cicero, widely recognized as one of Rome’s greatest republicans and one of the most virtuous of her citizens, as a witness.
By Cicero’s own definition, says Augustine, it is evident that even during the glorious years of the republic, not only was there no justice, but Rome was no “commonwealth,” as it did not represent the “weal of the people.” As reported by Scipio in Cicero’s dialogue *De re publica*, a commonwealth or “*res publica*” in Latin, is “an association united by a common sense of right and a community of interest” (Augustine, *City of God* 2.21). If and when there is injustice, or lack of a “sense of right” in the commonwealth, the commonwealth is not merely corrupted, but according to this definition, has ceased to exist at all. Without justice, there can be no “right,” and without a common sense of right, there is no commonwealth. Augustine quotes Cicero speaking “in his own person” in order to further demonstrate, without a doubt, Cicero’s opinion of the ailing Roman republic:

Thus, before our own period, the traditional moral code produced outstanding men, and these excellent men preserved the code and the practices of their forebears. Whereas our age has received the commonwealth like a magnificent picture which has almost faded away with age, and it has not only omitted to restore it with the original colours; it has not even taken trouble to preserve what one may call the general shape and the bare outlines. For what remains of the ancient morality which, according to the poet, supported the Roman state? We see that it has passed out of use into oblivion, so that far from being cultivated, it does not even enter our minds. And what about the men? The morality has passed away through lack of the men: and we are bound to be called to account for this disaster, and even, one may say, to defend ourselves on capital charge. For we retain the name of a commonwealth, but we have lost the reality long ago: and this was not through any misfortune, but through our own misdemeanours. (Augustine, *City of God* 2.21)

According to the testimony of one of Rome’s own authorities, Rome “had sunk into a morass of moral degradation” long before the coming of Christ (Augustine, *City of God* 2.21).
2.18). Even at the pinnacle of her virtue and glory, Rome was corrupt. In this way
Augustine establishes that the Romans themselves and not Christians bore the
responsibility for the weaknesses and the eventual downfall of Rome. In making this
argument, Augustine also clearly demonstrates that what the world values as noble,
virtuous, worthy of honor or glory, is not in fact true virtue, nor is it truly worthy of
honor or glory.

Augustine’s refutation of the pagan charge also provides him the context in
which to clarify the meaning of justice and, then, to redefine entirely the meaning of
“commonwealth.” Augustine accepts the traditional understanding of justice, which, he
says, is “to assign each his due,” and within man himself justice is “a certain just order of
nature” (Augustine, City of God 19.4). Augustine’s likening of the virtue of justice to the
right ordering of the soul according to nature harkens back to Platonic philosophy, in
which Augustine was well versed. However, according to Augustine, justice in the soul
and justice in the city take on an entirely new significance when viewed from the
perspective of the truth of God’s revealed word. To give each his due now means to love
your neighbor as he ought to be loved, for this is what Christ commands and this is,
therefore, what we owe our neighbor. To have a rightly ordered, or just, soul, now
means that both body and soul are subordinated to God in perfect obedience. Justice is
not possible, says Augustine, without God:

Augustine also defines justice this way in Book I of De libero arbitrio: “justice is but the virtue
by which each receives his due” (Augustine, On the Free Choice of the Will 1.13.27.90; King 2010, 22).
Justice is found where God, the one supreme God, rules an obedient city according to his grace, forbidding sacrifice to any being save himself alone...the individual righteous man lives on the basis of faith, which is active in love, the love with which a man loves God as God ought to be loved, and loves his neighbor as himself. But where this justice does not exist, there is certainly no “association of men united by a common sense of right and by a community of interest.” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.23)

Simply put, justice exists where “God rules and man obeys” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.27). If a man does not serve and obey God, he cannot be said to be just, and certainly, therefore, the gathering together of unjust men can never bring about a just city. Without true justice, even the best kingdoms of this world can be compared to piracies.

Augustine recalls the tale of Alexander the Great and his encounter with the pirate when he says: “Remove justice, and what are kingdoms but gangs of criminals on a large scale?” (Augustine, *City of God* 4.4). Augustine demonstrates that, by the definition of Rome’s own greatest citizens, Rome lacked justice. Furthermore, he redefines justice in such a way that it now becomes impossible that Rome or, for that matter, any earthly kingdom could possibly be just. Justice must wait until the afterlife. It is this vantage point from eternity, beginning with Plato and transmitted to all via Augustine, that Arendt will critique in *The Human Condition*.

Augustine’s definition of justice as absolute obedience to God also rules out the possibility that Rome could ever be described as a commonwealth, if by commonwealth we mean “a people united by a common sense of right.” However, Augustine acknowledges that we do need to use this word to make sense of our political and social
reality. Therefore, a new definition of commonwealth is needed. A commonwealth is not a people united by a common sense of right, because “right” is not possible here in this world, but rather it “is the association of a multitude of rational beings united by a common agreement on the objects of their love” (Augustine, City of God 19.24). This new definition of “commonwealth” now means that the whole of humanity belong to either one of two communities: the City of God, the citizens of which are united in their common love of God, or the city of man, whose citizens are united in their love of self.

Interestingly, Arendt will argue that love has nothing to do with politics, that, in fact, it is not only apolitical, but anti-political. This argument has its beginnings in her dissertation on Augustine and will also figure in her later works. In addition, Arendt is concerned by Augustine’s reduction of the great diversity amongst human beings to only two possibilities. This is a theme Arendt picks up in her dissertation and pursues in her more mature political theory. We will see she is troubled by the transcendence of the person in all of his or her unique individuality that, she argues, is required of the lover of God.

True to his training as a master of rhetoric, Augustine artfully overthrows centuries of political tradition and offers a transvaluation of classical Roman values using only words and persuasive speech. Even more remarkably, he is able to enlist Cicero, one of the greatest defenders of civic republicanism, as his chief ally. The Greek and Roman political traditions had long accepted political life as providing for man the possibility for justice and as the location for demonstrations of individual virtue. Augustine counters this perspective by telling us that true justice and virtue are only
possible in eternity. In the coming chapters, I will argue that restoring this dignity to
political life in this world is the primary task of Arendt’s political theory.

Augustine spends the greater part of De Civitate Dei recounting the genesis,
progress, and destinies of each of the two cities—what Augustine takes to be the
essential division among human beings. Out of all the differences that divide human
beings, the only division that matters is what distinguishes citizens of the city of man
from citizens of the City of God. National, ethnic, or political distinctions are not
significant. Neither is the classical philosophical distinction between just and unjust
regimes. What matters is that at the end of days, members of all nations that make up
the City of God will be gathered together and will be granted the enjoyment of eternal
felicity, while citizens of the earthly city will be damned for all of eternity. In his account
of these two cities, we find many of the essential elements that make up Augustine’s
political philosophy.

The “great difference” between the two cities is that in the City of God, a
community of the devout, love of God is given first place, but in the other city, a city
made up of the irreligious, love of self takes priority (Augustine, City of God 14.13). In
the former city the citizens love eternal things, and in the latter city the citizens love
temporal things. Each has its own angels attached to it, those angels who serve God,
and those angels, otherwise known as demons, who serve the devil (Augustine, City of
God 14.13).

Though it is tempting to equate the City of God with the institution of the
Church, the City of God cannot simply be equated with the Church on earth, for there
are those within the Church who are not true followers of Christ and who will not share in the rewards of eternal felicity. The City of God will not be complete until the world has reached its end when the faithful will share in God’s eternal kingdom. In the same way, the earthly city cannot be identified with any worldly empire or principality. For there are yet true believers among the worldly who will receive the eternal reward.

In history, writes Augustine, these two cities are interwoven and intermixed and will remain so until their separation at the final judgment (Augustine, City of God 2.29). At that time, the earthly city will disappear forever, and its citizens, wicked as they are, will be condemned to eternal punishment. Distinctions between earthly regimes do not matter for Augustine. Citizens of a monarchy, oligarchy, democracy, or tyranny could all either be citizens of the city of man or the City of God. What matters is who they love—God or self. Again, this is a dichotomy that proffers a radical reduction of human indviduation.

The earthly city has its origins in the fratricide of Cain, and the descendants of Cain’s inheritance of this sin is evident in Rome’s own founding myth, when Romulus kills his brother Remus. These founding acts demonstrate the quality that is man’s defining characteristic since the Fall, the libido dominandi or the lust to dominate. It is this lust “which of all human vices was found in its most concentrated form in the Roman people as a whole” who crushed “an exhausted country beneath the yoke of slavery” (Augustine, City of God 1.30). The libido dominandi marks man with the sin of pride (Augustine, City of God 19.12). For Augustine, “pride” is the attempt to put oneself
in the place of God. Through domination, men seek, in their own perverted way, to imitate God because only God rightfully has dominion.

The domination of man over man was not God’s design. God “did not wish the rational being, made in his own image, to have dominion over any but irrational creatures, not man over man, but man over beasts” (Augustine, City of God 19.15). Political authority, as we know it, is not natural to man (in contrast, Arendt argues that the authentic experience of authority has been lost to modern man and needs to be reclaimed). This is why, says Augustine, the first men were set up as shepherds and not as kings of men. Furthermore, God chose to make one individual the starting-point of all mankind, so that the human race would be united not only in likeness, “but should also be bound together by a kind of tie of kinship to form a harmonious unity, linked together by the ‘bond of peace’” (Augustine, City of God 14.1).

Through the sin of pride, men have hated this “fellowship of equality under God” and instead have sought to impose their own authority, hierarchy, and dominion in place of God’s rule (Augustine, City of God 19.12). While God meant for human beings to live in a state of perfect equality and harmony, with the only natural earthly authority that familial authority ordained by God and nature, after the Fall it is the libido dominandi, generated by the sin of pride that now characterizes human relationships, and no where else more so than in Rome. The human race, says Augustine, that was social by nature, became “quarrelsome by perversion” (Augustine, City of God 14.1). Political rule, for Augustine, is not natural to man, but is a result of sin. In addition, distinctions between and among human beings do not matter for Augustine. What is
significant is that God created us all and that we all share in the sin of pride. As we will see, this significance features prominently in Parts II and III of Arendt’s dissertation. Moreover, for Augustine there is no one who can claim self-sufficiency; neither is there anyone who can claim innocence. As I show in chapter four, Arendt draws on Augustine for her idea of a common origin as the source of human equality, while, at the same time, detaching it completely, however, from any notion of original sin.

Still, the Romans were not guided only by their lust for domination. This is the reason why God granted the Romans dominion, “because they served their country for the sake of honor and glory above greed for money and many other faults” (Augustine, *City of God* 5.13). It was their desire for the praise of men, or glory, that gave rise to Rome’s most marvelous achievements, which were, no doubt, glorious and praiseworthy in the estimation of men (Augustine, *City of God* 5.12). If they had not learned to control their passions by the power of the Holy Spirit, Augustine writes, “at least it is good that the desire for human praise and glory makes them, not indeed saints, but less depraved men” (Augustine, *City of God* 5.13). Though the Romans were, at times, “less depraved” than they might have been, Augustine is clear that they fell far short of true virtue. The love of human praise that was the motivation for the acts of glory performed by Rome’s greatest citizens is a vice that is an enemy to devout faith and that can never be fully rooted out of the human heart.

The teachings of Christ are directly contrary to the love of glory, that “inflated conceit,” exhibited by the Romans (Augustine, *City of God* 5.20). Christ taught his apostles to be careful not to perform acts of goodness in order to gain glory from men.
Indeed, righteous deeds should be performed in private, and not in the presence of men so as to be seen by them. Those who are praised by men for their deeds have received their earthly reward and will receive no reward from God in heaven (Augustine, *City of God* 5.13). Acts of goodness should be performed not for individual glory, but for the glory of God, “so the purpose is not ‘to be seen of them’, that is, with the intention that they should be converted to you, because by yourselves you are nothing, but ‘so that they may be converted to him’ ” (Augustine, *City of God* 5.13). Since the Romans did not have faith in eternal life, Augustine asks what else was there for them to love save glory. Through glory they desired to have a kind of immortality by remaining on the lips of those who praised them (Augustine, *City of God* 5.15). And, indeed, Augustine proclaims, they have received their reward in full.

As we shall see later, Augustine’s evaluation of Roman virtue is diametrically opposed to Arendt’s own account of glory in political life. For Arendt, glory, or the shining light of the public, is the necessary condition for excellence—the possibility for one person to distinguish him or herself, a possibility that is not available in the private sphere (Arendt 1992, 48-9). Public demonstrations of individuality in word and deed is what, for Arendt, endows political life with meaning and what, in the form of history, makes human life worthy of remembrance.

Though Augustine views the Romans as greedy for glory and controlled by their lust for domination, he nevertheless affirms that Christians can yet learn from the Roman example. If the Romans were willing to suffer and die for the sake of earthly reward, how much more should Christians be willing to endure for the sake of a
heavenly reward? The example of the Romans should also serve as a counsel against the
sin of pride. Do not count yourselves great, Augustine warns Christians, because you
suffer for Christ,

the citizens of so great a country should not suppose they have
achieved anything of note if, to attain that country, they have
done something good, or endured some ills, seeing that those
Romans did so much and suffered so much for the earthly country
they already possessed. (Augustine, *City of God* 5.17)

If Romans performed acts of bravery and self-sacrifice for the rewards of an earthly city,
Christians should feel no pride when they endure less for the sake of the rewards of the
heavenly city (Augustine, *City of God* 5.18). There can be no comparison between the
promise of Rome and what is awaiting the Christian in eternity. The heavenly city
“outshines Rome beyond comparison,” there, instead of high rank, holiness, instead of
earthly peace, perpetual happiness, and instead of a life destined for death, a life
everlasting (Augustine, *City of God* 2.29). All human efforts should be directed towards
eternity. A Christian should despise the glory offered by men and instead endure
obloquy for the sake of the true kingdom.

By way of his argument that Romans and not Christians were to blame for the
sack of Rome, Augustine also completely devalues politics and divests political action of
any independent value or meaning in its own right. In fact, any charitable deeds that
could set the individual apart from the rest should be performed in private, not in the
shining light of the public, and without the knowledge of others. As we see in Chapter
Six, the fact that good deeds are commanded to be performed in private is one of the
main reasons Arendt gives for why Christianity is essentially worldless. Furthermore,
Arendt actually *encourages* us to take pride in the great capacities of man—chiefly, to build a human artifice and to found a human world that does, in fact, grant men a kind of immortality.

1.2 The Limited Aim of Politics

Because, as we have just seen, the earthly city cannot be truly just, and citizens cannot be truly virtuous in this life, the proper aim of the historical city, according to Augustine, is drastically limited. Christians and non-Christians alike seek peace, and this, not justice, now becomes the proper aim of any earthly society, insofar as a semblance of peace can be maintained, even if for brief periods. There is no man, says Augustine, who does not wish for peace within himself, peace within his own household, and peace within the city. Indeed, there is nothing man wishes for more, nothing that “falls more gratefully upon the ear,” than peace in this mortal state (Augustine, *City of God* 19.11). Even victory, the desired result of war, shows that men fight not only for glory, but also for an end to the war and a return to a state of peace. Even bands of thieves desire peace amongst their fellow robbers, for how could they accomplish their common purpose, theft, without it?

Whenever peace is disturbed by conflict, it is not because men hate peace, but because he hopes to exchange one form of peace with another peaceful state of affairs

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13 See also *De libero arbitrio* Book III, “what he has in his feeling is the natural desire for peace” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 3.8.23.82-3; King 2010, 90).
preferable to him (Augustine, *City of God* 19.12). Whatever differences exist between political regimes, however diverse the laws or customs, all have a single aim—earthly peace (Augustine, *City of God* 19.17). It is peace, and not justice, that earthly regimes should seek as an attainable goal. The only political aim truly possible in this world is not justice, but an earthly peace, preserved through a kind of compromise amongst varying human wills. This should be the chief political concern of Christians—a regime that keeps the peace, not necessarily a regime that is just. For Augustine, we must wait for eternity to find true justice.

In the chapters that follow, we will see that Arendt, unlike other political philosophers of the twentieth century (e.g., John Rawls), her chief question is not “what is justice?” Nevertheless, in sharp contrast to Augustine, Arendt does not have a limited view of the possibilities offered by a political community. On the contrary, for Arendt the political space is where human freedom can be expressed and where independent meaning for our lives, as they are lived in the here and now, can be created. Politics is the realm of possibility.

Augustine defines earthly peace as “the harmonious agreement of citizens concerning the giving and obeying of orders to the establishment of a kind of compromise between human wills about the things relevant to mortal life” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.17). As an agreement among wills, earthly peace is essentially a kind of social contract. Peace, or what Augustine refers to more simply as “ordered harmony” or an “ordered agreement of mind with mind,” is made possible by the laws and the rulers of the political regime (Augustine, *City of God* 19.13). Earthly peace, however,
cannot compare or even draw close to that heavenly peace which is the only peace really “deserving of the name” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.17). Authentic peace is eternity spent with God, where there will be a “perfectly ordered and completely harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of each other in God” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.17). This is the ultimate bliss, the end of fulfillment that knows no destructive end. Here in this world we are called blessed, it is true, when we enjoy peace, however little may be the peace...and yet such blessedness as this life affords proves to be utter misery when compared with that final bliss. (Augustine, *City of God* 19.10)

Eternity is where Christians will finally find everlasting peace: “Our heart is unquiet until it rests in you” (Augustine, *The Confessions* 1.1).

Still, even the wretched of the earth loves a peace of its own that is not to be rejected. Earthly peace can be a “reflection” of true peace and shares “some part of the order of things among which it has its being or of which it consists” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.12). Earthly peace is best understood as a negative peace—the absence of disorder and violent conflict. Temporal peace is a blessing for both good and bad alike as it ensures all the ability to satisfy bodily needs, but earthly peace is especially a blessing for Christians who require peace to be able to practice the faith (Augustine, *City of God* 19.26). Because of the peace of the city, Christians can freely worship and are also able to provide for and protect their families. Politics, for Augustine, does have important instrumental value, even if it is not valuable for its own sake. In Chapter Three, I will point out why Arendt finds Augustine’s instrumentalization of others and a shared life with others in the world problematic.
In answering the charge that Christians have been a liability to the Roman Empire, Augustine also provides us with a political theory that views peace as the only proper aim of political regimes and argues that it is the responsibility of Christians to obey the laws that keep the peace. In fact, Christians do not concern themselves with the type of regime they live under, but are dutiful citizens who obey the laws regardless of whether they live under a republic, a kingdom, or an empire, however just or unjust. They do so as long as peace is maintained and no hindrance is placed on the practice of the true faith, the worship of the one and only supreme God. In providing us with a definition of justice, and directing earthly cities to seek peace, Augustine also teaches his parishioners their duties as citizens. Here we learn what the relationship of the Christian to the political regime ought to look like.

1.3 The Christian and Politics

We are better able to understand Augustine’s view on the nature of the Christian citizen, if we examine it from the perspective of Augustine’s philosophy of the final good. Augustine’s philosophy of the *summum bonum* and his distinction between “use” and “enjoyment” is also the primary focus of the first part of Arendt’s dissertation. Here Arendt argues that the neighbor, when viewed from this perspective, is useless to one who desires eternal life as the final good. Augustine, like Plato and other philosophers before him, was concerned with the nature of the final good, defined as “that for which other things are to be desired, while it is itself to be desired for its own sake” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.1). For Augustine, as explained in *De libero arbitrio*, the final
good is defined as the only good that cannot be lost as long as “the will to retain it remains” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.13.28.95; King 2010, 24). It is also necessarily a good that is eternal and immutable, and that can be shared by all in common and cannot belong to one person to the exclusion of others.

For the eudemonistic philosophies that came before Augustine, happiness was the final good, achieved through the just life, supplemented and supported by the blessings of material goods. For Plato, as for Aristotle, the unjust man could never be a happy man. Furthermore, the just man and the just city were necessarily related. The just city educated its citizens in the virtues and continued to foster those virtues by regulating just social relations. Additionally, the city provided the forum in which to practice and exercise the virtues.

Augustine accepts Aristotle’s definition of the final good as happiness. Indeed, he says, that which makes man happy “is the Supreme Good itself” (Augustine, *City of God* 19.1). For Augustine, however, happiness is entirely dependent not on the just city or on the independent attainment of virtue, all which can be lost against our will, but on God, who if we cling to him can never be lost. As the final good must necessarily be something eternal and unchangeable, true happiness is only possible in eternal life with God: “God is the happy life of the soul” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.16.41.162; King 2010, 62). It is also a good that can be shared and enjoyed by all in common: “No one says the other: ‘Take your hands away so that I too may embrace it!’ All hold fast to it and touch the selfsame thing” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.14.37.145-6; King 2010, 59). It is only God that should be desired as the final
good, while all other goods have only instrumental value and should be used for the sake of the final good.

Though we often use the word “happy” to describe ourselves or others, in actuality, when we speak of the “happiness” of the saints in this present life, what we are really describing is in fact the happiness “in expectation” of a future happiness, a happiness made possible by hope. Augustine quotes from Paul’s letter to the Romans: “it is in hope that we have been made happy...we do not enjoy a present happiness, but look forward to happiness in the future” (Augustine, City of God 19.4). Augustine exclaims, “all these philosophers have wished, with amazing folly, to be happy here on earth and to achieve bliss by their own effort” (Augustine, City of God 19.4). This is folly for Augustine because this life is characterized not only by warfare with others, but also by perpetual internal warfare with our own vices. Placing one’s faith in virtue as the source of happiness is folly because there is only one place—in heaven with God—where “the desires of the flesh do not oppose the spirit, and where there is in us no vice for the spirit to oppose with its desires” (Augustine, City of God 19.4). This is not possible in the present life, but only in eternity with God. In their arrogance philosophers have refused to believe in eternal blessedness and so have fabricated, “an utterly delusive happiness by means of a virtue whose falsity is in proportion to its arrogance” (Augustine, City of God 19.4). “God forbid,” exclaims Augustine, that we too should believe ourselves capable of attaining happiness without God (Augustine, City of God 19.4). If man is content with happiness, and he should be, for there is nothing which he could desire beyond that, then, declares Augustine, “let him serve the one
God,” the only giver of happiness (Augustine, *City of God* 4.25). For now let us “await Him with resolute hope and desire Him with burning charity” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.20.54.205; King 2010, 72).

As argued by George Kateb, for Arendt, “the life of the polis with its chance for immortal fame or because of its intensity could thus be accepted as a kind of eternity...the life of action is the one vindication of life...it is good in itself” (Kateb 1983, 1). This view is clearly in sharp opposition to Augustine’s own view of the *summum bonum*. Augustine does not reject ancient philosophy’s definition of the final good as happiness, but he does reject the placing of the source of happiness in virtue attainable in this life, and within the context of the just city. Augustine’s rejection of this possibility requires a new relationship to the city, as the city can never be truly just and her people never truly virtuous. Furthermore, even if justice in the city could be attained, because of the nature of this life, all earthly goods can be lost against our wills, including good government. Christians must have more limited expectations of their cities and rulers. It is an earthly peace, which is to be sought after, as a kind of an earthly “highest good,” while the final good is yet an eternal good.

Augustine acknowledges that there are many earthly goods in this present life, including the peace of the city. Augustine is well known for his pessimistic description of the “miseries” of this present life, but along with his list of the ills that make up the human condition, he also accounts for all life’s blessings. All earthly goods are God’s creation, and so everything good that is, comes from God (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 2.1.24, 2.18.49.188; King 2010, 31, 68). Human beings, even after the
Fall, have that “spark of reason” which is the blessing given to humans by virtue of being made in the image of God. The list of earthly goods also includes other goods of the mind. The mind is capable of knowledge and learning, and it has the capacity to acquire wisdom and prudence. Through the powers of his mind, human beings have been able to develop all sorts of arts, some for necessary uses and some for pleasure.

The blessings of this life also include the human body and the marvelous harmony of all of its parts. Then of course there is the beauty of natural creation, and all the resources for food to satisfy hunger and numerous flavors to satisfy our taste (Augustine, City of God 22.24). There are the blessings of friendship and human companionship. In this passage, one is tempted to read into Augustine the position that human companionship has an independent value of its own, but that would not be an accurate interpretation. All of these goods, including the peace maintained by the laws of the city, can certainly be described as goods, but they all are mutable and can be lost against our wills. They therefore cannot bring us happiness and are not the final good. There is only one good, says Augustine, “which will bring happiness to a rational or intellectual creature; and that good is God” (Augustine, City of God 12.1). Christians should be especially careful not to treat any earthly good as the final good and desire it, even friendship, for its own sake. For Arendt, civic friendship and the attitude towards the friend, which is respect, is its own good. It is to be sought for its own sake within the realm of the political. Indeed, Arendt speaks of the “joy” found in the life of action, but
which she will also contrast with the “happiness” sought by modern society (Arendt 1998, 134, 244).\textsuperscript{14}

Augustine’s famous (or infamous) distinction between “use” and “enjoyment” is of additional help in making sense of how a Christian is to relate him or herself to these earthly blessings, including the blessing of peace and sound government. The distinction between use and enjoyment, or *uti* and *frui* in Latin, is made most clearly in *De doctrina christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*), written in 397, thirteen years before Alaric’s sack of Rome, but not completed until 426, the same year Augustine finished *De civitate Dei*. Here Augustine says that some things are to be enjoyed while there are other things that are to be used, “for to enjoy a thing is to rest with satisfaction in it for its own sake. To use, on the other hand, is to employ whatever means are at one’s disposal to obtain what one desires” (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.4). The temporal goods of this world are not to be enjoyed, as Christians cannot look to these goods to find final and lasting satisfaction. Instead, they are to be treated as a means to an end, to be “used” insofar as they are “supports” that help the Christian bear the burdens of this life (Augustine, *City of God* 19.17).

In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine proposes a thought experiment that he uses as an analogy:

Suppose, then, we were wanderers in a strange country, and could not live happily away from our fatherland, and that we felt

\textsuperscript{14} See also Arendt’s discussion of the student movements in the 1960s and “its joy in action” (Arendt 1972, 202).
wretched in our wandering and wishing to put an end to our misery, determined to return home. We find, however, that we must make use of some mode of conveyance, either by land or water, in order to reach that fatherland where our enjoyment is to commence. But the beauty of the country through which we pass, and the very pleasure of the motion, charm our hearts, and turning these things which we ought to use into objects of enjoyment, we become unwilling to hasten the end of our journey, and becoming engrossed in a factitious delight, our thoughts are diverted from that home whose delights would make us truly happy. Such is a picture of our condition in this life of mortality. We have wandered far from God; and if we wish to return to our Father’s home, this world must be used, not enjoyed, that so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made—that is, that by means of what is material and temporary we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal. (Augustine, On Christian Doctrine 1.4)

Christians have to be careful that they are not “charmed” by the goods of the world, and that they keep their vision set upon God. Earthly goods can easily distract a Christian from the course towards God. Whoever uses the goods of this world rightly, says Augustine, will “receive goods greater in degree and superior in kind,” namely immortality and the enjoyment of God. On the other hand, whoever sets their sight on earthly goods as the source of enjoyment will lose the blessing of eternal life. (Augustine, City of God 19.13). Christians are pilgrims who do not make a home in the world, but rather who make use of the world as would travelers on a journey.

In his much earlier work, De libero arbitrio (On the Free Choice of the Will), Augustine discusses how the same goods can be used in an evil manner or in a good manner, demonstrating the persistence of the distinction between use and enjoyment in his thought. The person who uses things of this world in an evil manner, instead of
controlling these things, is controlled by them and thereby holds himself back from his true good. The person who uses these things in a good manner “does not attach himself to them with love...[r]ather, he is completely above them, possessing and governing them when there is need; he is ready to lose them, and more ready not to have them” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.15.33.113; King 2010, 28). Evil is the turning away from “divine and genuinely abiding things and towards changeable and uncertain things” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.16.35.116; King 2010, 29), In other words, enjoying the goods of this world as opposed to “using” them, as described in *De doctrina christiana*.

What we learn from Augustine’s perspective on the final good, and on the distinction between use and enjoyment, is the requirement that Christian citizens make *use* of government, rulers, the law, and the earthly peace maintained by these, but they do not expect more from these institutions than they can offer. They obey the laws insofar as the laws make peace in this life possible, but they recognize wherein their true good lies. They make use of the support offered by the goods of this world, but find their enjoyment in God. The central existential attitude of the Christian to the world, then, is one of alienation. According to Augustine, this attitude does not preclude Christians from holding political positions. Moreover, Christians also have a duty to perform civic responsibilities when necessary. Augustine himself understood this duty
well, as his role as Bishop of Hippo required that he arbitrate legal disputes among his own parishioners.15

Christians may choose to spend their lives contemplating the scriptures, or they may choose the life of action in service to their political community, or they may choose a combination of both, but each kind of life may be lived “without detriment to his faith, and might thus attain to everlasting rewards” (Augustine, City of God 19.19). If a Christian chooses a life of action, it is to be understood as a response to Christian love, and it should be viewed as an opportunity for service, as a way to promote the well-being and good of the people, and not as an opportunity for distinction. Those who give orders are the servants of those they appear to command, because they do not give orders out of a desire to dominate nor out of a pride in taking precedence over others, but out of compassion in taking care of those in their charge (Augustine, City of God 19.14).

A life of public service has dangers attendant to it that a life lived in private does not. Those Christians who hold positions of authority have to be wary that what is treasured is not honor or power in this life. Positions of authority are not proper objects of ambition, regardless of the respect that may be earned by others in the performance of duty. Rather, a life of action spent in devotion to the community, should be treated as an obligation, a “compulsion of love” (Augustine, City of God 19.19). According to

15 See Letter 90 written to Nectarius in 408 where Augustine reflects on his “public duties” and his standing in court “on the more deserving side of the case” (Augustine, Letter 90 to Nectarius; Atkins and Dodaro 2001, 1).
Augustine, a life in service of the common good is a burdensome life; it is a “task” not an honor (Augustine, *City of God* 19.20). Augustine makes this plain in his famous example of the judge who must sit in judgment, pronouncing innocence or guilt upon those who come before him, without the ability to see into the consciences of those he judges. Tragically, he may mistakenly put an innocent man to death, or set a guilty man free (Augustine, *City of God* 19.6). Yet, human society has need of wise men to fill these positions, and the claims of society draw the Christian to fulfill his duty (Augustine, *City of God* 19.6).

Along with the inherent risk of mistaken judgments made in a Christian’s capacity as a public servant, the Christian who lives the life of action must not overlook the health of his soul. Those who hold these positions must be diligent never to neglect the contemplation of the eternal truth wherein true honor and glory lie (Augustine, *City of God* 19.19). As Arendt will call it, the “*vita contemplativa*” is required of all Christians whether they lived a public or private life. Christians who live a private life should offer prayers for their rulers including their kings and those in high positions (Augustine, *City of God* 19.26). They should pray particularly that kings and all those in authority not be tempted by the “pride and pomp of worldly station to shrink from the humility of the Christian faith” (Augustine, *Enchiridion* 103).

Again, Augustine’s purpose here is both to teach his parishioners and fellow believers the proper way to relate to the world, and to respond to claims made by pagans that Christians are necessarily unfit to be citizens because of the requirements of their faith. In a letter written to Marcellinus, the principle recipient of *De civitate Dei*,
Augustine speaks directly to the latter concern—that Christians are, because of the practice of their faith, unsuitable citizens of a political community. Chief among Marcellinus’ and his fellow pagans’ concerns is the passage in Romans that requires Christians to “return to no one evil for evil.” How then, asks Marcellinus, can a Christian defend the city? Augustine interprets this passage in order to demonstrate that it is the intention of the scripture to bring peace to the city. “What is a city,” he asks, “but a group of men united by a bond of peace” (Augustine, Letter 138 to Marcellinus; Atkins and Dodaro 2001, 35). In returning no evil for evil, the wrongdoer is brought to repentance, and peace in the city is preserved. This teaching does not preclude punishment or even the waging of wars, but both are to be done in a spirit of “kind harshness,” for in this way people are helped, even if against their will. If the spirit of the scriptures are followed, even wars will be waged in a “spirit of benevolence, their aim will be to serve the defeated more easily by securing a peaceful society that is pious and just” (Augustine, Letter 138 to Marcellinus; Atkins and Dodaro 2001, 38). To those who say that the teachings of Christ are opposed to the commonwealth Augustine replies:

...[let them] give us an army composed of the sort of soldiers that the teachings of Christ would require. Let them give us provincials, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, kings, judges, and finally even tax-payers and tax-collectors of the sort the teaching of Christ demands. Then let them dare to say that this teaching is opposed to the commonwealth! Indeed let them even hesitate to admit, that if it were observed, it would contribute greatly to the security of the commonwealth! (Augustine, Letter 139 to Marcellinus; Atkins and Dodaro 2001, 39)
Christian citizens need not remove themselves from the politics and government of the regimes under which they live, but to remember that the things of this world will pass away, and that ambition for positions of authority, honor, or glory in this life will cost them the true glory that awaits them in eternity. Whether it is a life of “learned leisure, or a life of public business” that is chosen, or a combination of both, it is equally possible for a Christian to yet lose his way “in the search for the ultimate good which brings men happiness” (Augustine, City of God 19.2). For Augustine, life’s ultimate good always lies beyond his present earthly existence in eternity. As Arendt will point out in The Human Condition, for Augustine, citizenship is viewed as a responsibility, and the public sphere is not understood as a source of joy, much less as the realm of freedom.

As Augustine explains the proper relationship of the Christian to political regimes, he also offers an explanation for the origin of government, law, property, and the other institutions that make human social life possible. Augustine agrees with Aristotle and the other ancient philosophers who saw man as a social animal whose quality of life is made genuinely better when spent in company with his fellows. These philosophies, says Augustine, “hold the view that the life of the wise man should be social; and in this we support them much most heartily” (Augustine, City of God 19.5). As evidenced simply by the bearing and begetting of children, we can see that God created human beings to be in fellowship with one another (Augustine, City of God 19.12). The City of God, Augustine affirms, could not advance along its course or attain its appointed goal if the lives of the saints were not social (Augustine, City of God 19.5).
Though while human beings were created to be social, they have become contentious and prone to conflict with one another because of sin.

While it is the subject of some debate among Augustine scholars as to whether or not there would have been political authority before the Fall, Augustine makes clear that political authority in the form we now experience it is a result of sin and of man’s fallen nature. In heaven, it will no longer be a “necessary duty” for one man to give direction or orders to another, for in that state everyone’s welfare will be guaranteed by eternal felicity (Augustine, City of God 19.16). For Arendt, authentic political authority is the opposite of coercion and domination, or the kind of force seen in an authoritarian regime. The experience of political authority is something that has been lost to the modern world, but which can be reclaimed. For Arendt, political authority is derived from a given community’s origin and the founding principles that are passed down from one generation to the next, made possible by memory. Unfortunately, for Arendt, authority lost this original Roman meaning because of Christianity and its idea of a transcendent authority, such as what Augustine describes at the eternal law.

For Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, just laws served to impart virtue and to foster just citizens. For Augustine, this is not the purpose of law. Law exists not primarily for the virtuous, but for the sinful, who act justly only when the law compels them to do so (Augustine, City of God 22.1; Fortin 1994, 185). Law does not impart virtue, but keeps us

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from harming one another. Augustine treats the nature of law in the early work *De libero arbitrio* written in A.D. 387. Here Augustine discusses with his interlocutor, Evodius, the distinction between eternal law and temporal law. The temporal law is incapable of judging and punishing motivations. With Augustine’s approval Evodius states, “a law drafted to govern society...has in its scope redressing deeds sufficiently to maintain peace among unenlightened people, to the extent that such deeds can be governed by human beings” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.5.13.40; King 2010, 11). Laws serve for the protection of society, and will often need to permit lesser evils in order to avoid greater ones (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.5.12.34; King 2010, 10). It does not mean, however, that the committing of these lesser evils will be left unpunished by divine providence (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.5.13.41; King 2010, 11).

Property law is a good example of this. Many human beings cling to the goods of this world and seek to “enjoy” them in place of God. Yet, the law does not aim to redirect their affections, but instead protects their rights to these goods as property because these rights preserve human peace and intercourse. The law protects these rights even though the laws that allow men to hold onto goods as their own property might encourage the false belief that temporal goods are worthy of our love or give those goods that are subject to loss a certain semblance of permanence (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.5.13.41; King 2010, 11).

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17 Augustine defines property as “everything we control by right and appear to have the power to sell and give away” (Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will* 1.15.32.110; King 2010, 27).
the Free Choice of the Will 1.15.32.109; King 2010, 27). The law maintains peace through fear, the fear of the loss of property, freedom, or life itself (Augustine, On the Free Choice of the Will 1.15.32.111; King 2010, 28). The intent of punishment, provided it is just and legitimate, serves to correct the offender so that the peace of human society can be restored (Augustine, City of God 19.16). Punishment also has another purpose, it sets an example that serves as a deterrent to potential criminals or disturbers of the peace (Augustine, City of God 19.16).

The retribution the law is able to accomplish is limited; it cannot alter hearts or minds, or punish all sin. Laws cannot make a man see wherein his true good lies. Even so, says Augustine, “it does not follow that just because the law does not accomplish everything, we should disapprove of what it does accomplish” (Augustine, On the Free Choice of the Will 1.5.13.41; King 2010, 11). In Arendt’s writings, she is especially critical of laws that are designed merely to protect the life and property of citizens. Instead, she views law, as the result of an agreement among equals, as putting an end to “the rule of man over man” (Arendt 1972, 139). Laws grant stability to human affairs and, in this way, actually create a space for the exercise of human freedom. Law, for Arendt, is therefore not merely negative in nature, but actually makes human action possible.

For Augustine, Christians are to maintain the laws and follow them, for it is God who has granted dominion to both the good and the wicked alike (Augustine, City of God 19.17). According to Augustine, “[w]ithout the slightest doubt, the kingdoms of men are established by divine providence” (Augustine, City of God 5.1). Indeed, fathers, the head of their households, are responsible for instructing their families in the laws of
the city and conducting their household affairs in accordance with those laws (Augustine, *City of God* 19.16). The only exception Augustine grants to the obeying of the laws of the earthly regime is in the case of legal requirements that demand worship of false gods. In this instance, Christians endure the punishment and suffer martyrdom, but they are compelled not to obey, as it is only God who deserves *latreia*, or service, faithful devotion, and worship (Augustine, *City of God* 19.17).

Unlike, Plato, Aristotle, or Cicero, Augustine sees no necessary relationship between the just city and the just man. Christians can practice the true faith regardless of the type of regime under which they find themselves ruled. It is God, not the city, who is the source of all justice and virtue. While it is better that the good should rule, Christianity is compatible with any type of political regime. In his famous rhetorical style Augustine asks, “As for this mortal life, which ends after a few days’ course, what does is matter under whose rule a man lives, being so soon to die, provided that the rulers do not force him to impious and wicked acts?” (Augustine, *City of God* 5.17). The nature of the relationship of the Christian to the world is one of pilgrims in a foreign land, for this mortal life, says Augustine, “passes away like smoke” (Augustine, *City of God* 7.1).

Augustine’s political theory (if he can be said to have a political theory at all, when in actuality the end result of his political thought is the radical devaluation of political life altogether) begins from the vantage point of eternity. The final good is eternal life spent in the presence of God—the eternal Sabbath. True justice and virtue are only available in eternity, so we should hope for little more than peace—understood as the absence of disorder and violent conflict—from our earthly political communities.
In comparison to the perfection of the heavenly kingdom that awaits the faithful, there are no significant differences among earthly regimes, for all are tainted with the sin of pride. Regardless of the regime under which they live, Christians should obey the law as long as it permits the practice of the true faith, and set all of their hopes on eternity. If duty requires political responsibilities of the Christian, these responsibilities are regarded as a necessary burden and not as an opportunity for distinguishing oneself. All people are equal in sharing in the sin of pride, and all, equally, are offered redemption. Arendt will devote most of Part III of her dissertation to this feature of Augustine’s thought.

For Augustine, no one is worthy of glory and honor except for God: “So then ought the Christian to be, that he not over other men” (Augustine, *Homilies on the First Epistle of Saint John* 8.8). Ultimately the attitude of the Christian to earthly regimes should be one of “use” and not of “enjoyment.” Christian are to be thankful for earthly blessings, but should not expect to find happiness in them. Christians should think of everything about life in this world in terms of a pilgrimage and fellow Christians as fellow travelers. Arendt will argue in her dissertation that this view results in the primary existential experience of the Christian in this world being a feeling of homelessness and alienation. Arendt attributes the near total loss of an appreciation for the *vita activa* in the Western imagination to the universalism of the Christian faith, with Augustine as its chief proponent—a criticism that will be discussed in Chapter Six. In the next section, we will explore how love, defined as desire by Augustine, directs the Christian’s attention and aspirations out of this world and toward eternity.
1.4 Augustine on Love

It is Augustine’s philosophy of love, and specifically love of the other, which is Arendt’s primary research interest in her dissertation. In the next chapter, we will carefully examine her interpretation of Augustine on love of God, self, and the neighbor. Certainly, love is as central to Augustine’s theology as it is to any Christian theology. After all, the teachings of Christ can be summed up in the commandment to love. Christians are to love God and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. But for Augustine’s thinking, love is much more than the principal ethic of the Christian faith. The capacity to love, for Augustine, defines the human person. Love is central not only for forming the Christian community, but for uniting secular communities as well. As demonstrated in the previous section, it is the object of love that distinguishes the city of man from the City of God. We also saw how God is the good that is properly to be desired, which will be important here also for our discussion of the nature of love.

In this section, I will explain the centrality of love in Augustine’s anthropology, as well as the central place of love, for Augustine, in defining human community. For Augustine, love is the “in-between” that unites the lover with the object of his or her affection, and love is also the “in-between” that bonds members of a community. Love, says Augustine, is the “life,” which sustains the coupling together of the lover and the loved. Indeed, it is love that unites the three persons of the trinity: the father, son, and Holy Spirit. Wherever you see love, says Augustine, you are seeing the Trinity (Augustine, The Trinity 8.8.12).
For Augustine, love always has three aspects: the lover who loves, the desiring love directed toward some object, and the desired or loved object of affection. To will something is the same as to desire some object. Willing is the in-between, or bridge, which connects the lover and the loved. For Augustine, unlike Arendt for whom the spring of all action is natality as we shall soon see, the spring of every action will always be love. Willing is therefore simply understood by Augustine as love directed at some object. To will is to love. A right will is well-directed love, while a wrong will is ill-directed love.

Love is a two-step process. In willing, the lover is at first desiring an object, but once the object is possessed we are said to “enjoy” it—recall Augustine’s distinction between use and enjoyment in the previous section. Rightly directed desire is called by Augustine caritas, while wrongly directed desire is cupiditas.\(^{18}\) Once the desired object is possessed, our love is complete and is properly understood as joy (Augustine, *City of God* 14.7). If your desire is directed towards the right object, which for Augustine can only be God who is the final good, then all other affections that follow will also be rightly ordered. Those who love God are repelled by sin, while at the same time long for eternal life (Augustine, *City of God* 14.9). One whose desire is directed toward any object other than God will be plagued by anxiety, for all objects other than God, once possessed, can be lost. This is why we must “use” and not believe we can “enjoy” any

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\(^{18}\) For an example of how Augustine uses and distinguished between *caritas* and *cupiditas* see the *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, Chapters 31-32.
object other than God. In this life, the Christian cannot be truly happy; rather, the
Christian lives in the expectation, or hope, of possessing a good that can never be lost—
eternity spent in the presence of God. “Our heart is unquiet until it rests in you,”
Augustine prays in his Confessions (Augustine, Confessions 1.1.1). God, as the final good,
is the only right object of our love, and the only good that will bring us true joy.

If love is rightly directed, not only affections but all actions that spring from the
will also will be right. Every act, for Augustine, is an act of love. We act out of love of the
object for which we act. This is why Augustine tells his parishioners in one of his
homilies, “Love—and do whatever you like” (Augustine, Homilies on the First Epistle of
Saint John 7.8). For as long as your desire is only for God, Augustine tells his
parishioners, then the actions prompted by this love can only be right actions. If, says
Augustine, we want to know whether or not a man is a good man, we need not make an
account of all his attributes and actions, but only inquire as to who or what he loves and
that alone will give us our answer we seek (Augustine, Enchiridion 31.117). Well-
directed love is indeed a “brief but true definition of virtue” (Augustine City of God,
15.22).

Alternatively, if your desire is directed toward the wrong object, then the actions
that spring from this love will necessarily be wrong. What is sin, says Augustine, but
pride? And what is pride, but the desire for undue exaltation? “And this is undue
exaltation,” he writes in The City of God: “when the soul abandons him to whom it
ought to cleave as its end, and becomes a kind of end to itself” (Augustine, City of God
14.13). Sin is the desiring of your own exaltation rather than desiring God alone. It was
Adam and Eve who, in an act of free will, were the first to be guilty of this transgression, desiring to be like God. It is through progenitation that all of us inherit not only the just wages of this first sin, but also the desire to sin. Indeed, we are born into this world desiring sin. This is why Augustine describes sin as a habit, as something we are already compelled to do by our very nature, and which only God can free us from.

It is for this reason that all human beings are born into the world with a divided will, with two competing desires, on the one hand desiring to put him or herself in the place of God, while at the same time having been created by God to desire him alone. This divided will is the source of the two loves, love of self and love of God, which each individual experiences as an internal conflict within his own soul. Augustine’s own struggle with these competing loves is a major theme of his Confessions. In Book XIII he describes the nature of these two loves:

They are movements of the heart, they are two loves. One is the uncleanness of our own spirit, which like a flood tide sweeps us down, in love with restless cares; the other is the holiness of your spirit, which bears us upward in love for peace beyond all care, that our hearts may be lifted up to you, to where your Spirit is poised above the waters, that once our soul has crossed over those waters on which there is no reliance we may reach all surpassing rest. (Augustine, Confessions 13.7.8)

Love, for Augustine, is a “weight” that pulls us in a particular direction, not unlike the force of gravity. “My weight is my love,” he writes in The Confessions. If our love is directed toward God then we will be drawn by the Spirit to our true rest in God, like any physical body that is drawn by gravity to its final resting place. While in this world, the battle between these two loves will continue to rage within us until we are finally cured.
by God in eternity. In this world, whether we choose to allow the love of God to reign supreme within us or the love of self will determine our every choice and every action.

These two loves also define and distinguish the two communities in history—the city of man and the City of God. Indeed, it is common love that is the impetus for the formation of the two communities: “two loves created two cities” (Augustine, City of God 14.28). The earthly city, which can be understood as any time-bound human community, is formed by and defined by a common love of self, “even to the contempt of God” (Augustine, City of God 14.28). Members of the Church, and even clergy, may be citizens of the earthly city, if pride takes the place of love of God. The City of God, on the other hand, is formed of and defined by those who share in the love of God, “even to the contempt of self” (Augustine, City of God 14.28).

Citizens of the City of God are citizens of this city because of the direction of their love, and not because of their membership in any earthly institution, not even the Church. Augustine is clear that baptism into the Church community is not enough for salvation if, after baptism, one replaces love of God with pride. What keeps the City of God together is their common love of God: “all rejoice together in a common charity” (Augustine, Homilies on the First Epistle of Saint John Prologue). But also, for the time being, their kinship as fellow sojourners, travelers who are together passing through this world on their way to eternity where the City of God will finally be complete. What unites citizens of the earthly city, which is also not equivalent to any one particular political community, is a common love of self, of ruling rather than serving, of glory rather than humility.
Earthly political communities can be evaluated by their loves. For instance, Augustine accepts that political communities that love virtue are in some respects superior to political communities that love wealth. Ultimately, however, all are united by their common love of self and so make up the larger “earthly city” (Augustine, *City of God* 14.28). This is why the city of man is plagued by constant fear and grief—its love is not directed toward God (Augustine, *City of God* 14.9). Common love is both the cause of the community, and it is that which continues to unite and sustain the community. Love is the bond, it is the “glue,” Augustine says, that unites all human communities, whether that love is base or pure (Augustine, Sermon 349). This is a significant distinction from Arendt who, as we will see, is highly doubtful that love can provide the foundation for political solidarity. Instead of love, it is the constitution, the law, and equal rights that provide the “in-between”—both linking as well as providing space for unique, but equal citizens.

If it is a mutual love for God that unites citizens of God’s city, then what, if any, role does love of neighbor play in forming and uniting the Christian community in Augustine? This is Arendt’s principle question in her dissertation, which we will carefully examine in the next chapter. Because our fellow human beings are subject to change and can also be lost against our will, another human being can never be our final good. Only God remains our final good. Even our neighbor, then, is to be “used” and not “enjoyed.” This use does not mean that we should take advantage of our neighbor or love them for the sake of the material benefits they can offer us. That is not what
Augustine means. What he does mean is that we should not seek happiness in another mortal person.

The first commandment is to love God with all of your heart, soul, and mind, and the second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine explains the meaning of these two commandments. The first commandment, says Augustine, means that no part of our life is to be left unoccupied with the desire to enjoy only God as our final good. How do we love our neighbor as ourselves? We first must love ourselves aright by loving God, for only in loving God are we saved. From this understanding, says Augustine, it is clear how we are to love our neighbor. We love our neighbor aright when we direct him to the proper object of his love, and ardently seek that he share in our salvation. If our neighbor becomes the object of our love, and we put our hope in him as the source of our happiness, then not only do we not love God, but neither do we love ourselves or even our neighbor. It is sinful to give to another human being what is only due to God or to seek from our neighbor for ourselves what he also owes only to God. Whether a fellow brother or sister in Christ, or a non-believer, the commandment to love our neighbor entails loving him or her for the sake of God and not for any inherent qualities they may or may not possess. Love in them nothing save *only Christ* says Augustine (Augustine, Sermon 349).

The capacity to love is what defines the human person. It is evident, says Augustine, how “noble is each rational creature you have made, for nothing less than yourself can suffice to give it any measure of blessed rest, nor indeed can it be its own satisfaction” (*Augustine, Confessions* 13.8.3). It is not reason that ennobles us, or that
defines human nature, but rather the fact that we were created to desire and enjoy God. Human beings were created to love. Why do we love? Because God is love and first loved us.\textsuperscript{19}

Human beings are necessarily loving beings: “there is no one of course who doesn’t love, but the question is what do they love” (Augustine, Sermon 34). This also means that human beings are necessarily dependent beings. We are dependent upon whatever we love. That is why if we love earthly goods, we will be plagued with anxiety, for if earthly goods hold sway over us, then we must necessarily fear their loss. “If kinship with other souls appeals to you,” writes Augustine, “let them be loved in God, because they too are changeable and gain stability only when fixed in him...Let them be loved in him, and carry off to God as many of them as possible with you” (Augustine, \textit{Confessions} 4.12.8). But if we hold fast to God, who can never be lost, then we will live in the hope of eternal bliss. In her dissertation, Arendt will argue that Augustine’s definition of love is ultimately unsatisfactory as it makes it impossible to love the other for his own sake, and not only for the sake of God. In this way, she argues, we do not truly love the other as he appears in his concrete, worldly existence.

In the next section we turn to Augustine’s thinking concerning the possibility for new beginnings in time, in eternity, and in the human person. Love and beginnings are connected for Augustine because the new beginning offered by salvation was made

\textsuperscript{19} Another puzzle that we cannot explore here is how God can be said to love human beings if love is understood as desire, and we are only to love what we can enjoy. God cannot be said to be desirous, nor can God “enjoy” us. Arendt also makes note of this contradiction in her dissertation.
available to human beings only because God first loved the world and sent his son into the world. It is God’s love that “renews us that we may be new men, heirs of the New Testament, singers of a new song” (Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 65.2). *Cupiditas* makes man old, while *caritas* makes man new (Augustine, Sermon 350A). The free gift of salvation, made possible by God’s love, presents everyone with the opportunity for the passing away of the old self and the possibility to be reborn as a new creation.

1.5 Augustine on Beginnings

In the revised edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, released in 1958, the same year the first edition of *The Human Condition* was published, Arendt closed her new, final chapter with these words of Augustine from Book XII of the *City of God*: *Initium ut esset homo creatus est*—“that a beginning be made man was created” (Arendt 2004, 616).²⁰ Arendt concludes this work by presenting the human capability to start something new as our greatest and only hope against the threat of totalitarian terror. In *The Human Condition*, which constitutes Arendt’s most sustained inquiry into the meaning of beginnings in politics, Arendt includes the longer quote: “[*Initium*] *ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit* (‘that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody’)” (Arendt 1998, 177). For Arendt, human

²⁰Arendt is actually quoting not from Book XII, Chapter 20 as she cites in *Origins* and *The Human Condition*, but from Book XII, Chapter 21.
beings are capable of “action,” meaning that they are capable of beginning something new, because each human being is him or herself a new beginning by virtue of birth. Because each person is a unique individual, and his or her birth marks the appearance of a new person in the world who has never been before nor will be again, human beings are capable of the unexpected. Because Arendt has been called the preeminent “theorist of beginnings,” and because she cites Augustine as a theoretical foundation for her most famous and original insight—natality—this next section examines what exactly Augustine had to say about beginnings (Canovan 1998, vii). What we find is that his understanding of new beginnings is quite the opposite of Arendt’s own understanding.

For Arendt, the capacity to begin something new is the essence of human freedom. Arendt writes: “With the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which of course, is only another way of saying the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before” (Arendt 1998, 177). Though Arendt relies on Augustine’s theology of creation as a foundation for her theory of action, Augustine’s spiritual understanding of beginnings couldn’t be further from Arendt’s political understanding. Augustine understands “beginnings” in two respects, both theological and not political in nature, beginnings that mark the appearance of the new in the unfolding of God’s salvific plan for man and the new beginning offered to every individual through salvation. Still, the meaning of “new” is always qualified for Augustine because of God’s foreknowledge. Given Arendt’s thorough reading of Augustine, it is highly doubtful Arendt did not understand her misuse of Augustine. Rather, in this way and elsewhere, Arendt intentionally and creatively (mis)uses
Augustine as well as other philosophers or experiences (such as the Greek political experience) for her own purposes. We will explore Augustine’s understanding of beginnings below—by looking first at Augustine’s philosophy of history, and second at his theology of salvation—as a way to demonstrate the marked difference between Arendt and Augustine’s philosophy of beginnings, and in order to be able to show how Arendt reappropriated what are, for Augustine, theological concepts.

Given the pagan charges that the expanding Christianization of the Roman Empire had led to its downfall, the *City of God* affords Augustine the opportunity to provide a definitive explanation of the relationship between the Christian faith and history. Augustine’s progressive philosophy of history would later come to dominate the Western mindset, though in the secularized philosophies of Kant, Hegel, and, of course, Marx. But unlike these later thinkers history, for Augustine, is not the story of the struggle of ideas or material forces in history, but the story of the unfolding of God’s salvific plan for humankind. Even though original sin was the result of free will, God foresaw human sin and “arranged His own designs rather with a view to do good to man even in his sinfulness” (Augustine, *Enchiridion* 104). All of human history can be read as the realization of divine providence. It is in his linear philosophy of history that we see what the possibility for new beginnings means for Augustine.

Augustine, even more strongly than previous Christian thinkers, rejects the Greco-Roman idea of cosmic or historical cycles endlessly recurring in favor of a linear philosophy of history. Simply put, the dominant thinking in Greek and Roman philosophy was that the world was eternal and history was infinitely repeatable. For
Augustine, in sharp contrast, God’s creation of the world and of time was coincident. Time had a distinct beginning—it began with God’s creation of the world—and, the world as we know it is not everlasting but is itself finite. History, which is marked by a distinct beginning and end, also has a clear direction—it is progressing toward an ultimate end determined by God’s plan for his creation. History has a discreet beginning, in creation, and will have a discrete ending in the Final Judgment.

The end of time, however, itself marks a new beginning. It is the moment when the dead shall be raised and all of the saved shall be transformed anew into citizens of God’s eternal kingdom. This—eternity spent in the presence of God—is the true telos of humankind and humankind’s final good. It is the point toward which we should be progressing. For Augustine, new beginnings reveal God’s creative and redemptive power, and not man’s—what will be shown in later chapters to be a sharp contrast between Augustine and Arendt. It is also Augustine’s concept of time, the “time between times” that will reappear in Arendt’s own concept of memory and the present or “between past and future.” Similarly, Arendt heavily draws upon Augustine’s concept of the world, although she argues that it the location of meaning and the place for the exercise of freedom, whereas for Augustine, that can only be experienced in eternity after the world.

Augustine’s philosophy of history is hopeful in the sense that he firmly believes that whatever trials and tribulations may afflict life in this world, history is unfolding according to God’s providence. It is a hope that was later secularized in modern philosophies of history. For Augustine, however, the ultimate meaning of history is
*spiritual* and not material (in contrast to, for example, Marx’s philosophy of history); that is, history will not culminate with the ascendancy of a everlasting, yet temporal, Christian order and the reign of universal brotherhood and peace *in time*, but with a final judgment and the end of historical time as we know it. This means that historical time, the “in-between” space, while finite, is nevertheless, as the Greeks noted, marked by the cyclical rise and fall of regimes. While Augustine’s philosophy of history puts its faith in eternity, and in this way is profoundly hopeful, the eschatological message of his philosophy of history lends itself to a pessimistic perspective on political life. As we have already seen, political life cannot provide for anything other than the material and bodily good of the human person. The ultimate meaning of life is projected into eternity.

In contrast, for Arendt, human beings are the only creative source of meaning. Meaning comes from human beings acting together *in time*, in *this* world. Like Augustine, she rejects a cyclical view of history as well as a kind of progressive view of history that would place faith in the possibility for the creation of a Marxist utopia or democratic peace. In other words, she rejects a view of history that envisions an end to history within the world. While Arendt does not reject the possibility of the existence of God or life after death, we cannot measure the value of our existence or the political order by these standards. Men must create their own measures. Whatever meaning there is for history, we must create it ourselves.

The *City of God*, in addition to providing a definitive theology of the relationship of the Church to history, has many other secondary concerns—chief among them, to
counter pagan philosophies or heretical theologies. Among these are theories
maintaining the eternity of the world and the cyclical nature of history. It is in this
context that Augustine, in Books XI-XXII, recounts the origins and destinies of the City of
God and the city of man. In Book XI, he identifies the origin of God’s “city” with the
creation of the angels and the creation of man. Augustine is concerned to demonstrate
that the world had a distinct beginning and that history is progressive and not cyclical. In
contrast to the classical position that holds that the world is eternal and without a
beginning, Augustine maintains that the order and beauty of the world “bears a kind of
silent testimony to the fact of its creation” (Augustine, City of God 11.4). The first
“beginning,” according to Augustine, was God’s creation of the world. Before the
creation of the world, God, as immutable Being, always was, and so there could be
nothing “new.” The creation of the world marked the beginning of time, defined by
Augustine as “motion and change.” Before the creation of the world, there was only
God who is immutable Being—“God is existence in a supreme degree—he supremely
is—and he is therefore immutable” (Augustine, City of God 12.2). It follows, then, that
there was no time before the creation of the world, which is susceptible to change,
while God is not (Augustine, City of God 11.6). The world was created not in time, but
with time, and since the world was not created in time, there was no “past” before the
beginning that was creation (Augustine, City of God 11.6). God created the world ex
nihilo, and creation marked a new beginning. With time and the introduction of the
possibility of change and motion, creation also opened up the possibility for the
appearance of the new.
Although creation marked the appearance of the new, including the heavens and the earth, the sea and land animals, and, the pinnacle of God’s creation—man made in the image of God—God’s plan for creation was not new. The creation of the world was not something, Augustine says, which suddenly came to the mind of God “as an idea which has never before occurred to him, that he happened to take a new decision, whereas in fact, he is utterly insusceptible to change” (Augustine, City of God 11.4). In other words, though it may appear so to human beings, God is not capable of spontaneity. The creation of the world, though a new beginning, was nevertheless in accordance with God’s unchanging and eternal plan.

Why did God create the world? God created the world out of his goodness: “There is only one cause for the creation of the world—the purpose of God’s goodness in the creation of good” (Augustine, City of God 11.23). While the creation of the world marks the appearance of the new in that before creation the world and time did not exist, creation is not truly “new” because creation had always been God’s plan. For Augustine, because of God’s immutability and providence, there cannot be the appearance of the truly new. For Arendt, what is important is the possibility for the novel that sets human life apart from nature, and not divinity from humanity. Human beings are indeed capable of spontaneity, and the greatest threat posed by totalitarianism was its attempt to eliminate spontaneity.

When Augustine records the thought Arendt repeatedly quotes—“and so to provide that beginning, a man was created, before whom no man ever existed” (Augustine, City of God 12.21)—his purpose is not to demonstrate the condition of
human freedom, like Arendt, but rather to counter the pagan belief in the eternity of souls. Augustine argues against the pagan philosophy that proffers human souls as having no beginning and the human race as always existing. Augustine maintains that souls have not always existed, are not coeternal with God, and are not infinitely reincarnated. Rather, human souls and human beings are created in time (Augustine, *City of God* 12.10). While human souls are created by God to be immortal, they are not eternal. Augustine counters the belief that souls have always existed, arguing instead that human beings—embodied human souls—are created in time. Human souls have their origin in a creative act of God, including the first human souls of Adam and Eve and the souls of all new human beings born into the world through procreation. Even in procreation, it is not man, but God who is the creative author of human existence. Human beings are dependent on God, the immutable and immortal Being, for their being.

Augustine’s purpose in recounting the creation of man in Book XII is to demonstrate that the creation of man did, in fact, mark the appearance of the new in the world. However, his discussion centers on God as the creator, not on man’s creative capacities. His concern is God’s omnipotence, not the powers of man. God, as the Supreme Being, is the ultimate source and sustainer of the existence (the being) of all other beings. What we will discover, though, it that Arendt draws upon Augustine’s two-fold origin of man (in God the source of Being and in Adam and Eve) for her development of the concept of human plurality.
Augustine’s other intention in recounting the creation of the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, in the passage Arendt cites is to demonstrate the gregarious nature of man. Augustine emphasizes the difference between God’s creation of man and the creation of other animal species. He explains that it was only man who was created as a single pair, male and female, while other animals, “he commanded many to come into existence at once” (Augustine, City of God 12.22). Though human beings are not the only social animals, God intended that all human beings be descendants of the first man and woman in order “that in this way the unity of human society and the bonds of human sympathy be more emphatically brought home to man, if men were bound together not merely by likeness in nature but also by the feeling of kinship” (Augustine, City of God 12.22). Augustine’s concern here is not what Arendt describes as “natality.” Again, in recounting the creation of man, he is not making any kind of argument for the human capability to begin something new. Still, what he is doing is emphasizing an essential element of Arendt’s theory of action—plurality. Arendt defines plurality simply as “the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt 1998, 7) For Arendt, plurality, as she says, is not the “conditio sine qua non, but the conditio per quam”—of all political life” (Arendt 1998, 7). Arendt, starting with her dissertation was fascinated by the “relevance of the other,” in other words, the meaning of plurality in Augustine’s thought, and she relies upon his theory for the development of her own concept, although, for Augustine, plurality tells us something about human nature, whereas, for Arendt, plurality is a feature of the human condition.
Augustine writes, “God started the human race from one man to show to mankind how pleasing to him is unity in plurality” (Augustine, _City of God_ 12.23).\(^{21}\)

Human beings are social by nature, although quarrelsome by perversion, he says, and are intended for redemption by God so that they can have community _in_ God. Augustine interprets God’s command proscribing marriage between siblings in the same way. God’s purpose is that human relationships should be spread out among individuals, in order to “bind social life more effectively by involving in their plurality a plurality of persons” (Augustine, _City of God_ 15.16).\(^{22}\) This plurality is thoroughly examined by Arendt in her dissertation.

For Arendt, the fact that each person is born into the world as a unique individual means that each person is capable of action. This is not Augustine’s understanding of natality. His concern is God’s creative power, and not man’s creativity or capabilities. Still, Augustine does discuss human freedom in the context of the creation of man, which is of immense importance for Arendt’s political thought. However, Augustine’s understanding of freedom is not only different from Arendt’s; it is also drastically circumspect in comparison. Augustine’s philosophy of the freedom of the will does not permit of new or unforeseen possibilities for human action. Human beings

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\(^{21}\) In Latin, “_cui populo esset huius rei consideratio profutura, quod ex uno homine deus ad commendandum hominibus, quam ei grata sit etiam in pluribus unitas, genus instituisset humanum_” (Augustine, _City of God_ 12.21).

\(^{22}\) In Latin, “_habita est enim ratio rectissima caritatis, ut homines, quibus esset utilis atque honesta concordia, diversarum necessitudinum uinculis necterentur, nec unus in uno multas haberet, sed singulæ spargerentur in singulos ac sic ad socialem uitam diligentius conligandam plurimæ plurimos obtinerent_” (Augustine, _City of God_ 15.16).
essentially have only two choices: to turn away from God, or to turn back toward God—either to “live by the standard of the flesh” or “the standard of the spirit” (Augustine, *City of God* 14.4). All human decision, every choice, is either a decision to align one’s will with God’s will or to place oneself in opposition to God. As we will see, this is another point that will be important for Arendt in her dissertation.

Why are all human choices fundamentally either a choice for or against God? The answer lies in another “beginning”—the beginning of sin in an act of human will. Adam and Eve’s first sin marked a new beginning in time: the appearance of sin and, with it, “the origin of human mortality” (Augustine, *City of God* 13.1). But even in this act, Augustine is very clear that human beings are not “creative” because sin is a degenerative and not a creative act. God created human beings with a good, but mutable will. The mutability of the human will allows human beings the choice of turning away from God. The will becomes bad not because the object toward which it turns is bad, but, rather, in the turning away itself. The very act of turning away from God is itself “perverse” and corrupting (Augustine, *City of God* 12.6). The “evil will,” then, is not a creation of God, for what God creates is good. Nor is it even a creative choice of man. Rather, the evil will is a defective will, made bad by its direction (Augustine, *City of God* 12.7, 8). The defective will is diseased and degenerate, a slave to sin in habit, neither creative nor spontaneous.

This first sin was a “free” choice, and Augustine writes of the human soul rejoicing “in its own freedom to act perversely” (Augustine, *City of God* 13.13). It was man who took the initiative in forsaking God, and once “he used his free will in
arrogance and disobedience” he became “a slave of his desires” (Augustine, City of God 13.15, 22). The ultimate irony of the freedom of the will, however, is that, in freely choosing to turn away from God, the first man and woman did not find freedom, but rather became enslaved to sin. It is at this moment that, as a just punishment, human beings became mortal, their bodies destined to perish and their souls destined to suffer eternal death, understood as eternal separation from God.

Because all men and women are begotten of Adam and Eve, all have inherited this original sin and are also rightfully punished with death—“hence from the misuse of free will there started a chain of disasters” (Augustine, City of God 13.14). And, “God created man aright...but man was willingly perverted...and so begot perverted and condemned offspring” (Augustine, City of God 13.15). The result of the first sin, an act of free will, “was not that he was in every way under his own control, but that he was at odds with himself, and lived a life of harsh and pitiable slavery, instead of the freedom he so ardently desired” (Augustine, City of God 15.15). While human sin is an act of free will, it is not a “choice” in the truest understanding of the word. All human beings are born into the world with original sin. This is why the “two loves” are always at battle within.

The only other choice available to each human being—the choice to be true to our nature as created by God—is to return to God. This is also an act of free will, but even still it is not something we are capable of choosing on our own; we require divine intervention. Augustine writes, “God gave it [the will] that true freedom, and now that it has been lost, through its own fault, it can be restored only by him who had the power
to give it at the beginning” through grace (14.11). According to Augustine, it is in the return to God that, no more a slave to sin, authentic freedom is to be found. However, this freedom is not understood by Augustine in terms of the human potential for creative action—quite the opposite. Freedom comes through complete and total submission to God’s will. Augustine writes: “until being freed from sin, he shall begin to be the servant of righteousness. And this is true liberty, for he has pleasure in the righteous deed; and it is at the same time a holy bondage, for he is obedient to the will of God” (Augustine, Enchiridion 30). Even before man’s sin, when man experienced true freedom, Augustine admits that “in paradise, man could not, it is true, do everything” because he was perfectly obedient to God (Augustine, City of God 14.15). Freedom, according to Augustine, is found when man chooses to “live by the standard of his creator, not by his own, carrying not his own will, but his creator’s” (Augustine, City of God 14.4). There is only one sacrifice God desires, Augustine writes, “the heart bruised and humbled in the sorrow of penitence” (Augustine, City of God 10.5). What God desires is not a free spirit, but “a broken spirit.” In choosing to return to God, the choice is to submit, in total obedience, to the will of God.

Augustine is firm in his belief that it is “calamitous” for human beings to “act according to his own will, and not to obey the will of his Creator” (Augustine, City of God 14.12). We can even imagine Augustine cautioning Arendt directly when he writes: “By aiming at more, a man is diminished, when he elects to be self-sufficient and defects from the one who is really sufficient for him” (Augustine, City of God 14.13). This obedience to God must be so complete, that Augustine writes of the ultimate example
of God’s obedient servant, Abraham, as being willing to kill even his own son—

“Abraham’s obedience is renowned in story as a great thing, and rightly so, because he was ordered to do an act of enormous difficulty”—an act, as Kierkegaard later reminds us, of supreme irrationality (Augustine, City of God 14.15). It is because of this complete and total submission and obedience to God’s will that it will be possible, at long last, to experience what Augustine considers to be the truest and final form of freedom—eternal repose in the presence of God. Recall that this is, for Augustine, the final good and the only proper object of our love.

Augustine’s theology of freedom allows only for two possibilities. The first, turning away from God, which every human being is already born into because of original sin and is therefore better understood as a “habit” rather than as a choice. The result of this habit is slavery to sin. The other choice is a choice for God and for our true nature as designed by God. In this choice, one submits, not in slavery to sin, but in obedience to the will of God. Thomas Hibbs remarks that “for Augustine, the salient contrast is not between autonomy and servitude but between different sorts of bondage” (Hibbs 1996, xi). Submission to the will of God is Augustine’s definition of freedom. Freedom is not, as Arendt understands it, the human capability of beginning something new. Augustine’s anthropology envisions an entirely dependent human being, dependent not only for the “being” of our existence, but entirely dependent upon that which we love—either a slave to sin or a slave to God.

Returning to the question of Augustine’s philosophy of history, it is important to recognize that Augustine’s purpose in recounting the creation of the world is not only to
provide a theology of creation for Christians, but also to refute pagan philosophies and theologies. Augustine contests the position that the history of the world is cyclical—the belief that “the same ages and the same temporal events recur in rotation”—countering that the world has a distinct beginning and will have distinct end (Augustine, *City of God* 12.14). Augustine writes, “there is no reason to believe in those strange cycles which prevent the appearance of anything new, since everything has already existed in the past and will exist in the future and at certain intervals of time” (Augustine, *City of God* 12.21).

Like Arendt, Augustine believes in the possibility of the appearance of the new. But, unlike Arendt, whose political theory does not allow for history to be understood as bearing an ultimate trajectory and meaning, whether ideal or material, the “story” of history, according to Augustine, is the story of the origin and destinies of the two cities, the City of God and the city of man, and the unfolding of God’s salvific plan for man. We have already said above what Augustine means by the City of God and the city of man. The City of God has its origin, its beginning, in the creation of the angels and the creation of man, while the founder of the city of man is Cain, the murderer of his brother Abel. The city of man “consists of those who live by human standards,” while the City of God is made up of “those who live according to God’s will” (Augustine, *City of God* 15.11). One city is united by love of God, the other by love of self. One city is, therefore, “destined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the devil” (Augustine, *City of God* 15.1).
History, for Augustine, is both linear and progressive. According to Augustine, history is made up of six epochs to be followed by a seventh epoch that marks the end of historical time and the beginning of the eternal Sabbath. The first five epochs led up to and foretold, the appearance of Christ. The first epoch began with the creation of Adam and lasted up to the flood, the second from the flood to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to exile in Babylon, and the fifth from the exile to the appearance of Christ. These epochs marked necessary stages in the development of the City of God and in the unfolding of God’s salvific plan for man (when described this way, it’s easy to see how Hegel and Marx secularized the Christian philosophy of history).

Augustine believes we are now living in the sixth epoch, the time lasting from the incarnation to the second coming of Christ. The second coming of Christ and the Final Judgment will mark both the end of historical time and the beginning of the seventh and everlasting epoch—eternal rest for the faithful or the eternal separation from God for the damned (Augustine, *City of God* 22.30). While Augustine is adamant that history is not cyclical, and that the progression of history is characterized by the appearance of the new, what is important is that the beginning of each epoch in history originates in the mind of God and according to His plan, and not in the creative capacity or freedom of man.

All of history then unfolds according to God’s providence and is the story of God’s plan for man’s salvation. The story of the City of God, prior to the appearance of Christ in the world, portends the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the
development of the City of God evidences God’s promise of redemption to man in Christ. Augustine expends considerable energy recounting the promises God made directly to his servants, explaining how God made use of mediators, the Old Testament prophets, to prophecy the coming of the Messiah, and also explaining the allegorical meaning of key turning points in the history of the City of God. It is not only the City of God that proceeds according to God’s plan, but also the city of man proceeds according to God’s design, for “God makes good use even of the wicked” (Augustine, City of God 18.51). Augustine writes that both city’s “narratives were written under the inspiration of God; and God’s purpose was to direct and distinguish, from the start, those two societies in their different lines of descent” (Augustine, City of God 15.8).

It is God who grants empire and dominion to earthly kingdoms. As Saint Paul wrote, “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1). Under the providence of God, “some nations have been entrusted with empire, while others have been subdued to alien domination” (Augustine, City of God 18.2). Even the greatest of worldly empires have unwittingly played a key part in God’s redemptive plan. It was God who granted dominion to the Roman Empire: “it was God’s design to conquer the world through her, to unite the world into the single community of the Roman commonwealth and the Roman laws, and so to impose peace throughout its length and breadth” (Augustine, City of God 18.22). Because the reign of Augustus established a worldwide peace, the historical conditions required for the appearance of Christ in history were met (Augustine, City of God 13.46). All of history proceeds according to God’s master plan. Every “new” event is part of God’s design.
The first five historical periods led up to the appearance of Christ in history, and the sixth epoch, in which we are currently living, is directed toward the second coming of Christ. The appearance of Christ is the “deus ex machina” that marks the turning point in the story of humankind’s redemption. Christ is the new beginning upon which all of human history turns. The creation of man marked the beginning of the City of God; man’s turning from God marked the beginning of the city of man, and it is the appearance of Christ that marks the possibility for a new beginning for man—redemption.

Christ, writes Augustine, is himself a new beginning. He was present with God at the creation of the world and is coeternal with God, but his incarnation marks the appearance of the new in history. Augustine writes of the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ as evidence against the cyclical theories of history or the eternal recurrence of souls. If the world was eternal, then the miracle of Christ could not have been. Christ died for our sins “once and for all” and rose from the dead. Because of his sacrifice we are “no longer under the sway of death”—it never need happen again (Augustine, City of God 12.14). If new events can occur, and at the same time an old era, the reign of sin and death, can be defeated, then the world is not eternal and history is not cyclical. God is the Creator of all things new, though not unforeseen, and it is because of the appearance of God in history—the incarnation of Christ—that it is possible for each person to have his or her own new beginning.
1.6 Salvation as a New Beginning

Salvation, for Augustine, is the possibility offered by God to each individual for a new beginning. It is the moment when “the grace of regeneration finds any particular man, all his past sins are there and then pardoned, and the guilt which he contracted in his birth is removed in his new birth” (Augustine, *Enchiridion* 119). It is the opportunity available to each and every human being to choose to turn away from sin and to be reborn into a new life in Christ. This new beginning is made possible only because of Christ’s sacrifice. Augustine understands salvation as the only new beginning available to human beings, and it is not a new beginning human beings are capable of embarking upon on their own, but it requires divine intervention in the form of grace.

Augustine’s most sustained reflection on the possibility for a new beginning through salvation is found in his *Confessions*, what many consider to be the Western world’s first autobiography. It is in *The Confessions*, which Augustine began to write not long after being consecrated Bishop of Hippo, that Augustine describes, in neo-Platonist terms, his own ascent to God. While sometimes described as an autobiography, *The Confessions* is better understood as a work of theology. We are not presented with what is intended to be a straightforward and factual account of Augustine’s life. Rather, events in Augustine’s life are offered as a sustained reflection on Augustine’s own return to God made possible by the miracle of grace. In addition, Augustine includes considerations on the character of memory and time (prompted by the question of how to “remember” our origin in God), which influenced Arendt’s own thinking on the nature and purpose of memory, which she studied in her dissertation. What chiefly
concerns us here, however, is Augustine’s theology of salvation, precisely because, besides Augustine’s theology of creation, we find here the second manner in which “new beginnings” are important for Augustine.

Through salvation, the Christian whose physical body and immortal soul was originally created by God, “may now be a new creation in Christ Jesus” (Augustine, Enchiridion 31). Augustine identifies the sacrament of baptism, which is the physical demonstration of the internal reality of salvation, as “the sacrament of birth” (Augustine, Homilies on the First Epistle of Saint John 6). In baptism, he has become a “new man through the remission of all his sins” (Augustine, Homilies on the First Epistle of Saint John 6). What we find in reading The Confessions is that the new beginning offered to each individual through salvation is not possible through an individual’s own effort; it also requires a necessary turning away from involvement in worldly affairs.

Again, the meaning of new beginnings for Augustine couldn’t be further from the Arendtian conception of new beginnings, which emphasizes human freedom, the ability to do and say something new, which finds its fullest expression in political action.

As described above, new beginnings for Augustine have a solely theological and not political meaning. Arendt (mis)uses Augustine’s theology of beginnings for a decidedly anti-Augustinian purpose—to affirm the human possibility for politics, and furthermore to affirm the possibility for the creation of a meaningful political life in time and in this world. Arendt relies on Augustine’s theology of creation, specifically the creation of man, for her own political theory grounded in the human conditions of plurality and natality. Augustine’s theology of creation and his philosophy of history,
understood as the unfolding of God’s salvific plan for man, does allow for the appearance of the new in time, most significantly the incarnation of Christ. Still, “new” for Augustine does not mean un-thought of or unplanned for, because history unfolds according to God’s providence. There is not room for the truly spontaneous action in Augustine’s philosophy of history. As we also saw above, human freedom only allows for two possibilities: a choice for the self or a choice for God.

Again, Augustine is not concerned to demonstrate the human capacity for new possibilities generated by the condition of natality, but rather to demonstrate the creative power of God and his plan for salvation. In *The Confessions*, we see Augustine’s theology of salvation at the individual, rather than the macro, level—actually in Augustine’s own journey back to God. God offers a new beginning for each human being through salvation—the return to God—and in *The Confessions*, we see more personally the implication of this return.

From the very outset of the work, when Augustine is describing himself immediately after his birth into the world, we see the legacy of original sin. Augustine describes his infant self as “greedy,” and as provoking derision. He writes, “the only innocent feature in babies is the weakness of their frames; the minds of infants are far from innocent” (Augustine, *Confessions* 1.7.11). All sons and daughters of Adam have inherited pride, the source of all sin. But pride, or choosing one’s own will over the will of God, is also a choice, as Augustine so eloquently illustrates in his famous example of the stealing of the pears. Augustine recalls how his younger self stole the pears for the sheer thrill of doing wrong, echoing the choice of Adam and Eve (Augustine, *Confessions* 1.7.11).
2.4.9). In Books I-VII Augustine describes his attraction to sensual pleasures and his bondage to sin, but also his intellectual awakening. The young Augustine has an insatiable desire not only for the pleasures of the flesh, but also for the truth, and this desire for the truth led him to spend years as the devotee of false philosophies, especially Manichaeism. Although Augustine is intellectually persuaded to the truth of Christianity in Books VI and VII, he is still unable to abandon his sinful lust. The two loves are at war within him. It is only because of divine intervention, an act of grace, that Augustine is able to return to God. This is of course the story of Augustine hearing the voice in garden commanding him to pick up and read scripture; he reads the first passage he turns to, which he takes as a direct message from God, that he should “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh or the gratification of your desires” (Augustine, Confessions 8.29). It is only because of this miracle that Augustine’s will is healed and he is able to submit only to God’s will and no longer his own sinful desires. In his own personal account of salvation, Augustine demonstrates his complete dependency on God and God’s grace. New beginnings are not possible through a purely autonomous and independent act of will.

Important for our discussion of beginnings is how Augustine understands his salvation as requiring a complete turning away from the world. At the time of his conversion, Augustine had been a professor of rhetoric, appointed by Symmachus,

23 The puzzle in Augustine’s theology of sin and of free will is how, for Augustine, sin can be both a habit we are all born into, while at the same time a free choice. A puzzle we, unfortunately, cannot work out here.
prefect of Milan. A professor of rhetoric, though itself not a political position, was necessarily connected to the political life of the city and to the Empire. Indeed, rhetoric, or the art of persuasion, has long been described as the “civic art” because of the importance of persuasion in political life. Indeed persuasive speech is important for Arendt’s theory of politics. Within the Roman Empire, students who wished to pursue a career in law, either as a lawyer or a judge, or in another position in public service, would require training in rhetoric.

As a professor of rhetoric, Augustine was training those who were preparing to participate directly in political life in service to the Empire. But once converted, Augustine believed it was necessary, if he was to follow God, that he abandon his career in public service and pursue a life of contemplation. He writes:

I believed it to be pleasing in your sight that I should withdraw the service of my tongue from the market of speechifying, so that young boys who were devoting their thoughts not to your law, not to your peace, but to lying follies and legal battles, should no longer buy from my mouth the weapons for their frenzy. (Augustine, Confessions 9.2.2)

What Augustine describes as his “rebirth” also requires a simultaneous death to the world—a repudiation of what he calls “a professorial chair in lying” (Augustine, Confessions 9.4). Augustine is no longer interested in maintaining a position of worldly esteem, in participating in the political life of the community, or even being, as he puts it, “in the public eye,” but believes that his new life is best lived in quiet contemplation of scripture. He expresses “a wholehearted desire to be still and see that you are the Lord” (Augustine, Confessions 9.4). But it is not merely that Augustine’s interests have
changed, but rather that he believes turning towards God necessarily entails a turning away from the concerns of the world, including political life.

In studying Augustine’s *Confessions*, what we find is that the new beginning offered by salvation, or as Augustine puts it, his “rebirth,” is not a choice we are capable of making on our own; we require divine intervention. Again we see a demonstration of Augustine’s belief that human beings are completely and totally dependent on God. We also see the necessary turning away from the world that Augustine believes salvation requires. As we shall see in Chapters Five and Six, Arendt’s whole political theory is aimed at encouraging a turn towards the world, and a recovery of it’s possibilities as the space of human freedom.

For Augustine, the new beginning found in salvation calls for an abandonment of the world and political life in order to be in service to the truth: “The first step is to renounce the world” (*Sermon 350A*). The “world” is used by Augustine to mean much more than physical earth,—it means the making of a home out of the earth by lovers of the world. It includes not only the home that has been made, but the inhabitants of this home. The “world” also means the city of man: “now just as men may dwell in heaven by lifting up their hearts, though in the flesh they walk on earth, so all lovers of the world are dwelling in the world by their love, and thus may themselves be called the world” (*Augustine, Homilies on the First Epistle of Saint John* 12). This concept of world is what Augustine means when in the *Enchiridion*, he explains how the saved person must now set their sights on the things above and not on things of this world (*Augustine, Enchiridion* 53). He should not invest in this world, building up things of
value in the eyes of the world, those investments, which Augustine says “may please his wife,” but rather care only how he should please the Lord (Augustine, *Enchiridion* 68).

The saved should not “trust in man,” nor even trust in himself, but rather trust only in God (Augustine, *Enchiridion* 114).

In a letter to *Anicia Faltonia Proba*, a woman of great worldly esteem, whose three sons had held the consulship, Augustine urges her to discount all of her riches and her high rank, to “despise this present world,” and “out of love to this true life, to account yourself ‘desolate’ in this world” (Augustine, Letter 130 to Proba). To a governor of the province of Africa, Augustine admonishes him, like all true believers, to seek not to acquire an earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of heaven (Augustine, Letter 189 to Boniface). While Christians, once saved, need not necessarily renounce their worldly careers, like Augustine, they must renounce the “world” in the sense that they no longer love the world or seek to obtain earthly rewards or happiness, but set their sights on eternal rewards and eternal happiness. Arendt draws on Augustine’s concept of the world later on in *The Human Condition*, but, against Augustine, she argues we should take pride in our building and maintaining of the world.

While for Arendt natality provides the opportunity to demonstrate distinction, for Augustine the new beginning offered in salvation cancels all worldly distinctions.

God wills that all men be saved writes Augustine in the *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*, and by “all men” we are to understand:

the human race in all its varieties of rank and circumstance—kings, subjects; noble, plebeian, high, low, learned, and unlearned; the sound in body, the feeble, the clever, the dull, the
foolish, the rich, the poor, and those of middling circumstances; males, females, infants, boys, youths; young, middle-aged, and old men; of every tongue, of every fashion, of all arts, of all professions, with all the innumerable differences of will and conscience, and whatever else there is that makes a distinction among men. (Augustine, *Enchiridion* 103)

Additionally, there is no action that can be taken to earn salvation. Salvation is not earned by merit or distinction, but is the free gift of grace.

For Arendt, it is through action that we begin something new and also simultaneously creatively insert ourselves into the human made world and political life. In contrast, the understanding of beginnings as found in Augustine’s theology is first concerned with God’s plan for creation and salvation. In this way, we see that it is God who is creative and the source of new beginnings in history. In the second respect, Augustine’s theology of beginnings is concerned with the possibility for individual rebirth, made available only by the grace of God, which necessitates a turning away from the world, as well as all worldly esteem and glory.

1.7 Conclusion

What we have seen in this short study of Augustine’s political theory is that he has very low expectations for the possibilities provided by a shared political life in the here and the now. Rather, man’s good and true justice lie in eternity. His concept of the two cities reduces all the many distinctions between worldly regimes simply to a city which loves God and the other which is devoted to the love of self. Because of original sin, men, who were created to be equal and social, are now prideful and combative;
each strives to dominate over the other. It is because of sin that men require political
authority and law, and we cannot expect to make men virtuous, but merely to maintain
order and provide security. Christians should regard their life in this world as temporary
and comport themselves towards the state as travelers passing through a foreign land,
not attaching themselves to the worldly community or its priorities and concerns.
Christian citizens should pray for their leaders, be mindful to obey the laws, and perform
public duties when necessary, but they must be careful not to take pride in positions of
authority or glory in service to the state. What we find in examining Augustine’s political
thought is that, while some regimes are better than others, what matters the most is
that a political regime affords its citizens peace and allows Christians to practice their
faith freely. As we study Arendt’s political theory, we will see that Augustine’s very
limited view of the possibilities available to man in the political realm is, in fact, in direct
opposition to Arendt’s great faith in politics.

In this chapter, I have also provided an interpretation of Augustine’s theology of
love, which, as will be shown in the next chapter, actually shares much with the
principle conclusions Arendt reaches in her dissertation. For Augustine, human beings
are loving and dependent beings. We were created by God to love. The direction of our
love determines our actions. If we love rightly, we will also act rightly. For Augustine,
“well directed love” is the simplest definition of virtue. Although we were created by
God to love Him, because of sin we have divided loves. We need God’s grace to heal the
division within and to make us whole again. Indeed, it is only in the love of God that we
are reborn and made new. For Augustine, this is the only way men can be reborn again
in this life. Though, once they have received God’s grace, they have the promise of being born into eternal life. We will see that one of the most interesting features of Arendt’s political theory is her concept of natality. She draws on Augustine’s own considerations of new beginnings for her development of this concept, although she uses it to argue that men are capable of the new in this world, and not only once in salvation, but rather they are capable of new words and deeds again and again, and that this is the source of the creation of meaning for human life.

In this chapter, we have seen how Augustine’s theology requires that life in this world and in time be viewed from the vantage point of eternity. From this perspective, the Christian life takes on the quality of a “pilgrimage,” as all hopes must necessarily be placed in the life after death and the end of the world and time. This results in a radical devaluation of political life in history.

Arendt’s project, beginning with her dissertation, is to restore the independent value of political action and the public world. Yes, Arendt is guilty of the Augustinian charge of “love of the world.” But, what is truly remarkable is that she uses Augustinian concepts to defeat Augustine himself. Exploring how and why she does this is the purpose of this dissertation. Where her interest in human plurality in the world began is the subject of the next chapter. Her first original intellectual project was a study of Augustine’s philosophy of love. In chapter two, I provide a careful and close study of the argument she makes in her dissertation in order to show in later chapters how she draws on this very first study for the development of her own political thought. Remarkably, the influence of her dissertation can be seen in her mature works of
political theory, even through to her last work on *The Life of the Mind*. Her mature political thought, however, can be considered in sharp opposition to Augustine’s own. Augustine asks us to see our life in the here and now as a mere passage-way to eternity, wherein our true good lies. Arendt asks us to make our home in the world, to act together with others, and to grant to each other equal rights and a space for the expression of human distinctiveness, all of which grants an independent meaning and value to human life as it is lived in the here and the now.
CHAPTER 2:
ARENDT’S DISSERTATION ON AUGUSTINE AND LOVE

This chapter consists of a close and careful reading of Arendt’s 1929 dissertation Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin. This attentive reading provides an essential foundation for the argument I will make in Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six. In those chapters, I argue that, remarkably, the central concerns and most innovative concepts found in Arendt’s later political writings originated in her earliest work on Augustine. In Chapter Three, I will demonstrate that Arendt’s interest in human plurality began in the dissertation, including her interest in the “in-between” (inter se) that serves both to unite and separate plural men in a human community (Arendt 2003, 110). In Chapters Three and Four, I will show that her investigation into the nature and significance of plurality, the in-between, as well as the ground of human community (religious and political), continues in The Origins of Totalitarianism, but that it remains primarily an investigative interest until The Human Condition and On Revolution, when she relies on a more fully developed concept of plurality to advance her own political theory. In Chapter Six, I will show how Arendt draws on resources made available by her interpretation of Augustine in the dissertation to develop her theory of beginnings in politics (natality), and the possibilities of promising and forgiving in The Human
Condition. I will also show in Chapter Six how Arendt re appropriates Augustinian concepts to build, overall, an anti-Augustinian political theory, although I will also point out that in some instances she is surprisingly Augustinian. (Consider, for example, her appreciation of the fragility of human affairs.) In order to accomplish these objectives, a thorough examination of her dissertation is first required.

What follows is not an interpretation of the dissertation in the sense that I do not endeavor to derive new meaning from the resources offered by her research, or even to make explicit what Arendt herself only implied. Rather, I attempt to stay as close to a literal reading of her dissertation as possible. This will allow me in the next chapters to make clearer how Arendt’s interests in the dissertation reappear in her later works, as well as how she draws on resources made available by her interpretation of Augustine, and then eventually how she reappropriates Augustinian concepts to develop her own political theory. For this reason, I have chosen to rely on the original German dissertation along with the first English translation completed in the 1950s by E. B. Ashton. 24 Given the fact that Arendt made revisions to her dissertation in the 1950s and 1960s, precisely at the same time she was writing her more mature works of political theory such as The Human Condition and On Revolution, if I relied on the later edited version it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether or not

24 The translation is referred to as “Copy A,” the designation given to it by the Library of Congress, while the original German dissertation is referenced as “2003,” the most recent publication date of the dissertation by a German press. When it may be helpful to the reader, I have included the original German and Latin.
the dissertation influenced her political theory in those works, or if her more mature political theory influenced her re-reading of the dissertation. For example, Arendt added the term “natality” in her revisions, a term which did not appear in the original. Instead, I rely on the original dissertation so that I may more convincingly demonstrate that the guiding concerns and central concepts of Arendt’s political theory did in fact begin with this very first project on Augustine. In coming chapters, when relevant, I will also point out the revisions Arendt made to her dissertation, but only in order to demonstrate that Arendt herself recognized the continuity of these concepts and concerns in the dissertation with her later political theory.25

The continuity of Arendt’s interests and ideas from the dissertation to her later works, which will each be explained in coming chapters, are not limited to the ones just mentioned in the first paragraph. Those concepts will certainly be our focus. But, the extent to which we find ideas in the 1929 dissertation present in works written much later in the mid-1940s and 1950s, after Arendt’s life had undergone a most radical change, is truly remarkable and should not be ignored. For example, Arendt draws on Augustine for her articulation of man as *homo faber* and his man-made world; for her considerations on the elevation of the *vita contemplativa* at the great expense of the *vita activa* and the sharp distinction she draws between the two; for her considerations

25 Arendt wrote to Mary McCarthy in 1965: “I am re-writing the whole darned business, trying not to do anything new, but only to explain in English (and not in Latin) what I thought when I was twenty” (Scott and Stark 1996, 119).
on the nature of freedom, the role of memory and history in political life; and, of course, her reflections on the anti-political nature of love.

The essential purpose of this chapter is to lay the necessary groundwork that will enable me to show in the next chapters where and how we find the influence of the dissertation in her later work. In what follows below, I will carefully trace the argument of Arendt’s dissertation, while keeping in mind my primary purpose: to make plain how Arendt both relies on and reappropriates Augustinian concepts in her own political theory. A thorough investigation of her interpretation of Augustine will allow me to better point out, in the next chapters, the influence of Arendt’s dissertation on her political thought, chiefly in *The Origins of Totalitarianism, The Human Condition, On Revolution*, but also in *The Life of the Mind* and in other essays and writings. As I will show in Chapters Five and Six, what is most interesting about Arendt’s encounter with Augustine and the persistent influence it has on her later political thought is how she uses concepts derived from Augustine’s own thought precisely to develop a political theory that is arguably in opposition to Augustinian philosophy, especially as she here presents it.

2.1 The Structure and Argument of Arendt’s Dissertation

Arendt’s dissertation is, as she describes it, a philosophical interpretation of Augustine’s philosophy of love. It is divided into three parts, two longer parts, Parts I and II, of roughly equal length, and one final and much shorter part, Part III, as well as a brief introduction explaining her research question. Each part addresses one of three
independent “conceptual contexts” within Augustine’s thought, which give rise to different, and in certain respects contradictory, understandings of what it means to love (Copy A, 241; Arendt 2003, 23). Part I deals with love as desire (*appetitus*); Part II with love as return to the Creator as the “*summe esse*”; and Part III with love as shared past (*gemeinsame vergangenheit*). Arendt argues that although Augustine did not make these distinctions himself, for the purpose of her analysis each one of Augustine’s reflections on love can be interpreted as following one of these three basic, independent “thought trains” (Copy A, 243; Arendt 2003, 24).

As Arendt aptly points out, Augustine does not provide us with a systematic treatise on love. Instead, Augustine wrote extensively on love over the entire course of his life and in a variety of contexts. In addition to the occurrence of different conceptions of love appearing side by side, there is also a marked development in Augustine’s thought from his earlier to his later work (Copy A, 241; Arendt 2003, 23). For Arendt’s own purposes, she deliberately chooses to ignore these varying contexts and the development in his thinking. Instead, as Augustine does not provide us with a systematic philosophy of love, Arendt aims to interpret each of Augustine’s considerations along one of the three above mentioned thought trains. Her purpose is

26 In Oliver O’Donovan’s famous work, *The Problem of Self-Love in Saint Augustine* (1980), O’Donovan points out the difficulty of Augustine’s language, and he shows how different words for love cannot easily be identified with different ways of loving or as having different objects of love. For instance, Augustine will use *dilectio, amor, and caritas* to mean love directed toward worthy objects, but *dilectio* and *amor* are also used to describe love directed toward lower objects (O’Donovan 1980, 11). O’Donovan also acknowledges the lack of systemization in Augustine’s thought and attempts to make sense of Augustine’s theology of love by recognizing four different aspects of love present in Augustine’s work: cosmic love, positive love, rational love, and benevolent love (O’Donovan 1980, 18).
to draw out the implications of Augustine’s considerations for the love of God, self, and especially the other. She endeavors to provide a philosophical interpretation that will unify Augustine’s thought by pursuing the answer to her question in each of the three contexts. It is *her* question about the relevance of the other and love of neighbor, Arendt says, which will serve to guide and unify her inquiry into Augustine’s philosophy of love. Her question alone will endeavor to make explicit what Augustine has merely implied (Arendt 2003, 24).

Since Augustine was not a systematic thinker, as Arendt explains, she presents us with the question that serves to unify her study of Augustine’s philosophy of love: the question of the “relevance of the other” (*Relevanz des Anderen*) (Arendt 2003, 24). For Augustine, she says, the relevance of the neighbor was “simply a matter of course” (Copy A, 242; Arendt 2003, 24). Augustine takes for granted the obligatory nature of the central Christian duty to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” He did not recognize the contradictions within his varying philosophies of love—inconsistencies that leave neighbor-love without theoretical grounds. It is the “single question of the author,” as Arendt puts it (*eine einheitliche Frage der Verfasserin*), that will serve to unify her investigations into Augustine’s philosophy of love (Arendt 2003, 24). The fact that “the

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27 It is important to note that, in her dissertation, Arendt uses the terms *der Anderer* (the other) and *der Nachbar/der Nächste* (the neighbor) interchangeably. This will be explained further in the next chapter.

28 She says in her revisions that Augustine, “never became fully aware of the inadequacy of part of his terminology” (Arendt 1996, 22).
relevance of the other” is Arendt’s question will be important to keep in mind for the
next chapters when we connect the concerns of her dissertation to her later work.

When applying one of the three particular interpretations of love, Arendt always
asks: what is the relevance of the other (der Anderer), and what is the meaning and
significance of neighbor-love (Nächstenliebe)? (Copy A, 242; Arendt 2003, 23). What
prompts Arendt’s guiding question? What troubles Arendt, although she says it does not
pose an obvious problem for Augustine, is the absence of a theoretical ground for the
relevance of the other or for the love of neighbor, while at the same time the Christian
command to love thy neighbor remains. Indeed, this command is “the sum and
substance of the law, the aim of all the several laws” (Copy A, 340; Arendt 2003, 100).
She asks of Augustine: “how man in God’s presence, isolated from all things mundane,
can be at all interested in his neighbor?” (Copy A, 248; Arendt 2003, 28) And also, how is
it possible for those who have become estranged from the world and its desires to love
the neighbor who is yet in the world? She is perplexed by the peculiarity, as she
describes it, of how one relates to others in the world while attached to an eternal God
(Copy A, 284; Arendt 2003, 52).

After a thorough investigation, Arendt finds that if love is understood either as
desire or as a return, as it is by Augustine, then it becomes impossible to love the
neighbor for his own sake and as he appears in the world. The conclusion Arendt
reaches following her investigation is that there remains an irresolvable discrepancy
between loving an eternal God and loving the neighbor in his concrete, worldly
existence. In Part III, she does find an empirical ground for the relevance of the other,
but nevertheless love of neighbor is ultimately guided by an eternal standard that lies outside of space and time. This discrepancy clearly troubles Arendt. We will see in the next two chapters on the Origins of Totalitarianism that the twin follies of abandoning the world out of despair over what the world can offer its lovers, as she shows is also found in Augustine’s thought, and of trying to create a kind of “heaven” here on earth, as is the case with totalitarian ideologies (which prove attractive precisely to those people who have become alienated from the world), both have disastrous consequences. Her considerations of these problems, beginning in her dissertation, are ones she will attempt to resolve, at least as far as is possible in this fragile and unpredictable world, by directing us to love and be at home in the world in The Human Condition.

Arendt states at the outset that her examination of Augustine’s concept of love will look to the meaning and significance of neighborly love as a way to connect Augustine’s various ways of thinking on love. Since for Augustine love of neighbor is guided by the love of God and love of self, the first two chapters of each of the three parts of her dissertation specifically address what it means to love God, and the resulting new attitude that is reached regarding the self. The third chapters of Parts I and II then examine the relevance of the other and the implications for love of neighbor.\(^29\) It is not until the final section, Part III, that Arendt addresses directly the

\(^{29}\) Arendt sees Augustine drawing significantly on pre-Christian sources. Her first chapter of Parts I and II, she says, are interested in this pre-theological sphere in which love is a kind of craving and the
possibility for neighborly love within Augustine’s theory of social life (vita socialis). There she finds an empirical ground for the relevance of the other, as well as a concern for salvation from which duties to the other are derived. Part I begins with an explanation of Augustine’s definition of love as desire. In Part I we learn what, for Augustine, is the summun bonum, the only proper object of our craving. In Part II, we discover the meaning of Being in Augustine’s thought. Finally, in Part III, we find what, according to Augustine, is the foundation of social life. Let us examine Arendt’s arguments more closely in the paragraphs that follow.

2.2 Part I, Chapter I: Amor qua Appetitus

In Part I, Chapter I, Arendt studies Augustine’s concept of love as appetitus. She begins by quoting Augustine’s definition of love in De diversis quaestionibus 83: “‘To love is indeed nothing but to crave something for its own sake’” (Copy A, 250; Arendt 2003, 29). In Chapter I of Part I, Arendt first simply explains what Augustine means by this definition. In Chapters II and III, she traces the implications of this definition for the love of God, self, and neighbor.

30 When I say “for Augustine,” here in Chapter Two, I always mean Arendt’s Augustine.

31 Although Arendt relies on the Latin in her German dissertation, Ashton translates appetitus as either “craving” or “desire.” In what follows, I use the two terms interchangeably to signify the same concept of love.
According to Augustine, desire is the will to have and to hold a good for its own sake (Copy A, 251; Arendt 2003, 30). For Augustine, this is happiness. Happiness consists in having and holding—what he calls “enjoying”—the supreme good (summum bonum). Following this definition, love represents a human being’s desire to be happy. Arendt explains how love as craving is not only Augustine’s definition of love, but is central to his anthropology. For Augustine, to be a human being is to be a desiring being: “craving is the basic human mode of being” (Copy A, 272; Arendt 2003, 41). Craving is the basic structure of a created being—a creature that by definition cannot derive happiness from himself as his own good (unlike God) (Copy A, 275; Arendt 2003, 44). Still, having been created by God, this created being has the possibility of desiring and then laying hold of his good. In other words, he can be happy! In this chapter, Arendt describes craving or love as “a human being’s possibility to gain possession of its own good,” and then explains how a person comes to discover the good that will make him happy (Copy A, 251; Arendt 2003, 29-30). To love then, in this context, is the will to have and then to hold onto (in Augustinian terms “to enjoy”) this good. I am happy when I have and hold the good I crave.

Craving, Arendt says, is always directed towards a specific object within “a known world” (eine gekannte Welt) that is not yet possessed by the desirer (Arendt 2003, 29). All desired objects share in common the distinctive trait that we do not in fact possess it, otherwise it would not be desired in the first place. There is a gap between the subject and the object. Once we have the object we desire, the goal is for our craving to end and for enjoyment to take its place (Copy A, 250; Arendt 2003, 29). What
are goods? An object is viewed as a good (*bonum*) if the desirer believes the possession of it will bring him the happiness he craves (Copy A, 250-1; Arendt 2003, 29). Though, for Augustine, every person has the same desire to be happy, not all desire the same particular goods (Copy A, 252; Arendt 2003, 30). Nevertheless, Arendt explains, goods exist within a world that is already familiar to the desirer—a world in which the desirer knows the world’s goods from the world’s evils. According to Augustine, what they do not yet realize is that only eternal life can bring lasting happiness or “enjoyment.”

Arendt explains that, for Augustine, desire has a two-fold reference as it refers back to the person who desires and wishes to be happy and towards an object that is desired and is believed will bring happiness (Copy A, 250; Arendt 2003, 29). Love is the “in-between,” connecting the subject to the object and transforming the subject into a lover and the object into a beloved. To love is to be in relation to the beloved, and love itself constitutes the relationship (Copy A, 265; Arendt 2003, 36) This relationship is characterized by belonging. To love is to belong to the beloved. As we will see shortly, Arendt shows how, according to Augustine’s schema, one can either belong to the world or to God.

As Arendt points out, there is an insurmountable obstacle for Augustine’s desirer in the world. Though we are tied to our beloved by the desire to possess it, objects within the world nevertheless exist independently of man. Because temporal objects originate and perish independently of the lover, possession is always beset by the danger (*Gefahr*) of losing the beloved (Arendt 2003, 30). For this reason, Arendt says, human life is characterized by a basic insecurity. Every not-having is plagued by desire,
and every possession by the fear (Furcht) of loss (Copy A, 254; Arendt 2003, 33). This means the present moment is continually disturbed by reflecting on the future—either the longing for fulfillment or the fear of loss (Copy A, 254; Arendt 2003, 33). For Augustine, this perpetual worry (ständige Sorge) means temporal life can never be truly happy, and is actually better described as a miserable existence (Arendt 2003, 31).

Arendt explains how this worry can be traced back to life’s ultimate lack of power (potestas) over itself (Arendt 2003, 32). In the end, every object a human being craves or possesses will certainly and inevitably be lost in death. Indeed, it is in the attempt to escape death that human beings cling to goods in the world: “In its flight from death, the craving for permanence clings to the very things sure to be lost in death” (Copy A, 261; Arendt 2003, 35). Indeed this craving for permanence is what incites man to build the world in the first place. There would be few goods in the world to love if we, ourselves, did not build them as objects of desire. Fleeing from his mortality, worldly man strives to constitute something immortal. Nevertheless, everything he builds and desires in this world will inevitably be lost in death. So long as life is mortal, so long as we fear the inevitability of losing everything in death, this present life will never be free from worry. And, for Augustine, Arendt says: “A life in constant peril of death is no life” (Copy A, 252; Arendt 2003, 31). For Augustine, the

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32 Arendt describes how, for Augustine, it is the final loss in death that is the constant care of all human beings in this lifetime (Arendt 2003, 31). Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine is clearly influenced by Heidegger’s being toward death and the place of Sorge in Being and Time.
ideal of the happy life is a perfectly calm life, free from the worry the uncertainty a worldly future brings—a possibility only available in eternity.

Thus Arendt demonstrates how, from Augustine’s perspective, it becomes clear what love must seek as its true object. Only a life that does not fear death—eternal life—is a life that can, truly and finally, be free from the fear of loss. In contrast to mortal life—a life that knows only desire or fear—Augustine understands eternal life as the calm experience of an everlasting present, undisturbed by an expected future (Copy A, 254; Arendt 2003, 33). Arendt explains it this way: “Only a present without a future is immutable, utterly unmenaced. In it lies the calm of possession. This possession is life itself; for all goods exist for life alone, to protect it from its loss, from death” (Copy A, 254; Arendt 2003, 33). For Augustine, the only good that we can have and hold onto (enjoy) and which cannot be lost against our will is the “highest good,” (summum bonum). Eternal life is the highest good that love desires because it is the only good that cannot be lost against your will. It is the only proper end of our craving because it is the only end that can satisfy our desire. Only eternal life is the happy life we long for (Copy A, 252-3; Arendt 2003, 31).

From the perspective of eternity, Arendt says, it no longer makes sense to crave any object in this world. Mortal human beings, in craving after and clinging to transient goods, will be perpetually frustrated (Copy A, 256; Arendt 2003, 33). No worldly good can bring security. The good of man, Arendt explains, has been projected into the absolute future by Augustine. For him, what men actually crave is the pure fearlessness and absolute calm of eternity. Arendt argues that this ascribes a negative content to the
“good” of man—it is the absence of fear. In projecting man’s highest good into eternity, what Augustine has done, Arendt says, is proceed to strip the world and all temporal things of any independent value (Copy A, 256; Arendt 2003, 35).

According to Augustine, love (desire) is wrongly directed which has as its object that which will never satisfy, and love (desire) which has eternal life as its object is rightly directed. Augustine calls the former cupiditas and the latter caritas (Copy A, 261; Arendt 2003, 35-36). Chapter II of Part I, which we will turn to next, investigates the nature of these two modes of desire—one wrongly directed and wrongly ordered and one rightly directed and rightly ordered.

2.3 Part I, Chapter II: Caritas and Cupiditas

In this chapter, Arendt distinguishes between the two kinds of love: caritas and cupiditas. What differentiates one kind of love from the other in this context is not the presence or absence of desire (appetitus), but the different objects of desire (Copy A, 265; Arendt 2003, 36). Recall that, for Augustine, all human beings are desiring beings. Desire is the beginning of both caritas and cupiditas, but caritas is the desire for God while cupiditas is the desire for the world. Arendt interprets Augustine’s definition of love as craving as deriving from a pre-Christian, Greek context. Augustine, she says, inherited the idea of longing for the eternal from Plotinus.33 But, the distinction between

33 As Arendt explains in her “Zusatz zum ersten Teil,” Augustine’s devaluation of the world is not actually Christian in origin. Rather, we see the influence of Neo-Platonism in Augustine’s disdain for a life lived in the world, with all of its uncertainties and worries (Arendt 2003, 54). She points out the influence
the two types of longing—\textit{caritas} and \textit{cupiditas}—is, she says, Augustine’s own. In longing for the eternal, what we are really longing for, according to Augustine, is God: “the object of craving is \textit{God as the eternal}” (my emphasis; Copy A, 274; Arendt 2003, 43). Because God is the eternal, it is only in God that we can have eternal life. Therefore, \textit{God as the eternal} is the good that ought to be desired. In this chapter, Arendt further investigates the meaning of love as desire and, more specifically, how love of self is understood in this context.

According to Augustine, only God is self-sufficient: “God as the Supreme Being is the absolute independence which needs no help from any source” (Copy A, 267; Arendt 2003, 38). God is the source of His own good. Unlike God, human beings are not self-sufficient. Instead, they are separated from their own good and lack control over it:

“The good is not within my power, just as life itself is not within my power” (Copy A, 266; Arendt 2003, 37). Human beings are isolated from the source of their happiness. This explains why human beings are necessarily desiring beings. They try by means of love to break out of this isolation (\textit{Isoliertheit}), and to be with the object of desire (Arendt 2003, 36). The opposite of isolation is belonging, what Augustine calls “cleaving to” (\textit{inhaerere}) (Copy A, 265; Arendt 2003, 36-7). We desire to belong, to “be with” (\textit{Sein-bei}) the object of desire. This “being with” is the calm (\textit{quies}) of having (\textit{tenere}) and holding. Only in the calm of absolute possession does isolation end and enjoyment

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of Neo-Platonism on Augustine insofar as he views the final good, the \textit{sumnum bonum} as the beholding of eternal truth and beauty. I will discuss the Platonic origins of Augustine’s thought further in Chapter Six.
begin (Arendt 2003, 36-7). As we will see below, one can either cleave to God or to the world, but it is only in cleaving to God (\textit{inhaerere Deo}) that we are actually able to break out of our isolation. For Augustine, we cannot truly possess any good other than the good of eternal life.

What human beings desire, then, is the good they lack, the good that will make them happy. As Arendt writes in Chapter I, for Augustine the only good that is capable of bringing man happiness is eternity. Human beings, however, are born into the \textit{world}. This means they, not unexpectedly, look first to worldly things for fulfillment. In fact, as Arendt briefly explained in Chapter I, it is the desire for the world that turns the given world—heaven and earth—into a home (\textit{Heimat}) for man and into something that can be desired in the first place (Arendt 2003, 36). In desiring the world, I belong to what I love and become a denizen of the world. I become “worldly” (\textit{weltlich}) (Arendt 2003, 36). For Augustine, this longing for the world is \textit{cupiditas}. \textit{Cupiditas}, as Arendt will soon explain, is not an explicit choice. Rather, it is how human beings, born into a familiar world, regularly live in the world: “dependence on the world is expressed habitually” (Copy A, 269; Arendt 2003, 39). We will see that Arendt will have much more to say about how Augustine understands “habit” later on.

What does it mean, for Augustine, to belong to the world in \textit{cupiditas}? In longing to be happy, the desirer of the world, living in \textit{cupiditas}, stumbles from one object to the next seeking satisfaction. He looks to things outside himself, objects that appear more permanent than he is, trying in vain to escape the certainty of his own death (Arendt 2003, 35-37). Arendt explains, “I flee from my own self, which must die, and
cling to what seems lasting” (Copy A, 269; Arendt 2003, 39). In this turning from one “good” in the world to the next, we become estranged from our own true good. Ironically, when we long for goods in the world, we achieve the very opposite of our hopes by losing our self in the world. Augustine calls the loss of self in the world “dispersion” (Zerstreuung) (Arendt 2003, 39). Arendt directs her readers to the Confessions, when Augustine pleas with God “to gather [him] in from the dispersion (dispersione) wherein he was torn asunder” (Arendt 1996, 23; Arendt 2003, 39). This dispersion is what Augustine means by worldliness, writes Arendt. In my worldliness, I have become alienated from my own true good.

In his desire for the world, he becomes dependent on goods that are outside his power: “cupiditas makes me dependent on a desired object which, on principle, is beyond my control” (Copy A, 266; Arendt 2003, 37). At any time my beloved could be lost. As we have already seen, goods in this world are goods that can be lost against one’s will, and all worldly goods will certainly and inevitably be lost in death. In desiring goods that lie outside ourselves and in the world, we live in constant fear of losing our beloved, so much so that we become enslaved to our fear. Loving goods in the world is tantamount to slavery. We are enslaved because we can never escape the constant fear of loss. This is why, Arendt explains, in De libero arbitrio, Augustine opposes not caritas to cupiditas, but cupiditas to free will (Copy A, 266-7; Arendt 2003, 37). The ideal for Augustine, Arendt maintains, remains freedom from: “Freedom is freedom from fear [Freiheit ist die Freiheit von der Furcht]...caritas is free precisely because it casts out
fear” (Copy A, 269; Arendt 2003, 39). In loving the world, in cupiditas, I become a slave
to the world, but in caritas I could discover true freedom.

How then can one discover his true good and be freed from fear? It is through
God’s grace that we are led to self-examination. This, Arendt reminds us, is Augustine’s
famous quaestio from his Confessions: “I have become a question to myself” (quaestio
mihi factus sum) (Copy A, 269; Arendt 2003, 39). When we consider our own being, we
find it “consumed by time” (Copy A, 273; Arendt 2003, 42). In this self-examination, we
come face to face with our own mortality, and the final loss of the world in death. We
come to understand that everything we love in this world will certainly be lost. But, with
God’s help, we also discover God as the eternal (Arendt will have more to say about this
discovery in Part II). We find that in God we have the possibility of life everlasting—a life
free from the worrisome expectation of the future. God, as the eternal, is the summum
bonum, or the good that cannot be lost against our will, and the only true source of
happiness. For Augustine, the eternal God is, as Arendt puts it, the only proper correlate
of desire (das Korrelat des appetitus) (Arendt 2003, 40). Nothing else can satisfy.

Following the discovery of the summum bonum, the goal of desire becomes to
have and to hold (to enjoy) its true object—eternity in God. Only then will “man’s
existence amount to being—i.e., to immutability” (incommutablis) (Copy A, 270; Arendt
2003, 40). In eternity, man will no longer fear the changeability that makes this life so
unpredictable and insecure. In discovering my good, I have not only found God; I have
also discovered what is most my own. God, Arendt explains, “is loved as that part of the
inner man which consumes no time...as the eternal, which he, man, is not—as that
which belongs to him and can never be taken away” (Copy A, 270; Arendt 2003, 40). In discovering the eternal God, I have found my eternal self. As we saw in Chapter I, love as desire establishes a relationship between the lover and the beloved. In this chapter, Arendt again emphasizes this point. She quotes from Augustine’s *De Trinitate*: “What else is love except a kind of life that binds, or seeks to bind, together some two things, namely the lover and the beloved?” (Arendt 1996, 18; Arendt 2003, 36). Love is the bond that connects us to our beloved. In *caritas*, the lover “cleaves to” (*inhaerere*) the eternal God (Arendt 2003, 37). In *caritas*, we no longer belong to the world, but to eternity.

The object of desire not only determines to whom or to what you *belong*, but also determines the *who* of who you are. Arendt explains that, for Augustine, “Man is what he desires” (Copy A, 265; Arendt 2003, 36). In *cupiditas* one desires the world, and therefore becomes a “resident” (*Bewohner*) of the world. In *caritas* one loves God, and in so doing becomes a resident of eternity and an eternal being (Arendt 2003, 36). In this context, man as such has no “essence.” Insofar as he can be said to have a “nature” at all, it is only that he desires. It is *what* man loves that determines *who* he is. Arendt relies on Augustine’s *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*: “such is each one as is his love” (*talis est quisque, qualis eius dilectio est*) (Arendt 2003, 36). We are what we love, and if we love the eternal, we too become eternal. In belonging to eternity, we are now future residents of the world-to-come and no longer denizens of this world. The world for those who live in *caritas*, Augustine says, has become like the desert for the people of Israel who lived not in houses but in tents (Arendt 2003, 36).
By desiring God and not the world, we love our true good—the good that cannot be lost against our will, and the only good that can bring us happiness. As long as we yet live in the world, however, we cannot “enjoy” eternal life; we can only long for it. Even so, though we cannot enjoy our beloved, according to Augustine we can still live in hopeful expectation. It is here, Arendt says, that we can first begin to see how it is that we are to adhere to the “as thyself” in the central Christian command to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” It is determined by this hopeful expectation. The right kind of self-love is the desire for the future eternal self—a self that will endure because of its relation to God (Copy A, 271; Arendt 2003, 40). “In the love of God, man loves himself, the future being, in his longed-for attachment to God—i.e., he loves himself as the one who will be eternal” (Copy A, 274; Arendt 2003, 44). In loving God, our desire is no longer directed at a mortal, worldly self, but towards a future, eternal self, and only then do we love ourselves rightly.

In desiring the future eternal self, we “forget” (vergessen) the present life governed by fear (Arendt 2003, 41). For Augustine, Arendt writes, desire always forgets itself over its beloved. In cupiditas, our eternal self was forgotten for the sake of the world (this was dispersion). In the case of caritas, our worldly self is forgotten for the sake of eternity. For Augustine, Arendt says, the temporal character of the human being in the world is “from—toward” (Copy A, 272; Arendt 2003, 42). In other words, we have a distinct beginning and a distinct end, and we live our life in the in between—where the past meets the future. In desiring eternity, the lover forgets the “from” for the sake of the “toward.” As Arendt explains, in caritas, the worldly present is transformed into
nothing “but a desire for the future, which in turn will be the real present, an eternal today” (Copy A, 272; Arendt 2003, 41). Our present life becomes a mere striving towards eternity.

While we live on earth, we desire eternal life. But, the ultimate aim of desire is enjoyment. The goal of every lover is to have and to hold his beloved without interruption. This undisturbed possession is the happiness every desirer seeks. For Augustine, happiness has a very specific meaning. It lacks any activity or changeability. Arendt explains what “enjoyment” means for Augustine: “Love hopes for its own fulfillment. This fulfillment lies in seeing (videre)—a specific and, to Augustine, excellent manner of having. This seeing becomes enjoyment (frui)” (Copy A, 275; Arendt 2003, 44). For Augustine, enjoyment is not any active doing, but is better compared to the more passive “seeing.” For Augustine, enjoyment takes the place of caritas because the object of desire—eternal life in God—has been attained. All fear and striving ends in the immutable and “peaceful enjoyment far from any action” (Tun) (Copy A, 276; Arendt 2003, 45). From the perspective of love as craving, love is but a road to the ultimate goal—the absolute calm and stability of eternal life. Love ends when having and holding—enjoyment—begins: “In enjoyment, in the calm ‘being-with,’ love ceases and finds fulfillment” (Copy A; 276; Arendt 2003, 45). This has an odd implication, Arendt remarks. If love is understood as desire, the goal of love becomes the cessation of love itself. This, she says, should be compared to the words of Saint Paul, for whom, “love never ceases” (Arendt 2003, 45).
Arendt is now in a position to introduce Augustine’s rather infamous distinction between “use” (*uti*) and “enjoyment” (*frui*)—a distinction she will have more to say about in her next chapter. As we have already seen, the world is not the true end (wirkliches Ende) of love as desire, because the world can never be held without interruption. In other words, the world can never be “enjoyed” (Arendt 2003, 45). For Augustine, a good alone is to be sought for its own sake only if it lays desire to rest, everything else is “for the sake of this goal alone” (Copy A, 276-7; Arendt 2003, 45-6). We know now that desire for the world will never satisfy. Only eternal life puts all striving to an end. From this perspective, Arendt maintains, all earthly goods—including even our own bodies, and even our friends and family—are viewed as relative goods only insofar as their “use” serves love’s ultimate goal. All the goods of this world serve to point further to the highest good that alone is to be desired for its own sake. This “for the sake of,” says Arendt, has the effect of canceling man’s original relationship to the world—it is now only to be used and not desired (Copy A, 278; Arendt 2003, 46-7).

In desiring a future eternal self, we are longing for an expected *future* happiness. While we are yet in the world we cannot have and hold (enjoy) what we truly desire—eternal life. Nevertheless, we now live in the hope of a future eternity—“a provisional sort of eternity” (Copy A, 278; Arendt 2003, 47). In this way, earthly life gains a *kind* of freedom and power. If the world is viewed merely as a help along the way, one can be free from the fearful striving that possesses those whose love is directed, in *cupiditas*, toward the world (Copy A, 277; Arendt 2003, 46). One who lives in *caritas* is free from the fear that governed his life when he desired goods that could be lost against his will.
Instead, he can use those goods in freedom without being controlled by his desire for them. Living in *caritas*, one is no longer afraid even of the final loss in death. For we know that eternal life awaits us. Death only appears as an evil for one living in *cupiditas*. Freedom comes with no longer fearing loss, and especially no longer fearing the final loss in death (Copy A, 278; Arendt 2003, 47-8). Power, in this context, consists in no longer being concerned with my lack of control over worldly goods, but instead striving towards a future eternal life and relating to them in freedom (Copy A, 278-9; Arendt 2003, 48). By using the world rather than desiring it, we now relate to the world freely and without depending upon it.

Even still, as Arendt points out, for Augustine there is not complete freedom from fear: “human life on earth is not independent even in *caritas*; it is subject to the fear of losing the desired highest good” (Copy A, 279; Arendt 2003, 48). However, the fear of loss is transformed into what Augustine calls “chaste fear” (*timor castus*). Chaste fear is the proper companion of *caritas*. Because of it you hold fast to the faith out of fear of losing eternity. It is what prevents you from slipping back into *cupiditas*. In this way, instead of being slaves to the world we are now “slaves to charity” (Copy A, 279; Arendt 2003, 48). Arendt reemphasizes that, for Augustine, true freedom cannot be experienced until eternity, when all striving ends in the pure calm of enjoyment, undisturbed by the fear of the future. The freedom of *caritas* in the here and now is a future freedom. Meanwhile, a kind of freedom on earth consists in straining towards the desired goal of eternity (Copy A, 279; Arendt 2003, 48).
Arendt concludes this chapter by showing how the standard of the eternal affects the estimation of a life lived in the world. One can belong to eternity only by transcending the present, mortal self—“a leap from the present into the absolute future” (Copy A, 272-3; Arendt 2003, 42). In caritas, we are led to despise (verachten) our worldly present for the sake of a future eternity that lies ahead of us (Copy A, 272; Arendt 2003, 41). For “it is not in our variable, changeable earthly life governed by death, the end of everyone’s road, that we find the good of life” (Copy A, 271; Arendt 2003, 40-1). Rather, it is towards eternal life that we strive. Thus, Arendt concludes: “Our own present life, as it takes place in the here and now, is neglected. It loses its meaning and its weight in comparison with that true life which is projected into the absolute future and is the sole goal of earthly life” (Copy A, 271; Arendt 2003, 41). For Augustine, only eternal life is the “true life.” Insofar as life on earth is death-determined, it should not really be called a life at all.

Eternity is the only good, Arendt affirms, that for Augustine could give our earthly life and its endeavors any meaning (Copy A, 278; Arendt 2003, 47). If the world and this present life are viewed from the perspective of eternity, as Augustine asks us to do, then the world, Arendt argues, inevitably loses any independent meaning it once held for the lover and instead assumes only a relative meaning in “use” (Arendt 2003, 47). From this interpretation, Arendt argues, a contradiction arises. If the world must be transcended, how then is it possible to love thy neighbor as thyself—as we are commanded to do—if one’s neighbor yet lives in the world? In Chapter III of Part I,
Arendt explains how, for Augustine, in the context of love as desire, we are to love our neighbor.

2.4 Part I, Chapter III: The Order of Love

For Arendt, the primary task of Chapter III is to explain what Augustine means by the “order of love,” and how it applies to love of neighbor. Here she provides insight into how one whose desire is now directed towards eternity should comport themselves towards the world. Of course, she is especially interested in how one estranged from the world and its desires is to relate to the other living in the world. We have already seen that, from the perspective of eternity, loving the world becomes senseless because the things of this world cannot satisfy. The one who lives in caritas no longer values what the world values and esteems. In this way, the world has lost the original significance it once held for one who belonged to the world in cupiditas. The world has been relativized (Relativierung der Welt). It now possesses only a relative meaning in “use” (Arendt 2003, 50). Instead of loving the world for its own sake, we love the world “for the sake of” (Um-Willen/propter) eternity (Arendt 2003, 46-7). In this chapter, we see that this is true not only of things but of persons as well. In the end, Arendt finds that love of neighbor is incongruous with Augustine’s philosophy of love as desire.

For Augustine, the expected future becomes the ultimate standard for the right understanding of the world. The summum bonum “orders” our loves within the world. In other words, it provides the point of reference from which all goods in the world are to be viewed (Copy A, 281; Arendt 2003, 48). Though longing for eternity, we yet remain
in the world. If eternity is expected as a future good, “man can do no more,” writes Arendt, “than strain forward to it (extentum esse) and come to terms with the world” (Copy A, 284; Arendt 2003, 52). No longer concerned with or controlled by the world, I can now approach goods in the world with objectivity and independence. I consider objects in the world with impartiality, and I determine my attitude towards them according to their relative purposiveness. For Augustine, Arendt writes, what is above us (God) is to be loved for its own sake, while our own self and what is next to us (our neighbor) is to be loved “for the sake of,” and what is below us is not to be loved at all (Copy A, 283; Arendt 2003, 51). Nothing should be loved more or less than it ought to be: “with the determination of the object goes the degree of love, depending upon the order which assigns to each his proper place” (Copy A, 282-3; Arendt 2003, 50). Goods in the world are to be loved “for the sake of,” while only eternity is to be loved for its own sake. In this way the world is set into a definite order and the just man, according to Augustine in De doctrina christiana, is the person whose love is well ordered, which means he loves only what he ought to and only in the way he ought to (Arendt 2003, 50).

It is from the perspective of the summum bonum that one who lives in caritas need view his own self as a good in the world. His present worldly existence is regarded as just another thing to be used for the sake of the future eternal life (Copy A, Arendt 2003, 49). Arendt explains it this way: “man’s own ‘I’ is like everything else: a mere ‘thing’ to be used for the true life he seeks in the absolute future” (Copy A, 282; Arendt 2003, 49-50). This is true not only for ourselves, but for the other as well. The neighbor
(der Nächste), like every other worldly good, is not to be desired for his or her own sake, but is to be viewed “for the sake of” (Arendt 2003, 49-50). My neighbor’s place in the order of loves is next to me because, Augustine says, his good is also eternity; he too is capable of desiring and enjoying eternity. Therefore, he is to be loved exactly as I love myself (Copy A, 285; Arendt 2003, 52). As a good beside me and not above or below me, the right attitude towards my neighbor, as to myself, is not enjoyment but use. For Arendt, this means I no longer experience him in his concrete worldly existence—for example, as a friend or as an enemy (Freund oder Feind)—but only as another human being who enters into the same relationship with God as I do (Arendt 2003, 52).

This “for the sake of” has the effect, Arendt says, of canceling any original relationship I once had with the other (Copy A, 284; Arendt 2003, 52). This is how, Arendt explains, the commandment to “love they enemies” can be understood—because there is no longer any worldly distinction that would affect my estimation of him (Arendt 2003, 52-3).

34 That Arendt specifically uses the distinction between “friend and enemy” in her original German dissertation in order to explain the impossibility of loving the neighbor in his concrete worldly existence may indicate that she had in the back of her mind Carl Schmitt’s Concept of the Political, published in 1927 two years before her own dissertation, which famously claims that “the specific political distinction...is that between friend and enemy.”

35 Karl Jaspers was clearly influenced by his former student when he wrote his own analysis of Augustine and love in Plato and Augustine (1957). Here, he too, describes Augustine’s human being as primarily constituted by loving, and love as a “striving for something I have not” (Jaspers 1957, 95). Augustinian love is, first and foremost, characterized by desire (appetitus). As desire, love has the possibility of possession of the beloved, which leads to joy. Where there is potential loss, love, as appetitus, is characterized by fear. Augustine’s solution is to argue that we should love, but be careful of what we love. Only loving that which brings everlasting joy is ever worthy of our love (Jaspers 1957, 95). This means that God is the only worthy object of love. Jaspers points to the distinction between caritas and cupiditas in Augustine. Caritas is directed toward that which is worthy of love, while cupiditas is directed at worldly and transitory goods. From his explication of Augustinian love, Jaspers is motivated by the same question as Arendt: how we are we to comport ourselves toward the self and toward the
The effect of locating the *summum bonum* in eternity, Arendt argues, is man’s alienation from the world and everyone in it (Arendt 2003, 52). At the end of Part I, Chapter III, Arendt concludes that Augustine’s definition of love as desire no longer makes sense when applied to love of neighbor. She writes,

> love always defined as craving runs into considerable difficulties at this point and can no longer be isolated from different contexts.... The attempt to deduce neighborly love from this absolute future is bound to founder on the uselessness of neighborly love to the craving one. (Copy A, 284-5; Arendt 2003, 51-3)

In fact, the meaning of love has actually changed: “love is here simply the objective conduct which the desiring love outlines for the man who, while existing in the world, lives in the absolute future” (Copy A, 283; Arendt 2003, 50). Augustine’s definition of love as *appetitus* contradicts his order of love schematic.

Well regulated love is the attitude of one who is guided by an eternal ideal, and everything and everyone in the world is viewed from this perspective. Since I cannot desire my neighbor for his own sake, love as desire cannot be applied in this instance. What we are left with is a love that “uses” the neighbor for the sake of eternity. But, Arendt asks, can we really describe this attitude towards others as love? There must be another love, she says, that can unite human beings together. Arendt turns to another neighbor who both exist in the world? Jaspers concludes, along with his student before him, that “love for people and things in the world is true only if they are loved for the sake of God, not for their own sake” (Jaspers 1957, 97).
context within Augustine’s thought, love as return, to try to answer the question of the other’s relevance and love of neighbor.

2.5 Part II, Chapter I: Creator—creatura

We learned from Arendt in Part I that love as craving reveals human beings’ lack of self-sufficiency. Human beings are isolated from their own good, and desire itself is indicative of this isolation. Desire is the will to be-with the beloved. Arendt concludes that, in this context, man has only two possibilities available to him—to belong to the world in cupiditas or to belong to eternity in caritas. We have already seen that God as the eternal is the only good that can satisfy that desire. If man desires God in caritas, then it is from the perspective of this contemplative order (betrachtende Ordnung), Arendt says, that every human endeavor in the world need be evaluated (Copy A, 288; Arendt 2003, 59).

In Part II, Arendt demonstrates how love as craving directs us to an even more profound and fundamental dependence of man on God than we saw in Part I—the dependence of the creature on the Creator for his very existence. The subtitle of this chapter is “The Creator understood as the origin of the creature” (Creator verstanden als Ursprung der creature), meaning that God, as the Creator, is the source of my being (Arendt 2003, 57). In other words, I would not be were it not for God’s creation. Arendt shows us in Part II that, for Augustine, only if I return to God do I have the possibility of transforming my becoming into eternal being. According to Augustine, the meaning of my being is derived from God and not from the world. The purpose of Part II, Arendt
tells us, is “to understand this dependence in its consequences” (Copy A, 289; Arendt 2003, 60). As a created being, the structure of my being is createdness, but the purpose of my having been created is to return to God who is pure Being. In Part II, Arendt will demonstrate what consequences this has for love of self and neighbor.

In Part II, we see love in Augustine’s thought as understood in yet another context—love as the decision to return to God. In this case, it is memory and not desire that directs us to God as the source of being. Again, Arendt will examine the meaning of love in this context and then look to how it is to be applied to love of neighbor. In order to arrive at how Augustine understands love in this other context, Arendt first explains Augustine’s ontology, how he understands the being of the universe and the being of the world. She is then able in Chapter II to account for how love is understood as the creature’s return to his Creator as the source of his being, and then what this means for love of neighbor in the final chapter of Part II.

Arendt begins Part II, Chapter I by reemphasizing the conclusion reached in the final chapter of Part I. In caritas, we now approach both ourselves and our neighbor from the vantage point of eternity. Only eternity is to be desired for its own sake, while all other goods are “for the sake of.” Arendt finds that Augustine’s definition of love as craving does not explain love of neighbor because I should not desire my neighbor, only eternity. The original love of self and neighbor have been bypassed (übersprungen) for the sake of a future eternity (Arendt 2003, 57). Instead, we see another concept of love—well-ordered love—existing alongside Augustine’s definition of love as craving. In
this chapter, we find that craving is indicative of yet even another concept of love—love as return. Let us follow Arendt’s argument so that we may see why this is so.

Love as craving directs us towards the good that will bring us happiness, but in order for us to desire happiness, we must first have some experience of it. I cannot crave something I know nothing about. For Augustine, however, life on earth is characterized by an “unbroken misery,” while the happy life is only to be found in a future eternity (Copy A, 287; Arendt 2003, 58). How then do we come to have knowledge of happiness if we cannot experience it in this life? According to Augustine, we remember the happy life because we were created by God who is the source of our happiness. Here Arendt explains the function of memory in Augustine’s thought for the human being who desires to be happy.

For Augustine, the faculty by which we are able to access knowledge of the past is memory (memoria) (Arendt 2003, 58). In remembrance, the past is “presented” (becomes present) to our mind’s eye, allowing it to become a future possibility. Only if I recall an experience am I able to endeavor to avoid or recreate it. This is what gives memory its great power, says Arendt—that the past is not forever lost, but can, in fact, be brought back into the present (Copy A, 294; Arendt 2003, 65).\footnote{Arendt explains the meaning of this further in the addendum to Part I, and then includes this explanation in her revised dissertation. For Augustine, following Plotinus, only the present is real. The past is no longer, and the future is not yet. They exist and have being only in what the memory can presently recall and presently expect. Where past and future meet in the memory, it is as if time stands still. From the concept of “the Now” where past and future meet and have being, Augustine develops his understanding of eternity as the nunc stans or the “standing now” (Arendt 1996, 15).}
happy life, I am able to desire to be happy again. Remembrance is necessarily prior to desire.

In this context, Arendt explains, it is not the desire for happiness that directs us to memory in the first place, but rather the “searching query after my own source, the question, Who made me?” (Copy A, 289; Arendt 2003, 59-60). When I ask about the source of my being, I am directed to the most distant reaches of the past, which actually takes me out of the world, “beyond the realm of mundane experience” (Copy A, 288; Arendt 2003, 57). Here I discover the Creator, “who is in man only in so far as He manifests Himself in human memory” (Copy A, 290; Arendt 2003, 60). When I ask about the source of my being, I discover that I am a creation of God. In recalling my origin, I remember God as the source of my happiness. Arendt will have more to say about the experience that directs us to the question of being, but first elucidates what it means, for Augustine, to be a creation of God. In other words, she explores what the ontological structure of “createdness” is.

Memory points us back beyond our own worldly past to our origin in God. It is in remembering our origin that the happy life is discovered. This discovery reveals the fundamental dependence of the creature on the Creator.37 In Part I, Arendt explained that man is not the source of his own good, but rather he is dependent on God for his

37 Oliver O’Donovan seems to argue that, for Augustine, love as desire and as return are one in the same: “Insufficient of himself for himself because he does not have true being in himself, man is drawn back toward the source of being with a love which expresses his dependence, needy and thirsty like Plato’s eros in one of its aspects, full of the longing which affects us for things to which we naturally belong but from which we are separated, disiderium (O’Donovan 1980, 22).
happiness. In Part II, we find that the happy life is possible for man only because he is a creation of God. Without God, the creature literally would be a no-thing. Man is dependent upon God not only for his happiness but for his very existence, which represents a far more basic dependence of the creature on the Creator. The happy life, which lies ahead of us in eternity, can only be laid hold of by returning to the furthest most reaches of our past to our origin in God, the source of our happiness.

In this context, it is not desire that constitutes the structure of human existence, argues Arendt, but rather “createdness” (Kreatürlichkeit): “Createdness means that the creature has its being not from itself, but from God as such, the Supreme Being” (summe esse) (Copy A, 290; Arendt 2003, 61). To be a created being is the meaning (Sinn) of human existence (Arendt 2003, 61). Arendt explains that, according to Augustine, God is the Supreme Being (summe esse) who has no beginning (Er hat keinen Anfang), but is Himself the eternal (Arendt 2003, 76). God alone is the source of His own being. In contrast, human beings are dependent on God as the source and the sustainer of their being. Whereas God is the Being who always was, is, and will be, the essence of man is to be created (creatum esse).

Createdness means that, having been made by God, the being of human beings is determined by his origin (ursprung) (Copy A, 290; Arendt 2003, 61). To have an origin, a beginning, is “a constitutive factor of human existence” (Copy A, 292; 62). Arendt

38 Ashton translates this as “createdness,” though it is easy to see that a more literal translation would be “creatureliness.” Because Arendt did not change the translation in her revisions, I will use createdness as well.
writes, “It’s being is determined by its origin (fieri)—it becomes, it has a beginning” (Copy A, 293; Arendt 2003, 64). Having been created, human beings’ being is not being as such, but rather “becoming”: “Whatever the creature is it had first to become. The structure of its being is genesis (fieri) and change (mutari)...the mutability of the creature is its specific mode of being” (Copy A, 291; Arendt 2003, 62). Human beings created into time have a distinct beginning in birth and an end in death—human life “is born and passes away...it is always createdness acting in some way or another” (Copy A, 292; Arendt 2003, 62). Its structure is tendere esse or “tending to be” (Arendt 2003, 76). Because of this beginning, human life is temporal; it has the character, Arendt says, “of transience as such” (Copy A, 305; Arendt 2003, 74). Whereas God is immutable, human beings are constantly changing as they head towards death. Regardless of caritas or cupiditas, says Arendt, the creature’s life is mutable because it has a beginning. This changeable life is a “constituent factor of human existence” (Copy A, 292; Arendt 2003, 62). To have a beginning and “to tend towards” is the essential structure of the being of man.

By recalling our origin in God, we remember Him as the source of our being. In memory, we find that it is only by reestablishing a relationship to our source that we have the possibility of transcending the “becoming” of earthly life and laying hold of true being in eternal life (we will see in the next chapter that this is the right kind of self-love). Eternity lies “before” the creature in a two-fold sense: it is “before” in the sense that it antedates the creature’s creation, and it is “before” in the sense that it is what lies ahead (Copy A, 293; Arendt 2003, 64). This two-fold before is discovered in memory.
The creature discovers the eternal as both his origin and as his ultimate end: “Thus for the temporal creature’s reference to its own being, the postulated eternity of being makes beginning and end interchangeable” (Copy A, 294; Arendt 2003, 64). In living towards death, I am also living towards eternity. Through memory and expectation, which coincide in the present, the creature is able to participate in a kind of eternity in the here and now.

On the one hand, it is the eternal God who is the source of man’s being. On the other hand, man is created into a historical world constituted by men. This raises more questions for Arendt. What is Augustine’s guiding concept of Being? Also, “what sort of world is it, into which the creature is born and which is still not its original determinant?” (Copy A, 295, Arendt 2003, 65). After all, it is not immediately obvious how one living in the temporal world comes to inquire after and is able to discover eternal being.

According to Arendt, Augustine’s concept of Being as the eternal comes from the Greek tradition, while his understanding of the world as a created world, and especially his identification of a human world (Menschenwelt) constituted by men, is specifically Christian (Copy A, 296; Arendt 2003, 66-7). In the Greek understanding, Being is the everlasting, forever lawful structure of the universe—“the harmony of the parts” that make up the whole (Copy A, 298; Arendt 2003, 68). Being is understood as “being
forever.” In the Christian tradition, God is the eternal Being who *created* the universe. Arendt argues that the Greek tradition, as well as the Christian conception of the world, appears side by side in Augustine’s thought. For example, we see that the human being asks about his being in the world and, in so doing, discovers himself as a being created by God (Christian), but at the same time he encounters God as the eternal, immutable, Supreme Being (Greek). Insofar as the created being (Christian) is to truly *be*, he must transcend his worldly self in striving towards eternal Being (Greek).

Although Augustine equates Being (*summe esse*) with eternity, Arendt maintains that there are important differences between Augustine’s ontology and Greek ontology. In the classical Greek tradition, it is the universe and not God that is viewed as the eternal—“the cosmos in its entirety” (Copy A, 296; Arendt 2003, 66). The universe is understood as consisting of perishable parts which make up an imperishable whole. The universe “remains identical, regardless of the variability of its parts” (Copy A, 296; 2003 66). When one particular being disappears, another emerges to take its place, maintaining the imperishability of the whole. The imperishable harmony endures independently of the individual’s origin and passing (Copy A, 297; Arendt 2003, 67). Each individual is “exchanged and replaced” all the time, and is significant only insofar as he is one part in the harmony of existence (Copy A 298-9; Arendt 2003, 69). The temporality of the part makes sense only in relation to this whole, and not as deriving

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39 Arendt also says that Augustine gets his concept of good and evil from this Greek conception of the universe. Good is the ordered harmony of the parts in relation to the whole, while evil is a disordering of the parts in relation to the whole of being (Copy A, 298; Arendt 2003, 68).
from the creature’s relationship to the Creator (as in the Christian understanding of createdness). This is how and why the part experiences time. The part is born and passes away against the backdrop of a seemingly eternal universe. In the Greek tradition, says Arendt, the universe is indifferent to all of its parts, with the result that “life is divested of the uniqueness and irreversibility of its course from birth to death” (Copy A, 297; Arendt 2003, 67). This means that, within the Greek tradition, there can be no “referring back” for man because there is no beginning to which man could refer back to, only the eternal cycle of life (Copy A, 298-9; Arendt 2003, 69).

Although Augustine is guided by the Greek tradition in equating being with “ever-being,” for Augustine the universe is not eternal, but has a distinct beginning as a creation of God. Still we still see in Augustine the Greek concept of a universe, but it is a created universe consisting of the heavens and the earth that was before and is after each individual human being. Arendt quotes from Augustine’s Confessions: “So much hast Thou given them, for they are parts of things which do not exist all at once, but, by passing out of being and by coming into being, they all constitute the whole, of which they are parts” (Copy A, 296; Arendt 2003, 67). It is this seemingly “everlasting” heaven and earth that was before and will be after a particular human being’s appearance in time that gives rise to the creature’s question regarding his own being. Although according to the Christian tradition the universe is created and has an origin, because of its simultaneity, it is “eternal” from the perspective of any one individual part insofar as it endures independently of the individual (Copy A, 297; Arendt 2003, 67).
It is against the backdrop of this Greek concept of the universe that Augustine posits the Christian conception of the “world.” Arendt maintains that Augustine’s conception of world, “as the human world constituted by men,” is distinctly Christian (Copy A, 296; Arendt 2003, 66). In Augustine’s thought, the Greek understanding of universe is transformed into the “divine fabric” (fabrica Dei) (Arendt 2003, 70). This divine fabric is the heaven and earth created by God. Though the divine fabric is created and not eternal, from the perspective of human beings, who are born and will die while the heavens and the earth persist, this divine fabric appears everlasting (though it is not truly everlasting as in the Greek conception). While the universe receives its being from God, the world is “constituted” (konstituieren) by men on the ground of this divine fabric, made up of the heavens and the earth (Arendt 2003, 70). Arendt asks, what is this world constituted by men? (Copy A, 299; Arendt 2003, 70). From what Arendt describes, we see that the world for Augustine consists of all those material products and activities of man that turn what has been created by God—heaven and earth—into a home for man. But, more importantly, when Augustine refers to the world (saeculum) he means those who, out of love for the world, have made their home in the world. It is in this latter sense, writes Arendt, that Augustine’s concept of the world is uniquely Christian.40

40 In a footnote in her original dissertation, Arendt writes that Heidegger’s understanding of the “world,” especially in his 1929 essay “Vom Wesen des Grundes,” was influenced by Augustine’s own (Arendt 2003, 70). A study of the transmission of Augustine to Arendt via Heidegger is beyond the scope of this dissertation, although it remains an interesting question.
Next, Arendt interprets Augustine’s understanding of the being of the world and its constitution. The “world” is the result of the activities of men who, having been created into the divine fabric, turn the pre-existing divine fabric into a home for man. Man’s constitution of the world, however, is not similar in kind to God’s creation of the universe. God creates out of nothing (ex nihilo), while man makes from something else (fabricare ex aliquo) (Arendt 2003, 71). The world is initially brought into being, “not out of nothing as in the case of Creation; it is from the divine fabric (fabrica Dei), from the preexisting Creation, that man makes the world and makes himself part of the world” (Copy A, 300; Arendt 2003, 70). God, as the creator and sustainer of the being of the universe, “has an original link with a product existing exclusively as his creation” (Copy A, 301; Arendt 2003, 71). Whereas the universe depends upon God’s continuous sustaining and preserving of its existence, anything made by man exists separately and independently from its maker. For this reason, man in his “making” (fabricare) always “confronts his product as an outsider” (Copy A, 301; Arendt 2003, 71). Man can withdraw from the work of his hands at any time, and the product would not cease to be, while the work of God’s hands—the created universe consisting of the heavens and he earth, as well as man himself—is dependent upon God for its being (Copy A, 301; Arendt 2003, 71).

Arendt writes that, for Augustine, the human faculty that enables men to make the world is the freedom of the will: “What ‘happens by our will’ turns heaven and earth into the world” (Copy A, 330; Arendt 2003, 70). For Augustine, all of history unfolds according to God’s providential plan. Nevertheless, events in the world are partly a
consequence of man’s action (*tun*) (Arendt 2003, 69). In this sense, men’s actions and the events they initiate constitute the man-made world. As Arendt describes it: “The world is thus the place were things happen” (Copy A, 299; Arendt 2003, 69-70). In constituting the world on the basis of the everlasting divine fabric, human beings “temporalize” (*verzeitlichung*) heaven and earth (Arendt 2003, 74). In other words, against the background of the seemingly eternal cycle of life, men create a world where things happen in sequence. This world is now a historical world.

Arendt describes how, for Augustine, “What happens in the world by our will is guided by the love of the world (*dilectio mundi*) which for the first time turns the divine fabric into the self-evident home of man” (Copy A, 300; Arendt 2003, 72). Man loves the world by making it into a home and dwelling in it. When Augustine refers to the world he does not mean simply the man-made home, a location where things are produced or activities performed. More importantly, he refers to those who are the *lovers* of the world. Arendt quotes Augustine’s affirmation that “all lovers of the world are called the world” (Copy A, 300; Arendt 2003, 70). It is the world that men have founded as well as those who love it that Augustine identifies as the *saeculum* (Arendt 2003, 73-4). It is not in the making of the world that man becomes “worldly,” but rather in loving it, in making himself at home there. This love of the world rests on being of the world (*de mundo*) (Copy A, 300; Arendt 2003, 70-1). Because man is born into a world already constituted by men who have gone before him, the world seems his natural home. As Arendt says, “this pre-existing world is for him a present accessible one” (Copy A, 302;
Arendt 2003, 72). We will see in Arendt’s next chapter that man has the opportunity to choose himself out of the world and set his sights on an eternal home.

Though man is born into the world, the world, of course for Augustine, is not the ultimate source of his existence. The source of his being antedates the world and is “accessible to him only as presented past, in memory” (Copy A, 302; Arendt 2003, 72).

As we have already seen, the source of man’s being is God. It is only man, says Arendt, who, out of all created beings, inquires into his own being and is able to discover God as his source in memory (Copy A, 303; Arendt 2003, 73). What gives rise to this inquiry? The question, she writes, is prompted by the “double negative” that make up the boundary points of a human life (Copy A, 305; Arendt 2003, 75). From the perspective of man, the fabrica Dei appears to be everlasting—it was before and will continue after each individual man. It is against the background of the seeming eternity of the fabrica Dei, that man perceives his own mortality. The “no more” in death, marking the end of man’s being in the world, directs man’s attention to the “not yet,” to the source of his being in the world. It is the recognition of his own “not yet” and “no more” that gives rise to the essential questions concerning his own being: where did I come from, and where am I headed?

In questioning the “whence” and the “whither” of his existence, man’s inquiry reaches beyond the man-made world and asks about imperishable being (Copy A, 305; 41 This is reminiscent of Heidegger’s “being toward death” in Being and Time, but also Jaspers’ “boundary situations” in The Psychology of World Views.)
Arendt 2003, 75). God, as the Supreme Being, is discovered as the source of my being, and at the same time he is discovered as the source of eternal life. God is the answer to both questions for Augustine. He is from “whence” I came and “whither” I am headed. I now know the meaning of my being—having been created by God, I am meant to return to God. In this context, says Arendt, it is the “whence” and not the “whither” that gives life its significance. Only because man has a beginning in God is he able to lay hold of his being in eternity. It is the “not yet” of life, Arendt says, that “determines life in the positiveness of its being,” and not the “no more” (Copy A, 307; Arendt 2003, 76). Now that I know I come from the eternal and am destined for the eternal, death loses its original meaning.

Absent any Christian interpretation, Arendt maintains, death simply marks the end of our being in the world. Now, although death remains the end of life in the world, it is also the “end” (finis) towards which life is lived (se referre ad finem) (Copy A, 309; Arendt 2003, 78-9). The goal of life is eternity, which, Arendt reminds us, Augustine understands as “the point of a radically positive cessation, a lingering contemplation (verweilenden Shauen) and reflective calm” (betrachtenden Ruhe) (Arendt 2003, 79). In tending towards death, I am tending towards Being. Death is no longer significant because it marks the end of our being in the world but, rather, because it represents the return to eternal Being. But the return is only possible in Augustine’s thought, Arendt says, because man has his origin in God. It is for this reason that Arendt maintains that, in this context, it is the beginning of life and not the end of life that determines man’s being. The danger for man is to look to the world and not to God as the origin of his
being. In this case, death would not signify the return to the ultimate source of his being but, instead, “the utmost removal from our source, from the Creator” (alienatio a Deo) (Copy A, 307; Arendt 2003, 77). For Augustine, life can save itself only by returning to its source.

According to Arendt, this new understanding of death (as the return to my origin) has significant implications. If death is viewed by Augustine as a return to one’s origin, then life’s beginning and end become interchangeable (Copy A, 310; Arendt 2003, 79). The meaning of being is not derived from the world, but from createdness. The Being that was before us (antedates) is the same Being that lies before (ahead of) us. Coming from eternal Being, I am headed towards eternal Being. As a creation of God, I am meant to return to God: “the creature, in its createdness, derives its meaning from the Creator, from its source...and every creature is only in so far as it is thus re-connected with its own source” (my emphasis, Copy A, 290; Arendt 2003, 61). The creature participates in eternal Being only by choosing to return to his Creator. The goal of life is actually to transcend my being in the world—the “becoming” of createdness—in order to approach pure Being. Arendt argues here that this has the effect of radically devaluing concrete earthly existence as it is lived in the world.

Here, Arendt states, we see the Greek and Christian concepts of being existing side by side. Only because I am a being created by God can I return to my source (Christian), but once I discover my source as pure Being, I desire to transcend my createdness insofar as it entails mutability, so that I may again return to immutable pure Being (Greek). By reaching back to the eternal in memory and forward to the eternal in
expectation, I can “make a whole out of the temporal extension of its being as presented past and future, and thus approach the eternal today, the absolute present of eternity” (Copy A, 294; Arendt 2003, 65). Mortal man seeks to participate in eternity by turning his entire life into the present.

This understanding, Arendt says, obviously leads us to question the quality of temporal life in Augustine’s thought (Arendt 2003, 65). From this perspective, argues Arendt, the course of life becomes a mere distance to be traversed—a simple “matter of time” (Copy A, 308; Arendt 2003, 78). Arendt concludes that

life’s factual course ceases to be the singular, invariable, and irreversible one of being toward non-being...the concrete course of life is no longer important...the interchangeability of life’s beginning and end lets life itself appear as no more than a mere distance stripped of any qualitative import. (Copy A, 313; Arendt 2003, 81-2)

It does not matter if my life is long or short. Furthermore, all concrete, worldly differences among men lose their significance. Because we all have a common origin in God, all share in the same possibility of eternal life. Arendt hints at, but does not develop, a possible alternative in the Greek tradition:

In line with Greek tradition, being is not properly the Creator but the eternal structure of the cosmos; by imitation (μίμησις), the creatural essence comes to share in eternal being. The return to oneself, then, would accordingly no longer mean a departure from the world; instead, the imitation of God would already be accomplished in proper integration into the world, by the ‘duly regulated man’ who fits himself into what encompasses him, into the whole which makes him the part he is. (Copy A, 311; Arendt 2003, 80)
If we understand Being as the everlasting universe, then we can participate in Being not by withdrawing from the world, but by finding our place in it. But if the eternal ideal lies outside of not only the man-made world but also the created divine fabric, then man must overcome his createdness in order to participate in eternal Being. This has the effect, Arendt argues, of stripping temporal life of any qualitative significance (*qualitative Bedeutsamkeit*) (Arendt 2003, 82).

2.6 Part II, Chapter II: Caritas and Cupiditas

In Part II, Chapter I, we saw that when the creature comes face to face with his own mortality he is prompted to search for “perpetual being” (*Immer-Sein*) and discovers God as the source of being in memory (Copy A, 314; Arendt 2003, 82). Man was motivated to discover his source not by the desire for happiness, but by the question concerning his own being. In Chapter II, Arendt now describes how love is understood within this context. From the perspective of the question of being, *caritas* and *cupiditas* are not only distinguished by the object of desire but by a decision. The creature does not have all possibilities open to him, but has only two options: he can recall his source and withdraw from the world, or he can look to the world as the source of his being and make himself at home there (Copy A, 301; Arendt 2003, 72). *Caritas* is the choice to return to God, while *cupiditas* is the lack of decision that keeps us tied to the world. Both *caritas* and *cupiditas* “depend on man’s search for his own being as perpetual being,” but *caritas* chooses God as the source of eternal life, while *cupiditas* seeks immortality in the world (Copy A, 314; Arendt 2003, 82). While *caritas* loves God
as the eternal source of being, *cupiditas* is the “mistaking of the world, which exists before and after man, for eternity—and thus a turn to the wrong ‘before’” (Copy A, 314; Arendt 2003, 82). Chapter II of Part I is chiefly devoted to delineating the differences between these two kinds of love.

In *cupiditas* man chooses to make himself at home in the world. But, as Arendt explains, for Augustine, *cupiditas* is never first an explicit choice, “for the world is already there, and to love it is natural” (Copy A, 314; Arendt 2003, 82). Let us follow Arendt’s explication so we can see why this is so. Arendt recalls the fabrication of the world discussed in the previous chapter. She reminds us that, according to Augustine, it is the lovers of the world who turn what God has created, the *fabrica Dei*, into a man-made world. Whereas in the previous chapter she demonstrated what Augustine means when he refers to the world as *saeculum*, here she describes in more detail the motivations behind man’s constitution of the world. As we will see, it is motivated by the desire for immortality.

In the last chapter we saw that because the heavens and the earth antedate each individual man’s birth and persist after his death, it has for him an imperishable quality. It is against this background that man, confronting his own mortality, asks after imperishable being. Because everything created is already given to man, it is mistakenly believed to be independent—“as if it had made itself” (Copy A, 319; Arendt 2003, 87). Comparing his own mortality to the seeming independence and imperishability of the given, created world, man strives also to be independent and immortal (*unvergänglich*) (Arendt 2003, 86). It is this desire that motivates the founding of the man-made world.
on the grounds of the created heavens and earth. Man, by an act of free will, and in each individual case, “sets up the world anew” (*neu konstituiert*) (Copy A, 319; Arendt 2003, 87). In constituting the world as a home for man, he simultaneously establishes himself as belonging to it. Arendt notes that for Augustine the belief that I am capable of creating something new is pride (*superbia*) (Arendt 2003, 87). When in truth, since man “lacks true creative power,” he cannot make anything out of nothing; he can only turn the divine fabric created by God into “his own country” (*patria*) (Copy A, 320; Arendt 2003, 87). Pride is this perverse imitation of God who is the Creator. Instead of accepting God as the Creator and acknowledging my createdness, I believe myself to be a self-made man. I do not love myself as a creation of God, but only what I have made of myself (Copy A, 319-320; Arendt 2003, 87).

In this context, the constitution of the man-made world begins with man’s questing search after his own being as perpetual being. In striving for immortality, man founds the *saeculum*. Why does man miss the Creator and mistake the world as the source of his being? For Augustine, this is the result of original sin. Because of sin, man has a “second nature” (*secunda natura*) that has already delivered him over to the world (Arendt 2003, 86). Or rather, because of this sinful nature, he has already yielded to the world. Sin is why man is estranged from the true source of his being, and, for Augustine, “habit” (*consuetudo*) is what time and time again puts sin in control of life (Copy A, 320; Arendt 2003, 88). Already living in the world, man is accustomed to desiring it. This desire for the world consistently covers up the true source of being and insists time and again that man is “of the world” (*auf dem de mundo*) (Copy A, 320; Arendt 2003, 88). By
habit, man mistakes the world as the source of his being and forgets his own transience. Instead, as Arendt explains it, man “would make something imperishable of life itself” (Copy A, 321; Arendt 2003, 89). In this way, he develops a false sense of security: “The creature, in the search for its own being, seeks security for its existence, and habit, by covering the utmost limit of existence itself...makes it cling to the wrong past and thus gives it the wrong security” (Copy A, 322; Arendt 2003, 89). In habitually loving the world, the true source of my being is forgotten. Of course, for Augustine, this puts man in great danger. Striving for immortality in the world, man is led even “the more surely to death” (Copy A, 321; Arendt 2003, 88).

Having surrendered to the world in habit, man clings to his own worldly past. He loves what he has made, both of himself and in the world. This worldly past is the “wrong before” (falsche ante) because it is not the source of his being (Arendt 2003, 73). Now Arendt explains the meaning of love in this context. Clinging to the wrong before (the world) is cupiditas, while the choice for the right “before” (God) is caritas. But, if we are already tied to the world by habit, how do we break free from this love of the world that leads to death? For Augustine, Arendt writes, it is conscience (conscientia) that draws man’s attention to his dependence on God and grace (gratia Dei) that enables man to actualize the return to God.

Augustine describes conscience as the voice of God commanding from within what the law commands from without. Against the judgments of others in the world telling man who he is from the outside, the voice of conscience speaks from within. It is conscience that reveals man’s dependency on the Creator as the source of his being. It
testifies to man’s creation by God; man is only insofar as he is a created being. (Copy A, 323; Arendt 2003, 91). Conscience takes man into the presence of God (coram Deo) from which there is no escape. Arendt explains:

To the testimony of conscience, God is the only possible judge of good and evil. The testimony of conscience bears witness to the creature’s dependence on God, which it finds in itself. The world and its judgments crumble before this inner testimony; there is no fleeing from conscience. No togetherness (Beisammen), no being at home in the world (Heimischsein), can lessen the burdens of conscience. (Copy A, 323; Arendt 2003, 91)

Conscience demands man’s estrangement from all worldly things in the command “thou shalt not covet” (Copy A, 322; Arendt 2003, 90). The voice of the Creator speaks against the declarations of others (what has now become an aliena lingua), and calls upon His creature to withdraw from his entanglement in the world founded by men and return to the true source of his being in God (Arendt 2003, 90). Here, Arendt says, we see a much more personal God than we saw in Augustine’s Greek-inspired definition of God as the summe esse (Arendt 2003, 90). This God is not only the eternal, but he speaks directly to us and makes demands upon us. He “has a claim upon His creature against all the existential possibilities offered to it by its own will” (Copy A, 325; Arendt 2003, 92).

Having heard the voice of conscience, the creature now knows what the law demands of him. But having already yielded to the world, he finds himself unable to fulfill the law on his own (Copy A, 325; Arendt 2003, 92). This is not due to a lack of will.
The creature’s choice for God and against the world is already an act of will. Rather, the creature is not able to actualize the return to God because of a lack of power. This, Arendt explains, is the difference between “I will” (velle) and “I can” (posse) (Copy A, 326; Arendt 2003, 94). While will and power coincide in God, “the gulf marks the creature, which has no power over its own being” (Copy A, 326; Arendt 2003, 94). This demonstrates yet again the dependency of the creature upon his Creator. In this case, it is not the dependency of the created being upon the Supreme Being for his existence. Rather, the creature finds himself dependent upon God’s assistance if he is to return at all to the source of his being.

Grace is the experience of God granting his creature the power he needs to actualize the return to Himself (Copy A, 327; Arendt 2003, 94). This, for Augustine, is the meaning of the incarnation. In the written law, God had revealed Himself from afar; in the incarnation God reveals His grace from nearby (Copy A, 329; Arendt 2003, 97). But in order to receive God’s help, experienced as divine grace, man must acknowledge his incapability (Unfähigkeit) to fulfill the law and humble (humilitas) himself before God as a sinner (Arendt 2003, 96). In the humble acceptance of God’s grace, man reconciles himself to his Creator and in so doing becomes a new creation (nova creatura); he is

42 Arendt also explains that for Augustine the will itself is also not “entire.” It is possible to will to return to God, and, at the same time, to will not to return. A divided will comes with "being of the world," which is not explicitly chosen, but is habitual. Arendt quotes Augustine “It is not monstrous to will a thing and partly to oppose it; it is, rather, an illness of the mind which cannot wholly rise, being uplifted by truth, weighed down by habit” (Copy A, 328; Arendt 2003, 96).
recreated “by being delivered from sinfulness and thus from being of the world” (Copy A, 329; Arendt 2003, 96-7).

Arendt explains in more detail the meaning of caritas in this context of the return to the source of my being. Caritas is the decision to return to God: “In this selective love (erwählenden Lieben), the Creator is approached as personally related to the creature. The creature knows itself as a creature when it chooses the Creator in caritas” (Copy A, 314; Arendt 2003, 82). In caritas the creature recognizes the structure and meaning of his being as createdness. He is a being created by God. The world is not the source of his being. While for Augustine all human beings are dependent on God for their being, Arendt explains that it is only by returning to God that this dependency is positively taken up. In this decision, man acknowledges his dependence on God, not only for his very existence but also for his fulfillment of the law. He is a creature in need of God’s grace. Only by accepting God’s grace is he able to deny the world and return to the true source of his being (Copy A, 315; Arendt 2003, 82). In this way, the love of God in caritas is actually a loving-back: it is the “loving acceptance of God’s love” (Copy A, 330-1; Arendt 2003, 97).

Caritas entails not only a return to God, but a necessary withdrawal from the world. Arendt says caritas “is the choice out of the world. In it, the creature comprehends itself as belonging not to the world, but to God” (Copy A, 315; Arendt 2003, 83). This is why, she explains, Augustine actually equates love with death: “Love itself is our death unto the world, and our life with God. For if it be death when the soul goes forth from the body, how is it not a death when our love goes forth from the
world? Strong therefore as death is love” (Copy A, 316; Arendt 2003, 84) In this love, the creature renounces the world and whatever he has made in the world, no longer viewing the world as a home but as a desert (Wüste) (Arendt 2003, 97). In the return to God, “the world turn[s] back into what it had been in Creation, and the being which the creature made of it is brought to naught” (Copy A, 330; Arendt 2003, 98). This is true not only for what he has made of the world, but also for what he has made of himself in the world.

Man now recognizes himself as a created being and God as his Creator. As God’s creation, he is the object of God’s love, “a love which is extended to it as a creature, not as what it may be, perhaps, on its own” (Copy A, 229-30; Arendt 2003, 97). He denies whatever he has made of himself and loves only what God has created in him. “It loves itself as God loves it,” Arendt writes, “hating all that which it has made in itself, and loving itself only in so far as it is God’s creation. What it loves in itself is exclusively God’s goodness, the Creator Himself; it hates itself in so far as free will enables it to give its being of the world an independent significance” (Copy A, 331; Arendt 2003, 99). Man is no longer free for himself, says Arendt, but subject to the demand of “being as God” (sicut Deus) (Copy A, 317; Arendt 2003, 84). In rejecting his worldly self and acknowledging the meaning of his being as createdness, he is re-created; he is what Augustine calls a novo creatura (Arendt 2003, 97). Because he now looks to God for the meaning of his being and not the world, he can now live in the world without belonging to it (Copy A, 329; Arendt 2003, 97).
In the context of love as return, Arendt says, we must deny our self not because what we have made of ourselves can be lost against our will (as it was in the context of love as desire) but, rather, because the return to God is a return to the source of our being who is pure Being. In order to actualize the return to God we must ascend to Being as such. As the structure of human existence is createdness, human beings are “becoming,” and not being as such. In this way, they “imitate” Being. In the return, we positively take up this imitation and ascend to God who is Being as such: “In taking up caritas, the necessary, ontologically based imitation becomes an explicit assimilation to God (sicut Deus)” (Copy A, 316; Arendt 2003, 84). This requires casting off (abicere me) whatever distinguishes myself as a specific individual and whatever I have made of myself in the world (Arendt 2003, 85). Only in denying our being in the world can we draw closer to God who is pure Being. As long as we live in the world, however, we are unable to complete this assimilation; we remain en route (Copy A, 317; Arendt 2003, 85). The return to God is realized through caritas only over the course of a life (Copy A, 324; Arendt 2003, 92).

This “being as God” (sicut Deus) has the effect, Arendt argues, of destroying worldly individuality: “it makes everyone the same, because with the disappearance of the world it removes the possibility of boasting (iactantia) which came precisely from the creature’s worldliness in comparing itself with others” (Copy A, 316; Arendt 2003, 85). All men are equal as created beings who have the same possibility of becoming more like God, who is the Creator of each individual. They become more equal, so to speak, as each sheds his worldly individuality and ascends to pure Being.
In Chapter II of Part II, Arendt demonstrates how conscience, the voice of God within each man, calls upon him to return to God as the source of his being and to abandon the world. The return to God itself is caritas. In the turn to God, the individual, she says, is alone before God as his Creator and the source of his being (Copy A, 322; Arendt 2003, 90). The love of God requires that man deny himself and the world so that he may become more like God, who is pure Being. What implications does this kind of love of God have for love of neighbor? This is the question Arendt answers in the final chapter of Part II.

2.7 Part II, Chapter III: Dilectio Proximi

The purpose of this chapter, writes Arendt, is to answer the question: “how does the self-denying creature meet the other (der Nächste)—and what, in this encounter, in the other’s role?” (Copy A, 340; Arendt 2003, 99-100). She reminds her readers of the Christian commandment which requires that one first love God, and second love his neighbor as he loves himself. Indeed, love is the aim and fulfillment of all the other commandments (Copy A, 340; Arendt 2003, 100). Whenever we ask about what it means to love the neighbor, we must first ask about these two prior loves. Arendt has already explained in the previous chapter what it means to love God and self in the context of the questing search after perpetual being. We have seen that to love God is to return to God. Once I return to God, I love myself as God does—I love only what He has created in me, and not what I have made of myself. We see in this chapter that loving the other as one’s self means loving the neighbor too as a creation of God.
In the self-denial demanded of one who returns to God, I reject whatever I have made of myself as well as whatever relations I have founded (gestiftet) (Arendt 2003, 100). The world has become a desert to me and not a home. Now that I know the true meaning of my being (as a created being), I also see others for who they truly are. Just as the source of my being is not the world and so I deny the world, I see that the source of the other’s being, like my own, is God, and the meaning of his being is also that he is a created being. The other, like myself, is also now newly understood as a creation of God. This is the neighbor’s only significance. What he once was to me in the world is no longer of any import. This means everyone must necessarily have equal significance insofar as he is a creation of God. I cannot choose my neighbor; for all men are equally my neighbor. Arendt writes:

Thus the other (der Andere), the neighbor (der Nächste), loses the import which his concrete worldly existence has to the creature—as a friend or enemy (als Freund oder als Fiend), for instance. To the lover who loves as God loves, the other ceases to be anything but a creature of God. He meets a man governed by God’s love simply as God’s creation. All men meet in this love, denying themselves and their mutual ties, and all have as much—or as little rather—relevance to their own being. (Copy A, 341; Arendt 2003, 100)

The neighbor is relevant only as a creation of God. His worldly being, just as my own, is bypassed for the sake of the return to God the true source of being.

It is only by learning how to rightly understand the meaning of my being that I am able to love both myself and then my neighbor. As I deny what I have made of myself in the return to God, so do I deny the worldliness of my neighbor. For, “It is precisely not the other’s worldly significance that my every question about him is here
concerned with; it is his being before God” (Copy A, 353; Arendt 2003, 112). Now that I see my neighbor as God sees him, I love him as God loves him. Not for my sake or for his, but as a creation of God. I do not love in my neighbor what he has made of himself, “what I concretely, mundanely encounter,” but rather what is eternal in him—“the very thing which he, on his own, is not” (Copy A, 343; Arendt 2003, 102). What is loved is the identical source (God) in each. This means I must love all men without distinction:

The same source is loved in each individual human being; no individual means anything in comparison with this identical source. The Christian can thus love all men, because each one is only an occasion, and that occasion can be everyone. Love proves its strength precisely in conceiving even the enemy, even the sinner, as a mere occasion for love. (Copy A, 344-5; Arendt 2003, 103)

In loving my neighbor, even those nearest to me, what I am actually loving is God as the source of his being within him. Love of self and love of neighbor is every time simply an occasion for loving God. Even death becomes irrelevant in terms of the end of my neighbor’s being in the world: “Death, in removing my neighbor from the world, does only what love—my love of the being that lives in him, as his source—has done anyway” (Copy A, 344; Arendt 2003, 103).

In the context of love as return to Being, I do not love in my neighbor what is mortal, but what is eternal. My love for the other manifests itself in a call for my neighbor to also seek the source of his being in God and to thereby discover the meaning of his existence as a created being. “I deny the other so as to break through to his real being, just as in searching for myself I denied myself. The denial, Arendt says, is in line with ‘wishing that he may be’ (volu ut sis), and ‘carrying off to God’ (rapere ad
Deum)” (Copy A, 343; Arendt 2003, 102). In loving our neighbor as ourselves, the actual content of the love of neighbor becomes a call for the neighbor to seek his own source in the presence of God. In other words, it is a call for the neighbor, like myself, to live in isolation from the world and all worldly relationships. I deny my neighbor so that he too may deny himself. In caritas, Arendt argues, I remain in “absolute isolation, and the world a desert to this isolated existence” (Copy A 331; Arendt 2003, 100). According to Arendt, neighbor-love amounts to a call for the other to also return to God and live in this very same isolation.

In returning to God, self-denial requires “renouncing any independent choice and any originally established relation with the world,” including relationships with others (Copy A, 342; Arendt 2003, 101). In the context of love as return, Arendt argues, self-denial is congruent with an understanding of Being and createdness that posits a return to the Creator as the meaning of the created being’s existence. However, she writes, Augustine fails to account for how it is, in this specific context, we can have a neighbor at all, “as someone specifically linked with us,” when the world and all worldly relationships must be denied for the sake of the return to Being (Copy A, 341-2; Arendt 2003, 101). Loving my neighbor as God does, denying who he is in his worldliness, Arendt affirms, certainly separates neighborly love from any kind of understanding of carnal love (dilectio carnalis) (Copy A, 341; Arendt 2003, 100-1).

43 This reference also appears in Arendt’s and Heidegger’s correspondence, and which we will also see reappear in The Origins of Totalitarianism.
What we find, says Arendt, is that the mere sameness of a decision to return to God is not enough to bring about a community of believers: “Even if all do believe the same, this concurrence is irrelevant to the being of the individual (‘each has his own’). The simple sameness of the God they all believe in does not as yet bring about a community of the faithful” (Copy A, 349; Arendt 2003, 108). Even in love of neighbor, we remain isolated in the presence of God, the source of being. It is possible, Arendt writes, to find an empirical ground for neighbor-love in Augustine, but it is in an entirely different context, she says, a context which she explores in the final part of her dissertation.

2.8 Part III: Vita socialis

In the third and final part of her dissertation, Arendt investigates “social life” (vita socialis) in Augustine’s thought in order to find out whether there is in fact another context that would account for the relevance of the other and love of neighbor—the guiding question of her dissertation. Thus far, she has concluded that, within the context of love as desire and as return, love of neighbor in Augustine remains “incomprehensible (unfaßbar) in its true relevance” (Copy A, 348; Arendt 2003, 106). Love as craving meant that the neighbor was “forgotten” along with the self over the desire for God. Love of neighbor was fitted into the schema after the fact, says Arendt. The neighbor was not loved for his own sake, but “for the sake of.” In Arendt’s view, love as return was equally plagued by incongruities. It meant that, along with the self, the other was denied in order that his true being in God could be pointed out to him. He
was not loved as he appeared in his concrete worldly existence, but only as a creation of God. Nevertheless, and despite these “discrepancies” (*Unstimmigkeiten*), the commandment to love one’s neighbor appears whenever Augustine reflects on love. We find that, for Augustine, the love of neighbor plays a large roll, as Arendt puts it, even in these “alien contexts” (Copy A, 348; Arendt 2003, 106). How then can love of neighbor be understood?

As love as desire and as return have both failed to account for the specific relevance of the other, how then do we explain neighbor-love in Augustine’s philosophy? The purpose of this third section is to investigate yet another context in which love of neighbor appears, an empirical context that, Arendt says, does reveal a certain relevance for the other. Here, Augustine is not concerned with the being of the individual before God, but with “the being of man among men...the being of humankind as such” (Copy A, 356; Arendt 2003, 115). This empirical context, a historical pre-existing reality, is the common descent from Adam (Copy A, 350; Arendt 2003, 109). In this final part of her dissertation, Arendt demonstrates how this common descent is, in fact, “the most crucial determinant of human existence” (Copy A, 351; Arendt 2003, 109). It determines both how men live together in the world and also their need for redemption. Even though grace takes us out of the world, this common descent cannot be canceled: “it only receives a new meaning” (Copy A, 353; Arendt 2003, 112). Let us see how Arendt explains the significance of this descent for how we are to understand the relevance of the other and thereby concludes her dissertation.
Arendt begins by first asking what the basis of social life is in Augustine and what are its essential features. This is a necessary first step, she says, so that we are in a better position to see how the meaning of human community changes once God’s grace has been accepted. For Augustine, this worldly community founded by men, which he refers to as the *saeculum*, is prior to the City of God, the society of believers (Copy A, 354; Arendt 2003, 113). It is a community to which all men belong, not by choice but as a matter of course. It is not arbitrarily founded or dissolvable, writes Arendt, but rather is “rooted” in the common descent from Adam. This common descent from one man is the basis of all human fellowship. All men belong to this society by generation; the common source in Adam is handed down from one generation to the next. In this way, it is a kinship: “from and with the dead. In other words, it is historic” (Copy A, 354; Arendt 2003, 114). It is from this shared history, writes Arendt, that the society of men derives a legitimacy of its own. When Augustine affirms in the *City of God* that man is by nature a social being, what he means, says Arendt, is that he is social in two respects, both naturally (our common humanity) and historically (a shared past) (Copy A, 355; Arendt 2003, 114). Men share a common nature and a common history.

For Augustine, says Arendt, this common descent is the reason for the basic equality of all men. Because all men are descendants of Adam, all share in the common fate from which they cannot escape—mortality. She writes, “All men share the same fate. The individual is not alone in the world; he has companions of his fate (consortes) not merely in this situation or that, but for a lifetime. His entire life is regarded as a distinct fateful situation, the situation of mortality” (Copy A; 351; Arendt 2003, 110).
This is not an equality of traits or talents, she says, but an equality of condition. Man is not aware, however, of the true significance of this equality (original sin) until he has it pointed out to him by conscience. In the meantime, death is viewed as a mere fact of nature and not as a punishment for sin. Still, Arendt says, this equality of condition permits us to understand the mutual interdependence, “which defines their social life in the worldly community” (Copy A, 351; Arendt 2003, 109-10).

Before Arendt points out the true meaning of a common descent from Adam—shared sin and common redemption—she explains the possibility of this interdependence (Copy A, 351; Arendt 2003, 110). Men are interdependent because they are equal (if they were unequal some would be completely dependent on others, as is the relationship between man and God, rather than “inter” dependent). In Augustine’s thought, writes Arendt, the society of men is understood as “a social organism defined by people’s living with and for each other, not just side by side” (Copy A, 350-1; Arendt 2003, 109). It is through interdependence, or as Augustine puts it, “the mutual give and take” that individuals are bound together in a human community (Copy A, 351; Arendt 2003, 110). The attitude that makes this give and take possible, Arendt says, is belief (credere) as opposed to knowledge (Wissen) (Arendt 2003, 110). Interdependence would not be possible without belief in the other. Reciprocity requires mutual trust. Mutual trust is necessary because, for Augustine, it is impossible to know another’s will towards yourself. Interpreting a passage from Augustine’s De fide rerum, she writes:
The attitude of individuals toward each other is here characterized by belief (*credere*), as against all real or potential knowledge. We comprehend all history, all human and temporal acts, by way of believing—which means, at the same time, by trusting—but never by way of understanding (*intelligere*). This kind of belief in the other is a belief that he will prove himself in our common future. Upon this proof each earthly community depends; yet the belief, arising from our mutual interdependence, precedes any possible proof. The continued existence of humankind does not rest on the proof; it rests on the necessary belief in it, without which social life would become impossible. (Copy A, 351-2; Arendt 2003, 110-111)

Belief that the other will prove himself in the future—mutual trust—makes interdependence, the basis of human community, possible. It is precisely this interdependence, however, that, for Augustine, is sinful: “In the society based on Adam, man has made himself independent of his Creator. He depends on other men, not on God” (Copy A, 354; Arendt 2003, 114).

Arendt asks, if this shared life and common past is precisely what is to be denied in the return to God, how is the duty to love one’s neighbor derived from it? (Copy A, 356; Arendt 2003, 115). As we will see, this worldly past is in fact decisive for neighborly love in the context of Augustine’s philosophy of social life, but the past takes on an entirely new meaning when viewed from the perspective of grace. This is made apparent by the incarnation.

44 Quoting Augustine she writes, “If this faith in human affairs is removed, who will not mark how great will be their disorder and what dreadful confusion will follow? –Therefore, when we do not believe what we cannot see, concord will perish and human society will not stand firm” (Copy A, 352; Arendt 2003, 111).
As we saw in Arendt’s previous chapter, “what actually enables man to relate to his source, as the creature to the Creator, is a historic fact: God’s revelation in Christ” (Copy A, 356; Arendt 2003, 115). Individuals are only able to ask themselves out of the world because the free gift of God’s grace, which enables the return, was revealed in the world made by men. In the previous context, love as return, grace was viewed as a gift bestowed on the individual. In this context, grace is viewed as God’s revelation of Himself to mankind living in the world. By taking on human form, God revealed Himself to all men living together in the historical world they founded. The message of salvation, the grace of God, was brought to all.

The incarnation reveals the true significance of the common descent from Adam (Copy A, 357; Arendt 2003, 115-6). While man’s origin in Adam is the beginning of the man-made world, it is “at the same time the origin of sin and the apostasy from God” (Copy A, 356; Arendt 2003, 115). As descendants of Adam, we have all inherited his original sin (peccatum originale). We are sinful by generation, prior to any free choice (Copy A, 354; Arendt 2003, 114). The need for redemption also points to a new understanding of death. Death is not only the end of our being in the world, an “event of nature” but “the wages of sin” (Copy A, 363; Arendt 2003, 121). Furthermore, were it not for Christ all would be subject to eternal estrangement from God, what Augustine calls the “second death” (Copy A, 363; Arendt 2003, 121). Only by the grace of God can this second death be overcome. Nevertheless, the first death, the end of our being in the world, remains as a reminder of our sin and “expresses the continued existence of our sinful past, for whose sake it alone existed” (Copy A, 363; Arendt 2003, 122). Death,
Arendt says, is the clearest indication that our shared past is not simply erased by salvation—death remains our common fate (Copy A, 360; Arendt 2003, 118).

That the message of salvation was brought to all men also reveals the true meaning of human equality. All are in need of redemption because all have sinned: “The similitude of being bought off, points to the equal state in which Christ finds all men in the world...all are redeemed together, just as all were found together” (Copy A, 357; Arendt 2003, 116). Furthermore, it is not by any action that one merits salvation. All have sinned and are equally undeserving of God's grace. In light of this new understanding of equality, Arendt explains, all other worldly distinctions no longer matter.

Along with redemption and the realization of one’s own sinful nature comes a new understanding of the meaning of the shared worldly past. Redemption does not simply erase this past, but it is now “newly experienced” as sinful (Copy A, 357; Arendt 2003, 116). This reinterpreted past still continues alongside the newly discovered source of being: “man’s equality before God, corresponding to their equality in sin, rests on the same sinful past even in the course of lives governed by Christ” (Copy A, 357; Arendt 2003, 116). While the believer has the opportunity to choose himself out of the world, this shared sinful past is what alone remains common to all. It is this new interpretation of the past that reveals the relevance of the other, and that becomes the basis for the “absolute obligation” to the neighbor (Copy A, 357-8; Arendt 2003, 116).

The other is relevant—even to one who has been called out of the world—because of the shared sinful past which has not been simply erased by salvation, but
reinterpreted. From the perspective of a shared sinful past, the other is relevant because he serves as a constant reminder of sin: “he is a living warning of pride” (Copy A, 358; Arendt 2003, 117). No longer viewed “as he happens to be in the world,” the other is either “one in whom God has already worked His grace—and thus, for us, an occasion not only to love but to pay homage to grace—or one still entangled in sin, in which case he is nothing but what the Christian was and would, but for the grace of God, still be” (Copy A, 358; Arendt 2003, 117). In the first instance, the neighbor is relevant because God’s grace has been at work in him, overcoming his sinful past. In the second instance, the neighbor is relevant because he is still entangled in a sinful past that was once our own. In either case, the neighbor serves as a reminder of our own sinful past, and what would be our peril, but for the grace of God (Copy A, 358; Arendt 2003, 117).

Now that we see the other’s relevance, Arendt writes, we are able to understand how the command to love our neighbor becomes obligatory. It is because of the essential equality engendered by the shared past: “Because the other is fundamentally your equal, because you and he have the same sinful past—that is why you should love him” (Copy A, 358; Arendt 2003, 117). It is only this past, argues Arendt, that “permits us to understand the obligatory equality of men even in God’s presence” (Copy A, 359; Arendt 2003, 117). We love our neighbor because we share the same sinful past and therefore encounter the same danger. Ultimately, Arendt explains, the obligation to love one’s neighbor rests on knowledge of this common danger—eternal estrangement from God—that threatens all descendants of Adam (Copy A, 362; Arendt 2003, 121).
Having understood this, being with others now takes on a new meaning: “from an inevitable and matter-of-course one, it comes to be freely chosen and replete with obligations which the individual assumes on the ground of their common situation, now made explicit as communion in sin.” (Copy A, 353; Arendt 2003, 113). We love our fellow believers by struggling with them against the world. We love the unbeliever by endeavoring his salvation and his inclusion in the community of the faithful.

Though redeemed, the believer yet lives in the world and is still subject to its desires, which the believer is called upon to overcome: “it is against the world—not simply without it—that the message of salvation has come to mankind” (Copy A, 359; Arendt 2003, 118). The new life can be won only in defeating the old—a constant struggle that lasts a lifetime (Copy A 360; Arendt 2003, 119). For Augustine, Arendt explains, man cannot do this alone: “the past remains at work in the impossibility of complete isolation for the individual. He cannot act by himself (separatus), only with others, or against them” (Copy A, 360; Arendt 2003, 118). From this perspective, mutual love (diligere invicim) becomes a necessity because, even in the return to God, man cannot escape the pre-existing world founded by men. This is the raison d’être for the foundation of what Augustine calls the City of God (civitas Dei). Arendt writes:

Thus, in estrangement from the world, divine grace gives a new point to human togetherness; and this point is defense against the world. This defense is the foundation of the new community, the City of God. Estrangement itself gives rise to a new togetherness, to a being with and for each other that exists beside and against the old society. (Copy A, 361; Arendt 2003, 119)
The City of God provides a common defense against the world and its desires. The ultimate danger being, of course, that we will relapse into our old sinful past—“a relapse which amounts to eternal death” (Copy A, 363; Arendt 2003, 122). In order to avoid this ultimate peril, each member of the City of God struggles together with the other against the world and its desires. This, Arendt writes, is the meaning of neighborly-love or caritas in regards to fellow believers (Copy A, 361; Arendt 2003, 120).

Faith, Arendt maintains, “dissolves the bonds which tied men to the world in its original sense of the earthly community, and so it dissolves men’s dependence on one another” (Copy A, 361; Arendt 2003, 120). In the community of faith the individual ceases to be anything but a member: “the individual is completely forgotten over this community” (Copy A 361-2; Arendt 2003, 120). Unlike worldly communities, “which always isolate only one definition of being, in regard to which the community is a community,” the community of the faithful “demands the whole man, as God demands him” (Copy A, 349; Arendt 2003, 109).45 When each member of the community ceases to be an individual, but is viewed rather as a member of the same body of Christ, then love

45 By “one definition of being,” Arendt may have in mind what she describes in The Origins of Totalitarianism as a “principle of action”:

Therefore what the definition of governments always needed was what Montesquieu called a “principle of action” which, different in each form of government, would inspire government and citizens alike in their public activity and serve as a criterion, beyond the merely negative yardstick of lawfulness, for judging all action in public affairs. Such guiding principles and criteria of action are, according to Montesquieu, honor in a monarchy, virtue in a republic and fear in a tyranny. (Arendt 2004, 602)
of one’s self is, at the same time, love of my fellow believer (Copy A, 362; Arendt 2003, 120). In the City of God mutual love replaces the mutual dependence of the earthly city.

When one chooses grace, he now belongs to God. If he remains in the world, he belongs to sin and death. This is why, explains Arendt, for Augustine there are only ever two communities (civitates): a community of those who have chosen love of God and a community that loves the world (Arendt 2003, 112). Despite the many different human communities in existence at any given time, there are but two “cities”—one based on Adam and one based on Christ (Copy A, 353; Arendt 2003, 113). One community builds a home in the world, says Augustine, while the other community sojourns on earth (Copy A 371; Arendt 2003, 116).

The world can be “overcome” only when all men have become believers. Knowledge of a shared sinful past obligates me not only to love my fellow believer in the City of God, but also those who do not yet believe: “To bring the other to this explicitness of his own being, to ‘carry him off to God’ (rapere ad Deum), is the duty to his neighbor which the Christian assumes from his own past sin” (Copy A, 360; Arendt 2003, 119). To direct the neighbor to the source of his own being is the Christian’s responsibility. In this way, the neighbor too, will come to be. This is why, explains Arendt, a flight into solitude would be sinful—because it would rob the other of his opportunity to change (Copy A, 360-1; Arendt 2003, 119). While the contemplative life, according to Augustine, is pleasant (suavitas), love is a necessity (necessitas) (Arendt 2003, 120). Although it might be more pleasant for him, if the Christian removes himself entirely from the world, he deprives his neighbor of imitating him and misses the
opportunity to be “the impulse that will save his neighbor” (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 122). In this respect, “imitation” is the meaning of love of the non-believer. Here Arendt cites Augustine’s Homilies on the First Epistle of John VIII, 2: “Did He mean to say we should hide from the eyes of men whatever good things we do, and fear to have them seen? If you fear watchers, you will have no imitators; hence, you ought to be seen,” and also from VIII, 9: “For if thou hidest it from the eyes of man, thou hidest it from the imitation of man; thou withdrawest from God his praise” (Copy A, 372; Arendt 2003, 119 & 122).

Thus the believer’s love for the other is expressed in either one of two attitudes towards the world—both in the fight against it and in concern (Sorge) for it (Copy A, 366; Arendt 2003, 124). This concern for others in the world does not distinguish among those who, in their preexisting worldly significance, may have been “good or bad” (gut order schlect), friend or enemy (Copy A, 362; Arendt 2003, 121). In Augustine’s view, we cannot choose who we love, but rather we must extend caritas to every individual. Augustinian love of neighbor, Arendt maintains, never means love in “our sense” (unserem Sinn) because we cannot choose our beloved (Arendt 2003, 122). Rather, because of our common situation, love must be extended to each and every individual. Furthermore, “I never love my neighbor for his own sake,” but for the sake of what divine grace has already, or may yet, work in him (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 123). I love my neighbor because, in doing so, I love God. My relation to my neighbor is, as Arendt claims, “a mere passage for the direct relation to God Himself” (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 123).
Arendt finishes by concluding that “[t]his indirectness [love of neighbor as a mere passage to loving God] breaks up social relations by turning them into provisional ones” (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 123). Furthermore, however necessary caritas may be, she says, it is only necessary in this world (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 123). In inquiring into the relevance of the other in Augustine’s thought, Arendt says, what we have found is that, in the contexts of love as desire and love as return, the other cannot be relevant for one whose desire or quest for Being has drawn him out of the world. We have found, however, that the other is relevant in a specific empirical context—in a common descent from Adam. But even in this context, Arendt concludes, the meaning of our being with others in the world is nevertheless still judged by the standard of the eternal and does not possess an independent significance on its own terms. For Arendt, this has the effect of radically relativizing the meaning of being with others in the world.

2.9 Conclusion

In the introduction to her dissertation Arendt poses her overarching research question: what is the relevance of the other (Relevanz des Anderen) in Augustine’s philosophy of love? (Arendt 2003, 24, 28). In pursuing the answer to her research question, Arendt explores themes such as new beginnings and worldliness that, as we will see, later provide direction and come to shape her own political theory. Now that we have carefully followed Arendt’s analysis of Augustine’s philosophy of love in each of the three contexts, we are in a position to examine Arendt’s political theory with an eye to the influence of her very first work. This is what we turn to now. What we will see is
that the influence of Arendt’s first project on Augustine is both persistent and significant. In the next chapter, I will specifically demonstrate Arendt’s original concern with plurality—what in her dissertation appears as her interest in the “relevance of the other.” In so doing, I will demonstrate how Arendt’s encounter with Augustine ignited a persistent interest in this relevance. It was her dissatisfaction with the possibility of Christian love as the “in-between” that led her to continue to inquire into what ties are able to unite men together in a human community, whether religious or political. In Chapters Four and Five, I will explain the relationship between her dissertation and her analysis of the forerunners of totalitarianism and also the phenomenon of totalitarianism itself. In these chapters, we will see a persistent interest in plurality, namely in human equality, human distinctiveness, the world, and also her interest in what destroys the space between men and the freedom this space permits—namely, totalitarianism. Then, in Chapter Six, I will show how Arendt draws on Augustine’s philosophy to develop her own positive political theory—a theory that she poses precisely as an alternative to Augustine’s otherworldliness and the loss of the value for the vita activa in the Western tradition that he inspired.
CHAPTER 3:

PLURALITY IN DER LIEBESBEGRIFF BEI AUGUSTIN

In their interpretive essay following the edited and revised version of Arendt’s dissertation, Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark argue that Arendt maintained her very first interest in the “relevance of the other” over the course of her entire lifetime, from Heidelberg to America, from her first writings in philosophy to when, in The Origins of Totalitarianism, her work became more overtly political (Scott and Stark 1996, 116). They contend, “The question that intrigues her and continues to dominate her thought when it turns explicitly political is the ‘relevance of the neighbor’” (Scott and Stark 1996, 122). Furthermore, they argue, “the theme of the individual’s relationship to the human community pervades all of Arendt’s work, both in Germany and America” (Scott and Stark 1996, 153).

Scott and Stark are to be commended for affirming the persistence of Arendt’s interest in the individual’s relationship to the human community, for pointing out the source of her concern for “the relevance of the other” in her dissertation on Augustine, and especially for explicitly connecting it to her later articulation of “plurality,” when no
other scholars had yet done so. However, their interpretive essay simply points out the source and persistence of this interest, but it does not trace this interest through to *Origins* or in *The Human Condition*. Instead, as they expressly state, their essay had another purpose: “this interpretive commentary is intended to stimulate new conversations” (Scott and Stark 1996, 116). Scott and Stark aimed to inspire and ignite further research and investigation into this primary concern of Arendt’s as it appears in the dissertation and into how it connects to her later works. Building on the work of Scott and Stark, that is precisely what this chapter and the following chapters intend to do.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate not only that Arendt’s concern for human plurality and in the space between plural men began in her 1929 dissertation, but that it appears as the dissertation’s most significant theme. This will then allow us to see how this interest continues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in the next two chapters, and then in *The Human Condition* in Chapter Six, as well as in other works that we will look at along the way.

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46 Robert Beiner’s essay on Arendt’s dissertation, which came out in 1996, before the Scott and Stark edition was published, argues for the importance of the dissertation for Arendt’s later work, but does not discuss plurality. Rather, he treats the dissertation primarily as a preparation for Arendt’s criticism of Christian otherworldliness in *The Human Condition*, which it undoubtedly is, but, as I will argue, there is much more of Arendt’s political thought present in nascent form in her dissertation and first among these is plurality.

47 Although I will describe it as Arendt’s “interest” in plurality from time to time for the purposes of variation, it is much better to describe her “interest” as a “concern.”
This continuity is remarkable, considering both the time and the events that transpired from 1929 to when she first began writing *Origins* in 1945. Though it is also surprising that Arendt scholars such as Margaret Canovan have, for the most part, not acknowledged the continuity between the ideas present in Arendt’s dissertation and in her later works when, in my view, her concern for human “plurality” is so very visible in the dissertation.48 It is even more surprising that since the publication of the revised dissertation in English by Scott and Stark in 1996, so few scholars have noted the presence and importance of “plurality” in the dissertation.49

Arendt from the very beginning had a certain care for plurality, in the sense that she was obviously troubled by Augustine’s desire to transcend both the unique individuality of the human person and to deny the meaning of being with others in the world. And, as we will see in the next chapters, she was later deeply disturbed by totalitarianism’s intention to destroy human plurality and the space between plural men altogether. Arendt was not merely fascinated by human plurality, but she came to believe, especially after 1945, that we must embrace human plurality with gratitude and recognize our responsibility to preserve it. I will show in this chapter and the next that Arendt’s concern for plurality did not arise out of her encounter with totalitarianism, as

48 Canovan’s dismissal of the dissertation’s significance will be discussed further in the next chapter.

49 I have so far found only one scholar, Stephen Kampowski (2008), who has explicitly done so.
other scholars have argued previously, but rather that this encounter only heightened and made more urgent a concern that began in her dissertation.50

As I will demonstrate below, Arendt’s concern for plurality did in fact begin in her 1929 dissertation, although she did not specifically articulate the term “plurality” until much later in The Human Condition (1958). This interest appears in the dissertation primarily in three ways. It appears first in her concern for the meaning and significance of being with others in the world (the inter homines esse). The question, she says, that guides her research on Augustine is “the relevance of the other” and the responsibility to love one’s neighbor. This is the chief research question she pursues throughout her dissertation. This concern for the meaning and significance of human plurality remained with her throughout her intellectual career.

Second, Arendt’s interest in plurality also appears in her concern with the ties that bind together unique individuals in a human community (the inter se), but not so closely that men would lose the space in which to express their unique individuality. We see her inquiring into whether or not love, as Augustine understands it, can serve to connect distinct human beings one to another in a shared community. We also see her considering other “worldly” ties when she explains the joint constitution of the world, and in Part III when she discusses interdependence as well as a shared history.

50 Chiefly Margaret Canovan in Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Thought (1992).
Third, we see in her dissertation the beginnings of Arendt’s formulation of the two-fold character of plurality as she later describes it in *The Human Condition*: equality and distinction (Arendt 1998, 175). In each part of her dissertation she considers a different basis for human equality (*aequalitas*) within Augustine’s three conceptions of love. Arendt also acknowledges and investigates the nature and origin of human uniqueness, and argues in each case that, for Augustine, it is precisely this uniqueness and variability which must be denied or transcended.

Furthermore, I will demonstrate her dissatisfaction with Augustine’s philosophy of love insofar as its aim is to transcend human plurality and being with others in the world for the sake of eternity. However, we also see that it is in the dissertation that she uncovers theoretical resources that will enable her to develop her own political theory—a political theory that argues *against* Augustine’s otherworldliness. It is for this reason, that I will also indicate where and how we see the origin of Arendt’s concept of a man-made world and, more importantly, of “natality.”

Arendt’s concern for human plurality began in her dissertation, but while in 1929 she considers the relevance of the other and the “in-between” in the more abstract context of Augustine’s philosophy, beginning in 1945 she considers plurality in the light of the much more concrete and terrifying reality of totalitarianism. In the next two chapters, I will show how *The Origins of Totalitarianism* can be read as a sustained reflection on, but also an argument for, the importance of human plurality. Indeed, for Arendt, the greatest threat of totalitarianism is its deliberate aim to destroy the plurality of men. I will show that, in *Origins*, she comes to a similar conclusion to the one she
reached in the dissertation. She finds that plurality is a human condition that must not be spurned, neither must it be taken for granted, for there are great dangers that come with doing so, but rather our shared political life must be arranged in such a way that plurality is both preserved and celebrated.

This will lead us into Chapter Six, which will take up the political implications of plurality and the relationship of Arendt’s dissertation to her mature political thought in *The Human Condition*. More interestingly, I will show how she uses theoretical resources first discovered in her dissertation on Augustine *against* Augustine’s love of eternity and *for* the love of the world.

The purpose of this present chapter is to show the roots of Arendt’s concept of plurality in her dissertation in order to be able to demonstrate how her interest in the relevance of the other persisted, both in framing her inquiry into the chief elements of totalitarianism and in providing the impetus for her own political theory. But first, we must explain what Arendt means by “plurality,” and I must also make clear what I mean when I argue that Arendt’s dissertation as well as *Origins* should be read as sustained meditations on plurality, indeed well before she specifically articulated the term.

3.1 What is Plurality?

Margaret Canovan identifies plurality as “the fundamental feature” of Arendt’s thought. Canovan writes:

> In contrast to more or less “existentialist” early twentieth-century thinkers who wrote about the claims of “the individual,” Arendt’s central point is the obvious though neglected one that human
affairs go on among a multiplicity of individuals who are all
distinct and who are constantly replacing their predecessors.
(Canovan 1992, 132)

For Arendt, as Canovan rightly states, “the very starting point of politics is that we are
plural beings” (Canovan 1992, 226). In The Human Condition, Arendt describes plurality
as “specifically the condition—not only the conditio sine qua non, but the conditio per
quam—of all political life” (Arendt 1998, 7). As we will see, action, as political deeds and
political speech performed in the public sphere, would be neither possible nor necessary
were it not for the human condition of plurality.

It is easiest to identify what Arendt means by plurality by looking to The Human
Condition, because it is where Arendt first defines it explicitly.51 As Arendt defines it
most simply in The Human Condition, plurality is “the fact that men, not Man, live on
earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt 1998, 7). This idea, she says, is implicit in the
Judeo-Christian creation story: “Male and female he created them” (Arendt’s emphasis;
Arendt 1998, 8). It is also implicit in the Roman usage of the Latin terms “to live” and “to
die,” which were synonyms for “to be among men” (inter homines esse) and “to cease
to be among men” (Arendt 1998, 7-8).

Plurality entails the basic human condition wherein a multitude of human beings
together live on the earth and together dwell in a human-made world. But it means

51Although, of course, I am arguing that the idea of plurality, as a significant theme, appears long
before in her 1929 dissertation. Indeed, it is the thematic thread running through and connecting her
analysis of both the origins of totalitarianism and the phenomenon of totalitarianism itself, and it can also
be found in her essays before the war.
more than the simple fact that human beings are born into a world that already is and will continue to be inhabited by others. Plurality means that each human being born into this world, like every other, is a completely unique individual. For Arendt, it does not necessarily follow from plurality that human beings are by nature zōon politikon, but rather she means something more basic—that any human being born into the world finds himself among other human beings, and that there is no one exactly like him or her to be found among them. Certainly, for Arendt, plurality is a condition of political life, but plurality is a human condition, which does not imply an unchanging human nature. In fact, it is because of plurality, because of the fact that each person is unique, that we cannot speak of a human nature.

According to Arendt, this human condition of plurality has a twofold character—of “equality” on the one hand, and “distinction” on the other (Arendt 1998, 175). If human beings were not equal, Arendt argues, “they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them” (Arendt 1998, 175). Human beings are equal in the sense that all human beings are born and will die (the conditions of natality and mortality) and have the same biological needs. Because of this basic equality, they are capable of building a common world that, in general, suits human needs and desires. They can also estimably predict the future needs and wants of coming generations and plan and build a world that will provide for the needs and desires of future generations of human beings. They are capable of developing a common language, and of communicating these similar needs and wants to each other and of understanding each
others’ desires. They use this common language to write histories and tell stories that can be comprehended by, and even compelling to, other human beings. All this would not be possible were it not for a basic human equality. This basic equality is, however, not the same as political equality, the need for which arises precisely out of distinctness one from the another (Arendt 1998, 215).

However, despite a basic equality, human beings are not “endlessly reproducible repetitions of the same model, whose nature or essence was the same for all and as predictable as the nature or essence of any other thing” (Arendt 1998, 8). The other side of the two-fold character of plurality is distinctness. In fact, human beings are equal in such a way that no one human being is alike, what Arendt identifies as a paradox of plurality (Arendt 1998, 176). “We are all the same,” she says, “that is, human in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (Arendt 1998, 8). Every single human being is a completely irreplaceable, irreplicable, unique individual. “Each human being,” Arendt writes, is “distinguished from any other who is, was, or ever will be” (Arendt 1998, 175).

According to Arendt, because every human being is unique; he or she is free in the sense that they can do something new, something that has not ever been done before, or even imagined before, by any other human being. Each human person born into the world is distinctive, each unlike any other, and therefore capable of

52 As Arendt notes in Origins of Totalitarianism, “history is enacted by men and therefore can be understood by men” (Arendt 2004, 19).
spontaneity, of introducing something new into human togetherness. Arendt describes it this way: “Because they are initium, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action” (Arendt 1998, 177). That each human being born into the world is a new person and therefore capable of performing new actions stems from what Arendt calls the human condition of “natality,” which we will discuss in more detail below and in Chapter Six.

For Arendt, human uniqueness and distinctiveness also means that each and every human being will have his or her own unique perspective on “reality.” If this was not true, she says, then human beings would not need language at all in order to make themselves understood to one another. Grunts and gestures meant to communicate absolutely identical needs would be enough. Also important for Arendt, human beings are the only beings capable of communicating this specific uniqueness to each other, of communicating not what, but who they are: “only man can communicate himself and not merely something” (Arendt 1998, 178). For Arendt, a life no longer lived among men, where one no longer needs or is allowed to express himself to others through new and unique words and deeds, has ceased to be a human life at all. We will pursue this idea further in the next chapters when we discuss totalitarianism. This is what Arendt means when she specifically uses the term “plurality,” but her interest in plurality is not in merely acknowledging it; that would of course be rather insignificant. Rather, the interest this spanned her lifetime was a much broader, more important, concern with the meaning and significance of human plurality.
When I argue that Arendt’s interest in human plurality began in the dissertation, I mean to say that she was, from her very first work, concerned with the “relevance” of the fact that men and not Man inhabit the earth. The questions that clearly matter the most to her in her dissertation are those regarding human togetherness; the question of the nature of this togetherness (equality and distinction), if there is meaning to be derived from the fact that I find myself with my fellow human beings who are also unique individuals; and what responsibilities or duties this being with others might entail. From her initial work on Augustine through to her considerations on human judgment in *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt was always fascinated by and concerned with the meaning and the implications of the human condition of being with others, with, as she says in her 1948 essay on existential philosophy: “the shared life of human beings inhabiting a world common to them all” (Arendt 1994, 186).

This being so, when I discuss Arendt’s “persistent concern with plurality,” I will mean all of her considerations regarding the nature of this basic human condition, all of her reflections as to its significance, and then later, her articulation of plurality’s political implications. These questions and meditations on the phenomenon of plurality, the fact that we find ourselves among men, include: In what ways are human beings equal and in what ways are they unique? How do completely unique and singular individuals relate to one another, build together a shared world, and act in concert? Why do they do so, and what are the effects and implications of these relations and joint endeavors? What are the different manners out of which (love? respect?) human beings relate to one to another, and are distinctions between these different attitudes important? What is the
basis or foundation of a particular human community, be it religious, national, or political? What is the tie (the *inter se*) that joins men together in one of these communities, and what is the significance of belonging to one? Are there responsibilities we have towards this shared human world in which we find ourselves, and, if so, how do we judge what those responsibilities are?

These are the questions that captured Arendt’s imagination throughout her entire lifetime. All of these questions concern the human condition of plurality. All of these questions can be found in one way or another in her dissertation, albeit some in a more nascent form. And, as we shall see in the coming chapters, Arendt has something of great importance to contribute in response to each of these questions.

3.2 Arendt’s Guiding Question

Even though she did not use the term until much later, as an investigation into the “relevance of the other” in the thought of Augustine, we can consider Arendt’s entire dissertation as a reflection on the meaning and significance of human plurality in the broader sense as I have described it above. I will begin by discussing the guiding question of her dissertation and then interpret each section of the dissertation in turn from the perspective of her concern for the relevance of the other and human plurality. This will allow me to then show, in the coming chapters, the continuity between Arendt’s questions and considerations on the nature and significance of human plurality in the dissertation and in her later works.
As noted previously, in her dissertation Arendt uses the terms *der Anderer* (the other) and *der Nachbar/der Nächste* (the neighbor) interchangeably. According to Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine, “the neighbor” does not mean someone who is necessarily of special relation to me or someone with whom I am specifically linked. In an original footnote that she later added to the body of the text in her revisions, Arendt says that whenever Augustine asks the question, who is my neighbor, he always answers “every man” (*Omnis homo*) (Arendt 1996, 43). She argues in her dissertation that, for Augustine, I cannot choose my neighbor. Rather my neighbor is every other human being. This means that when Arendt considers the relevance of the neighbor and neighbor-love in the thought of Augustine, she is asking a broader question—a question after the relevance of all other persons as they appear in the world, and not merely a question after the nature of brotherly love within the confines of the Christian community. In other words, in the dissertation she is asking after the relevance of the fact that man does not find himself alone in the world, but is already together with other men. Her dissertation is an inquiry into this human condition. It also questions the nature of the ties that connect us to others, as well as the nature of our responsibilities to others. It is, in fact, an inquiry after the significance of human plurality in the thought of Augustine.

Arendt begins her dissertation by delineating the aim and purpose of her project on Augustine. Her research question, she says, is: what is the relevance of the other (*Relevanz des Anderen*)? (Arendt 2003, 24). She makes it quite clear from the outset of her dissertation that this question is indeed her own and not Augustine’s. It is a single
question of the author (\textit{eine einheitliche Frage der Verfasserin}) that serves to provide unity to her considerations of Augustine on love in the three different contexts in which his varying philosophies of love appear. Pursuing an answer to her question regarding the relevance of the other in the thought of Augustine is the principle concern and primary aim of her dissertation. “The several parts of this essay,” she writes, “are linked only by the question after the other human being’s relevance (\textit{Relevanz des Anderen})—a relevance which to Augustine was a matter of course” (Copy A 242; Arendt 2003, 24). The question of the other’s relevance is Arendt’s own and not Augustine’s because, as Arendt says, Augustine simply took for granted both the relevance of the other and the central Christian command to love thy neighbor as thyself.

In addition, she says that Augustine did not recognize the inconsistencies among his varying philosophies of love. Even so, she says, her unifying question is not an attempt “to yoke Augustine to a consistency unknown to him,” but rather to interpret “seemingly heterogeneous statements and trains of thought in the direction of a common base” (Copy A 243; Arendt 2003, 24). This “common base,” as Arendt explicitly states, is always “the meaning and import of neighborly love in particular” (Copy A, 241; Arendt 2003, 24). We have seen that Arendt investigates three different contexts in Augustine’s thought in which, she says, “the problem of love (\textit{Liebesproblem}) plays a decisive role” (Copy A, 241; Arendt 2003, 24). The “problem” of the relevance of the other and the possibility of neighbor-love is a problem not for Augustine, but for Arendt (Arendt 2003, 23). This problem, as Arendt sees it, is that although Augustine’s “every perception, his every remark about love, refers at least in part to this neighborly love,” it
nevertheless remains impossible to see how the other, in his concrete worldly existence, can be at all relevant to one who has become “estranged from the world and its desires” (Copy A, 241-2; Arendt 2003, 24). How can man, Arendt asks, “isolated from all things mundane,” be “at all interested in his neighbor”? (Copy A, 248; Arendt 2003, 28). The problem, as Arendt sees it, is that we are commanded to love others who, according to Augustine’s schema, can have no relevance for us.

In her introduction, Arendt also explains why she considers love of God and love of self first. It is only because, she says, for Augustine these loves are prior to love of neighbor. If one is to love his neighbor rightly, he must first know what it means to love God and himself (“love thy neighbor as thyself”). However, although these considerations appear first, Arendt makes it clear they are preparatory considerations and are secondary to her own chief interest and concern with the relevance of the other and with the possibility of neighbor-love. It is this singular concern which provides unity to her analysis.

Because Augustine was not aware of his own inconsistencies, and because he took the central Christian command to love thy neighbor as thyself for granted, it is Arendt’s single question after the relevance of the other—a question she pursues with dogged determination—that serves to unify and give direction to her investigation into Augustine’s philosophy of love. It is also worth noting that there were many other possible research questions that might have animated a former student of Heidegger who set out to study Augustine. This is evidenced by the dissertation itself where Arendt considers the role of mortality in prompting Augustine’s quaestio and also interprets
Augustine on the question of Being. But while these considerations do figure prominently in the dissertation, it is not these considerations with which she is chiefly concerned or which motivate her study of Augustine. Rather, we see her troubled by the isolation from the shared human world Augustine’s *quaestio* entails. Already in the dissertation, we can see Arendt breaking away from Heidegger’s preoccupation with the Self and charting a new course of her own. A quote from “What is Existential Philosophy?” (1948) is helpful in making this point. Arendt writes:

> Our fellow-men are not (as in Heidegger) an element of existence that is structurally necessary but at the same time an impediment to the Being of Self. Just the contrary: Existence can develop only in the shared life of human beings inhabiting a given world common to them all. (Arendt 1994, 186)

In asking after the significance of the other in a concrete, given world in her dissertation, Arendt has already broken with Heidegger’s preoccupation with, what she calls in this essay, “the phantom of Self” (Arendt 1994, 186). In Part I and especially in Part II of her dissertation, Arendt represents Augustine as also being preoccupied with the singular discovery of an authentic self (the search after the source of my being is discovered in the Being of God) against the forgetfulness and dispersion of *habitus*, or what Heidegger might describe as against the everydayness of the “they” in the public world.

In this way, we can view Arendt’s evident dissatisfaction with the Augustinian obsession with the question after Being at the expense of being with others in the world as an expression of her dissatisfaction with Heidegger’s own approach. This is something that Scott and Stark also point out in their interpretive essay, arguing that the dissertation can be read as “an extended, but critical, encounter with Heidegger.”

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(Arendt 1996, 173). As we will see in Chapter Six, for Arendt, being with others in the world is not an impediment to the discovery of an authentic self, but quite the opposite. The disclosure of the unique “who” requires the presence of others in the public world.53

Obviously, much more could be said about the relation between Heidegger’s philosophy and Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine in her dissertation, but that is another project. The primary point I wish to make here is that Arendt’s concern for the relevance of the other in the shared human world is not Augustine’s; nor is it Heidegger’s. It is Arendt’s own. The question after the relevance of the other, as a question after the significance of human plurality in the world, is the question Arendt chose as her first original contribution to distinguish herself as an independent scholar. It was a question that would remain with her throughout her life and that would

53 Dana Villa is extremely helpful in explaining this break from Heidegger. He writes:

Eschewing Heidegger’s residual subjectivism and his philosopher’s distaste for the realm of human affairs, Arendt transforms his distinction by spatializing or externalizing it. Authentic disclosedness is identified with a particular worldly activity—political action—and this activity is seen as having a “proper location in the world,” namely the public sphere. Arendt’s conviction that each human activity has its “proper place” means that her hierarchy of human activities takes the form of a phenomenological topography of the \textit{vita activa}. The ironic and supremely un-Heideggerian result is that authentic disclosedness is “localized” or domiciled in a realm of opinion and talk. As we have seen, Heidegger views this realm as irredeemably “fallen,” and this precipitates his turn to the self (\textit{Selbst}). Arendt, free of the philosophical prejudice against the realm of human affairs that motivates this retreat, sees Heidegger’s strategy as futile and self-deluding. She opposes all romanticism, particularly the “politics of authenticity” invented by Rousseau. Arendt combats the modern “flight from the world to the self” by asserting that individuation occurs in the context of plurality, through the performance of action in a “theatrical” public space. Nothing could be further from the Heideggerian identification of individuation with being-toward-death. (Villa 1996, 140)

Again, more will be said in regard to the political implications of plurality in Chapter Six.
become a much more concrete question of immediate concern after her encounter with totalitarianism.

As Arendt says in her introduction, her approach in the dissertation is not an “absolute critique from some fixed philosophical or theoretical standpoint”; rather her approach in the dissertation is an interpretive one (Arendt 2003, 23). This means, she says, that she intends to make explicit what Augustine himself merely implied. It is an analysis that endeavors “to pierce the very recesses not clarified anymore by Augustine himself” (Copy A, 243; Arendt 2003, 24).

For Arendt, Augustine’s work provides great possibilities to recover resources and draw on insights pursuant to the interpretative framework of the relevance of the other. The varying sources, both classical and Christian, upon which Augustine draws, as well as the different contexts in which love appears, Arendt says, provide for the “particular abundance and fascination” of Augustine’s work (Copy A, 243; Arendt 2003, 24). For Arendt, because Augustine was first and always remained a philosopher, his work provides insights not merely into the nature of Christian community, but into the human condition itself (Copy A, 244; Arendt 2003, 25). “What this means to interpretation,” she says, “is possibility” (Copy A, 247; Arendt 2003, 27).

Arendt also says that her dissertation does not aim to solve the contradictions present in Augustine’s thought, but rather to allow them to appear: “The illumination of incongruities is here not tantamount to the solution of problems…. We must let the contradictions stand as what they are, make them understood as contradictions, and grasp what lies underneath” (Copy A, 248; Arendt 2003, 28). Arendt’s approach in the
dissertation is to demonstrate theoretical contradictions present within Augustine’s thought, but also to open up possibilities within his thought that he himself was not aware of. Her approach follows in the longer German philosophical tradition of *Kritik*, in the sense that she is uncovering contradictions in Augustine’s thought that may not be immediately apparent, while at the same time also opening up and retrieving from Augustine theoretical resources which can then be reclaimed and reappropriated. In this way, she also follows Heidegger’s approach to the Western philosophical tradition insofar as his self-described “dismantling” of metaphysics aimed to open up possibilities that had been covered over by centuries of tradition and to lay bare the primordial meanings that lay hidden underneath.

What we see in the dissertation is that Arendt interprets Augustine for her own purposes, in order to pursue and develop a question that, as I have already maintained, is not Augustine’s and not Heidegger’s, but is decidedly her own. This is why Arendt makes a deliberate decision to ignore the development in Augustine’s thinking on love, which she acknowledges is clear and demonstrable (Copy A, 241; Arendt 2003, 24). Ultimately, she is not concerned with being true to Augustine, but rather with pursuing her own question and uncovering resources for her own project—a question after the relevance of being with others or, to put it in other terms, a concern for the significance

54 I owe this insight into German critique to a lecture given by Wendy Brown at U.C. Berkeley in the fall of 2011.

of human plurality. We will see that Arendt draws on the possibilities and the “particular abundance” of Augustine’s thought, as she conveys it in her dissertation, to guide both the direction and development of her later political theory. Now that we have discussed Arendt’s guiding question and her approach, we turn to look at her considerations concerning human plurality in each section of the dissertation.

3.3 Love as Desire

What I am most concerned with in the section that follows is explaining Arendt’s conclusions regarding the relevance of the other in the context of love as desire (appetitus). I will also point out Arendt’s interest in love as the tie that unites the lover with the beloved, as well as in human equality and in human uniqueness in order to begin to demonstrate that her concern for human plurality originated in the dissertation.

We have already seen that love as desire aims at “enjoying” (frui) the object of desire. According to this understanding of love, desire ends and enjoyment begins when the object of desire is possessed entirely by the desirer. But since objects in the world can be lost against our will, desire for worldly goods necessarily turns into fear. The only good, according to Augustine, that can satisfy our desire, the only good we can have and hold onto without fearing its loss, is eternal life in God. Eternity is the summum bonum, the only good that should be desired for its own sake, while all other goods are for the sake of this highest good alone.
It is from this perspective that our attitude towards our self and to the other are determined. Arendt finds that if we view the other from this perspective, the other is then regarded as any other object in the world ought to be, as a mere thing that is to be used (uti) for the sake of a future higher good that lies outside of space and time. This has the effect, Arendt argues in Part I, of canceling any original relevance the other might have held to the desirer. Furthermore, if love is understood as desire, since I am not permitted to desire my neighbor for his own sake, then love of neighbor thus understood actually becomes impossible in this context. Arendt’s dissatisfaction with the conclusion she reaches in Part I then leads her to search out the relevance of the other in yet another context.

Arendt’s interest in the tie, or the “in-between,” that can serve to both connect and separate plural men, began in this very first part of her dissertation. As I will show, it will be pursued by Arendt in Origins (she argues there that totalitarianism seeks to destroy it), and it figures prominently in The Human Condition (as the public sphere). Here we see Arendt interested in whether or not love as desire in particular can be the “in-between” that unites one human being to another, and she ultimately concludes it cannot.

In the context of love as desire Arendt describes love as the in-between (inter se) that constitutes the relationship between the lover and the beloved. Love is always directed towards some good, and is a combination of “aiming at” and “referring back to” (Copy A, 250; Arendt 2003, 29). In this way, love creates a relationship between the individual and the desired object, transforming the former into a lover and the latter
into the beloved. Arendt says that *caritas* mediates between (*vermittelt zwischen*) man and God in the same way that *cupiditas* mediates between man and the world (Arendt 2003, 43). The relationship established by desire is described by Arendt as *Zugehörigkeit*, which denotes more than just a relationship, but a belonging-to. For Augustine, she says, when you love a good you become “bound” (*gebunden*) to it (Arendt 2003, 30). In the original dissertation, Arendt references Augustine’s *De Trinitate*: “What else is love except a kind of life that binds, or seeks to bind, together some two things, namely the lover and the beloved?” (Arendt 1996, 18; Arendt 2003, 36). One can either belong and be bound to eternity in *caritas* or to the world in *cupiditas*.

Later we will see Arendt’s interest in the in-between (*inter se*) reappear in her analysis not only of totalitarianism, but also in her preparatory analyses of anti-Semitism and imperialism, and then in *The Human Condition* in her articulation of the public sphere that both relates and separates plural men. But, this interest in the intermediary between plural men, so important for understanding Arendt’s political theory, first began here in her dissertation.

We have already learned that it is because man is isolated that his desire is aroused in the first place. Man is isolated because, unlike God, he is not the source of his own good (*se ipso bono beatus*), but is separated from what will make him happy (Arendt 2003, 44). Man, Arendt explains in her revisions, “is seen by Augustine in his isolation as separated from things as well as from persons” (Arendt 1996, 18). It is this separation that he cannot bear which drives man to break out of his isolation by means
of love. The desire is a longing to be-with (Sein-bei) the beloved (Arendt 2003, 36). For Augustine, this longing to be-with my beloved can only be satisfied by the total possession of the beloved. Only in the calm (quies) of an undisturbed having and holding am I able to truly “enjoy” (frui) my beloved, and happiness comes not in loving but in enjoying (this calm described here is what Arendt will later refer to as the vita contemplatīva in The Human Condition). Only in possession, “when the gap between the lover and the beloved is closed,” does isolation really end and happiness begin (Copy A, 265). What I really desire is that the space between myself and my beloved be closed, and that my beloved permanently inhere to my being. Arendt explains further in her revisions:

Hence, for happiness, which is the reversal of isolation, more is required than mere belonging. Happiness is achieved only when the beloved becomes a permanently inherent element of one’s own being. Augustine indicates the closeness of lover and beloved by using the word inhaerere, which is usually translated as ‘clinging to’ and occurs chiefly as inhaerere Deo, “clinging to God.” (Arendt 1996, 19; Arendt 2003, 37)

In his desire, man cleaves so closely to the object of his desire that he actually becomes his beloved: “living in cupiditas, man himself becomes the world,” while in caritas man becomes eternal.

What we find, Arendt concludes, it that when love is understood as desire, love’s goal is actually the cessation of love itself in the calm having and holding of enjoyment. Arendt represents Augustinian desire as forming the in-between connecting the lover to the beloved, but as actually longing to close the gap in complete and total possession of the beloved. In Part I of her dissertation, Arendt emphasizes man’s isolation (Isoliertheit)
and his desire to break out of his isolation by belonging (zugehörig). Not only does Arendt’s interest in the “in-between” reappear as a significant theme in *Origins* and then *The Human Condition*, but in *Origins* we will also see the themes of both isolation and a desire to belong reappear as well. I will show where and how we see these themes and their significance for totalitarianism in the next chapters.

Man is described in Part I of Arendt’s dissertation as desperately wanting to break out of his isolation and to belong. He turns from one worldly good to the next searching for a permanent home in the world. We know that according to Augustine, desire for goods in the world can never be satisfied, regardless of what or who it is that we crave. In *cupiditas* I long for something outside of myself (extra me) which, by definition, I cannot have and hold without interruption (Arendt 2003, 37). If I belong to something outside myself, then I become enslaved to the fear of losing it.\(^{56}\) It is because, Arendt says in her revisions, “he can never close the gap between this outside and himself, [that] he is enslaved by it” (Arendt 1996, 20). If I desire something in the world, I can never calmly enjoy being-with my beloved because I am perpetually afraid that this something outside myself will be lost against my will. I become dependent on something or someone that I am powerless to control. This is why, for Augustine, my belonging to the world must be “canceled” (*aufgehoben*), and it can only be abrogated in *caritas* (Arendt 2003, 39). Because these relationships are governed by fear, I must

\(^{56}\) While Augustine wants us to reject our belonging to the world and our ties to the human *civitas* built by men, for Arendt, interestingly, there is only one “right” all men possess by nature, and that is, as we will see, actually *to belong* to a political community founded by men in the world.
cut the ties that bind me to anything that can be lost against my will, the tie to my worldly self, as well as to other persons in the world.

For Augustine, following the author of the *First Epistle of John*, perfect love casts out fear. Only when I desire what I cannot lose against my will can I be free from the constant anxiety that characterizes the uncertainty of life in this world. Only in severing my attachment to the things of this world am I able to be independent of the world and free from fear. Freedom is here understood as “freedom from” (*Freisein-von*) (Arendt 2003, 48). The world must become a desert to me and not a home. Arendt describes Augustine’s conception of freedom as an entirely negative one (Arendt 2003, 48).

This means that, from this perspective, one can find no meaning, only anxiety, in uniting myself together with others in a shared human community. In the next chapters, I will argue that in contrast to Augustine, Arendt affirms the independent meaning found in being with others and articulates a theory of freedom as *freedom-to*. Nevertheless, she maintains the limits of human ability to control human affairs, as well as its inherent unpredictability. This latter view does reflect an Augustinianism in its recognition of the fundamental uncertainty of the man-made world, as well as in its rejection of the belief that human beings are capable of controlling other persons absolutely or of building any and every kind of world they are able to imagine (which we see figure as “pride” in Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine in Part II).

As Arendt writes in a essay written in 1945 on *Christianity and Revolution*,

The insistence of the Christian doctrine on man’s limited condition was somehow enough of a philosophy to allow its adherents a very deep insight into the essential inhumanity of all those
modern attempts—psychological, technical, biological—to change man into the monster of a superman. (Arendt 1994, 154)

I will discuss this further below, and also in the next chapters when we consider totalitarianism and Arendt’s criticism of its belief that “everything is possible.” It will also be significant when, in Chapter Six, we examine the need for promise-making and the importance of forgiveness in human affairs—ideas that were both first developed in Parts II and III of her dissertation. At the same time, she wants to offer a political theory that posits the reclamation of the possibilities of action as opposed to the elevation of contemplation.

In caritas I desire something within, something that cannot be lost against my will. I desire that which is most my own, my eternal self. Interpreting a passage from the Confessions Book X, Arendt says that God, “is loved as that part of the inner man which consumes no time; love confers belonging, and in the love of God we belong to eternity” (Copy A, 270; Arendt 2003, 40). The eternal God is desired as the source of eternal life, which is the only good that can satisfy the human desire to be-with, and never fear to lose, my beloved. In desiring something within, that which is eternal in me, I am desiring a good that, unlike goods existing in the world, cannot be lost against my will, and which will actually be able to satisfy my craving. In eternity, there will no longer be any striving or fear, only enjoyment. When I enjoy my own eternal life, there will no longer be a gap between the lover and the beloved. Desire aims to annihilate the distance between lover and beloved, and that can only be achieved if I long for my eternal self.
In order that I may lay hold of eternal life, I must, as Augustine says in his *Homilies on the First Epistle of John*, “hold fast to the love of God” in this present life (Copy A, 270; Arendt 2003, 40). This “cleaving to God” (*inhaerere Deo*) is only achieved in denying my worldly self for the sake of eternity (Arendt 2003, 42). “The true ‘cleaving to God,’ is achieved in self-obliviousness” (Copy A, 273; Arendt 2003, 42). We remember that every desirer “forgets” himself over his beloved. In desiring the world, I forget my eternal self over the world, while in desiring eternity, I forget my own worldly self and find my true, eternal self (Copy A 272; Arendt 2003, 42). The right love of self is the desire for a future eternal self, and, insofar as our present, mortal self will certainly and inevitably be lost in death, self-denial actually turns into a hatred of this very worldly self (*odium sui*) (Arendt 2003, 40). I must transcend whatever I myself uniquely am: “He seeks and craves himself as a future being and does not love the I-myself he finds in earthly reality. In self-hatred and self-denial he hates and denies the present, pre-existing mortal I” (Copy A, 272; Arendt 2003, 43-44). The worldly self can have no independent meaning for a life lived in *caritas*, and no longer bears any relevance to me. We see that, in Arendt’s interpretation, Augustine is demanding a denial of whatever I am as a unique and distinct individual. In this context, the only significant and meaningful relationship one can have is to God as the eternal.

It is the future eternity, explains Arendt, which sets the standard for the rightly ordered love of self and also the rightly ordered love of other persons (Arendt 2003, 36). I love my neighbor as myself because my neighbor is my equal. “My neighbor’s place in the order is next to my own self. They occupy the same level” (Copy A, 285; Arendt 2003, 43-44).
My neighbor is my equal because, like me, he too can desire and enjoy eternity. In the dissertation, we see Arendt investigating the nature of human equality first here and then also in Parts II and III. Here, the other is my equal because he also is a desiring being and, like me, can find his desire satisfied only in eternal life. In Part II, we find that human equality is derived from a common divine origin—we are all creations of God. Finally, Arendt will explore equality as derived from an empirical context. We are equal because we are all descendants of Adam and share in a common worldly past. Arendt’s interest in human equality began here and will be explored further by her in *Origins* and in *The Human Condition* where she will draw on, but also depart from Augustine in certain respects. We have already seen the two-fold conception of plurality developed in Part I of the dissertation. Arendt argues that, for Augustine, we are equal as well as unique, but that we must transcend our individuality for the sake of equality in the enjoyment of eternal life.

Because the other is my equal, my attitude towards him must be the same as it is to myself, and we have already learned that I must deny myself for the sake of eternity. From this vantage point, the other can have no relevance in his concrete, worldly existence, but is relevant only insofar as he too can reject his worldly existence and desire eternal life as his good. I do not experience the other any longer as a “friend or an enemy,” as one for or against me, but only as one who can also desire and enjoy eternity. The result, as Arendt argues, is “the elimination of any original relationship with his neighbor” (Copy A, 284; Arendt 2003, 52).
We see in Part I, that love, if it is rightly directed in *caritas*, actually serves to cancel the other’s original relevance and break up the connections I once had to my fellow men. “The greatest difficulty this self-forgetfulness and complete denial of human existence raises for Augustine,” argues Arendt, “is that is makes the central Christian command to love one’s neighbor as oneself well nigh impossible” (Arendt 1996, 30). For how is it possible to love the neighbor I must also deny? This is why Arendt actually describes self-denial in this context as “pseudo-Christian,” because it denies the worldly self not for the sake of others (as one might expect from a Christian), but for the sake of my own eternal life and at the expense of loving others as they are the world (Copy A, 275; Arendt 1996, 30). We see here that Arendt is troubled by Augustine’s location of the proper object of desire in eternity (the elevation of the *vita contemplativa*), and by the implications it has for being with others in the world.

We know that Arendt is chiefly concerned with how Augustine’s understanding of the highest good, and the right kind of self-love it entails, affects our attitude towards the other. Since eternal life is the only proper correlate of desire, it does not make sense to desire another person in the world for his own sake. Another person cannot be the right object of desire because I can never truly possess another without the fear of losing him. To the extent that the ideal remains freedom from the fear of loss, I can no more depend on my neighbor than I can depend on myself. I can only view him with the same unconcerned objectivity with which I view my self and any other good in the world. I ought only to desire eternity for its own sake, because nothing and no one in this world can satisfy my desire.
If I cannot desire my neighbor, this means love cannot be the mediator, the *inter se*, that connects myself to another person. Interestingly, in Part I, Arendt says this is not the case for Saint Paul, for whom love is “the ‘bond of perfection,’ even on earth” (Copy A, 275; Arendt 2003, 44-5). For Saint Paul, she says, love is not desire, but an “expression of the attachment to God” (Copy A, 275; Arendt 2003, 45). She explains this further in her revisions: “The reason [for Saint Paul] that *caritas* is greater than faith and hope is precisely because *caritas* contains its own reward and will remain what it is in this life and the next” (Arendt 1996, 31). For Augustine, in contrast, love as desire is but a means to an end—the *summum bonum*. If there is a kind of love that can form the in-between connecting one person to another or men together in a human community, Arendt finds that it is not love understood as desire. Rather, the desire for eternity requires complete alienation from the world and everyone in it. However, her discussion of Saint Paul leaves open the possibility that love need not be only instrumental, but can be the bond uniting persons together in a community—a topic that will be considered in my final chapter.

Arendt explains that, for Augustine, neighbor-love is secondary to our own quest for the good that will bring us happiness, the highest good. Eternity, as the highest good, is the only good to be desired for its own sake (*propter se ipsum*) because it is the only good that can be enjoyed (*frui*) (Arendt 2003, 46). It is the only good that can lay desire to rest. All other goods are to be used (*uti*) for the sake of (*Um-Wollen/propter*) this supreme good (Arendt 2003, 46). Since only eternity can be enjoyed, then the neighbor, like my own I-self, becomes a mere thing to be “used” for the sake of eternity.
Love as desire, returning from eternity to regulate relations within the world, views the neighbor in terms of “for the sake of.” I cannot love my neighbor for his own sake, for who he is as a unique individual in the world, but only for the sake of eternity.

Arendt finds that this leaves us with a serious problem: “The attempt to deduce neighborly love from this absolute future is bound to founder on the uselessness of neighborly love to the craving one” (Copy A, 284-5; Arendt 2003, 51-3). In attempting to fit in love of neighbor after defining love as desire and eternal life as the only right object of desire, Augustine actually ends up changing his definition of love so much so that it ceases to be something most of us would consider to be love at all. What we find is that the definition of love has changed entirely to “well-regulated love.” As we saw in the previous chapter love of neighbor is no longer a desiring love which seeks a good for its own sake, but “love is here simply the objective conduct which the desiring love outlines for the man who, while existing in the world, lives in the absolute future” (Copy A, 283; Arendt 2003, 50). I view my neighbor with the same kind of unconcerned objectivity that I view all other goods in the world including myself: “this relationship concerns us only insofar as it is seen and ordered from the outside, from the standpoint of the highest good” (Copy A, 283-4; Arendt 2003, 51). With a rightly ordered love, I love the other no more and no less than he ought to be, not for his own sake, but “for the sake of,” and only because he too can enjoy eternity. This kind of “well-regulated love,” Arendt argues, may very well allow me to be free from a certain kind of fear that comes with attachment, but it also leaves me isolated from everything and everyone outside myself and in the world. In her revisions Arendt adds: “The justification for this
extraordinary enterprise can only lie in a deep dissatisfaction with what the world can give its lovers” (Arendt 1996, 19).

We see in Part I of Arendt’s dissertation the beginning of her interest in the in-between space that serves to both relate and separate plural men. We see this in her investigation into whether or not love, specifically understood in the Augustinian sense as desire, can be this in-between. She concludes that love cannot bind men together in an original relationship because another person is not the proper object of desire. I can never truly “enjoy” another, only eternal life. Furthermore, she finds that love actually aims to eliminate the space between the lover and the beloved so entirely that the lover actually inheres to his beloved. So even if men were united together by the bond of love, love as desire would draw them together so closely that each would lose his own unique individuality. Nevertheless, she keeps open the possibility for love as the bond by comparing Augustine to Saint Paul.

In considering the relevance of the other in the context of love as desire, Arendt has also come to two other conclusions. First, she finds that because the other is to be denied in the same way that, in caritas, I deny myself, this has the effect of breaking up any original relationships. She writes, “The result is precisely the elimination of any original relationship with his neighbor” (Copy A, 284; Arendt 2003, 52). I do not meet him in his concrete worldly reality and relation to me. Only one aspect of my neighbor is to be regarded as relevant and that is that he too can desire and enjoy eternity. This relates to the another result of understanding love in this way: “every member of the human species is equally near, that is, not everyone in his concrete uniqueness, but in
the sense that every man share the abstract quality of being human with all others” (Arendt 1996, 43). Love as desire denies the uniqueness of others, while at the same time it affirms their essential equality.

Second, Arendt finds that since my love for the other is determined by the highest good, this means I must love the other for the sake of eternity and not for his own sake. I view him objectively as just another thing in the world to be used for the sake of eternity. In her original dissertation, Arendt describes the “considerable difficulties” posed by a kind of love that relativizes all relationships I have with others in the world (Arendt 2003, 51, 53). In her revisions, Arendt uses stronger language, calling this relation to the other a “degradation of love” (Arendt 1996, 43). While this “for the sake of” might mean I am free from the fear of loss, Arendt finds that it leaves one living in caritas isolated from others and alienated from any worldly community. “Would it not then be better,” she asks in her revisions, “to love the world in cupiditas and be at home? Why should we make a desert of the world?” (Arendt 1996, 19). In her rhetorical question, we see her continuing frustration with Augustine’s approach.

We will return to the themes of the in-between, isolation, and belonging, when we examine Arendt’s analysis of the both the origins of totalitarianism and the phenomenon of totalitarianism itself in the next chapters. In Part I we see Arendt’s concern for the preservation of the uniqueness of every individual first appear in her critique of love as desire. She recognizes that denying the concrete uniqueness of my neighbor as he appears in the world serves to break up all social relations and human community. We also see here in Part I Arendt’s interest in the nature of human equality,
“my neighbor’s place in the order is next to myself” (Copy A, 285; Arendt 2003, 52).

Arendt has already begun her lifelong meditation on the meaning of being with others in the world and the development of the two-fold character of plurality. She pursues this interest in each part of the dissertation and in her later works.

In Part I, Arendt has also explained Augustine’s conception of freedom as freedom from action. In Chapter Six, we will examine how Arendt uses theoretical resources discovered in her dissertation to combat Augustine’s elevation of the *vita contemplativa* over the *vita activa*. Now we will turn to look at the relevance of the other in Part II of her dissertation and return to discuss the persistent interests we have already seen here in Part I, while at the same time pointing towards where we will find them reappear in *Origins* and *The Human Condition*.

3.4 Love as Return

In this next section, I will elucidate Arendt’s conclusions regarding the relevance of the other in the context of love as the return to Being as the source of my own being. Again, as in the previous section, I will point out where in Part II of the dissertation we find Arendt considering the nature and origin of human equality and human distinction, or what she will later identify as the two-fold character of plurality. In Part I, Arendt posited the idea of a man-made world when she explained that it was the lovers of the world that constituted the world and that this was what defined love as *cupiditas*:

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The world is constituted as an earthly world not only by the works of God, but by the “lovers of the world”—by men, and by that which men love. It is the love of the world which turns heaven and
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earth into the world as a changeable thing. In its flight from death, the craving for permanence clings to the very things sure to be lost in death. This love has the wrong object...Augustine’s term for this wrong, mundane love which clings to—and thus at the same time constitutes—the world is cupiditas. (Copy A, 258-261; Arendt 2003, 35-36)

But, though she introduces the concept of the man-made world in Part I, it is in Part II that she provides a more systematic treatment of what Augustine means by “the world.” In what follows, I will explain the meaning and import of “the world” as it appears in the dissertation so that we are in a better position to recognize how Arendt draws on the resources made available by her early examination of Augustine for her own conceptualization of the man-made world many years later in The Human Condition.

As I have already said previously, it is also in the dissertation where we see Arendt’s first investigation into the human condition of natality. We see the concept of natality appear in nascent form here in Part II of her dissertation. The capacity to begin something new, inherent in the human condition of natality, is one of Arendt’s most significant contributions to political theory. It is remarkable that a concept she articulated in 1958 appeared, in its basic theoretical form, in the 1929 dissertation. In the paragraphs below, I will also show where and how natality appears in its theoretical formulation. To sum up, in what follows we will again pursue plurality in terms of the relevance of the other, equality and distinction, but also the idea of the world and the beginnings of natality.
In Part II Arendt pursues the relevance of the other in the context of love as the return to the Creator who is the source of the creature’s being. More specifically, she is interested in what significance the other can have for one pursuing an isolated quest after the source of his own being. According to Arendt, in positing love as the return to the source, Augustine is asking after the being of each individual as an individual and not, as she says, after the being of man among men (Sein des Menschen unter Menschen) (Arendt 2003, 115). How then, she asks, can we arrive at the relevance of the other and love of neighbor?

Although she spends considerable time in Part II interpreting Augustine’s ontology in terms of Being as the source of beings, she is ultimately interested in the implications this ontology has for the meaning of human being with others in the concrete world. As we will see, however, this Augustinian ontology does have significant influence on Arendt’s formulation of the concept of natality, which will be pointed out below. In the context of love as return, Arendt finds that love depends upon the solitary quest for the source of one’s own being. In turn, the discovery of God as the source of my being, and the positive acceptance of the meaning of my being requires an assimilation to God that ends up leaving me isolated (isoliert) from others in the world. In the same way Arendt concludes that in the context of love as desire the other was relevant in only one aspect, because he too can enjoy eternal life; she also finds that here, when love is understood as the return to my source, the other is only relevant in that he too is a created being. Whereas in the former context I should love my neighbor only for the sake of the summum bonum, in this context I should love my neighbor only
as a creation of God. In both instances, the other’s original, worldly relevance has been canceled, and I remain isolated before God either as the source of my own happiness or as the source of my own being. In both Part I and Part II, Arendt represents Augustine as attempting to transcend human uniqueness and being with others in the world.

Here in the dissertation, we see that Arendt finds the resulting isolation from others in the world unsatisfactory. As we will see in the next chapters, it is her dissatisfaction that continues to motivate her inquiry into the significance of being with others. While the dissertation is a sustained meditation on the meaning of human plurality for Augustine, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is a sustained meditation on the meaning and significance of plurality in the modern era. In the former, she investigates plurality in a highly theoretical manner, but in *Origins* her considerations on the nature and significance of human plurality become not only concrete in the historical cases of anti-Semitism and imperialism, but urgent in the new phenomenon of totalitarianism. Later, in *The Human Condition* and elsewhere, she will argue against Augustine’s otherworldliness and for a being with others that affirms the meaning that arises out of men acting together in a shared world. Her political theory rejects what she sees as the dangers of isolated men and posits the power of men acting together in concert.

Arendt presents love in the context of the return to God as the result of the singular and solitary quest of man after the source of his own being. The questing search after the source of my own being begins with the solitary confrontation of my own mortality. It is the individual, faced with his own death, who is prompted to ask about his own “no more” and the “not yet.” It is the end of his being in the world that directs
him to inquire into the origin of his being. “Only because our life has an end—an end that is already given with its beginning—does the search for our own being require us to refer back” (Copy A, 307; Arendt 2003, 77). The question is who made me (qui fecit me)? (Arendt 2003, 59-60). It is a question not after the meaning of being with others, but after my own being. The discovery of God as the source of my being is also a solitary endeavor. It happens internally in memory where the past is re-presented to the mind’s eye. Here I discover the Creator, “who is in man only in so far as He manifests Himself in human memory” (Copy A, 290; Arendt 2003, 60). Because I am a being created by God, I am able to remember my own origin in God, and through memory I am able to discover God as the source of my own happiness. Arendt interprets both the quest and the discovery as an individual, solitary enterprise. We can easily see that it is difficult for Arendt to understand how there could be a relevance for the other in this context. In Part II, the solitude of this quest after the source of my own being is further emphasized because Arendt presents it as being in direct conflict with the joint constitution of the world by men. According to Augustine, this world must be transcended, though, as we will see, Arendt argues for its importance in the generation and preservation of meaning. Interestingly, she will use her investigations into the role of memory here in the dissertation to help her do so.

Arendt presents Augustine’s understanding of “the world” as a world jointly constituted by men out of and against the background of the fabrica Dei. The fabrica Dei is what Augustine means by the heavens and the earth created by God—what we might describe as all that is naturally given to man. The fabrica Dei has the character of
simultaneity in the sense that while the individual parts appear and disappear, the harmony of the whole remains. The *fabrica Dei* consists of the endless cycle of life. In this way, from the perspective of human beings, the universe has the appearance of immortality. It is against this background and on the grounds of the *fabrica Dei*, that men found the world. Unlike God who created the world *ex nihilo*, men do not create out of nothing, but *ex aliquo*—out of something (Arendt 2003, 71). Man is not a creator, but a fabricator. He builds the world out of the preexisting material of the *fabrica Dei*. The verb Arendt relies on to describe this activity is *fabricare*, meaning to build or construct. (Arendt 2003, 69-70). This verb is, of course, closely related to the term Arendt uses to describe man as a builder of durable objects in *The Human Condition*: *homo faber*. *Homo faber*, she says, “fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice,” which she contrasts with the “circle of biological movement” (Arendt 1998, 136, 137). We will look more closely at the relationship between the dissertation and man as a builder of the world in *The Human Condition* in Chapter Six. When Augustine refers to “the world,” he is referring both to the world built by men and to the men who have built it. This world is not build by one man alone, but is a world jointly constituted by men who seek to make for themselves, together, a home. They found a “*patria*” or a home country that provides both a sense of belonging and a feeling of stability (Copy A, 320; Arendt 2003, 87). We see in Part I and Part II that it is out of a desire to belong and out of a desire for permanence that men found the world together. The constitution of the world is a joint enterprise. The world cannot be constructed by one person. But, the love for the world that motivates
its constitution is grounded in the desire of each individual person to belong and to build something lasting—to something that will give his life meaning.

We see also that Arendt describes men as being born into a world that has already been founded by men who have come before him, and so, for Augustine, it is natural for him to feel at home in the world and to love it. “Since he is born into the world, however, and thus of the world, this pre-existing world is for him a present, accessible one” (Copy A, 302; Arendt 2003, 72). “For the world is already there, and to love it is natural” (Copy A, 314; Arendt 2003, 82). At the same time, because each human being appears in the world as a new person, in loving the world, he constitutes the world anew (neu konstituiert) (Copy A, 319; Arendt 2003, 87). He can build or do something new that would add to the human world and would reaffirm his place in the world and his feeling at home there. It is by our actions in the world that the world becomes a historical world: “By our will we share in events in the world” (Copy A, 299; Arendt 2003, 69). And it is the judgments of others that determines who we are in the world. The human made world has its own history, as well as its own judgments and determinations. It is this historical world, Arendt says, that Augustine calls the saeculum (Arendt 2003, 73-74). Thus, we have seen that “the world,” for Arendt’s Augustine, is the historical world; it is a world built jointly by men out of a desire to belong and to be at home with others in a world that provides stability and meaning. The world refers both to the world built by men and the place where human affairs take place, but also to those who love the world and therefore belong to it. It is to this world that we first look to determine who we are. It is precisely this world, however, and our worldly self,
that, for Augustine, must be transcended. We will come back again to this world concept in Chapter Six, where we will study *The Human Condition*. There I will argue that Arendt relies on the conceptualization of “the world” as found in her dissertation to formulate her own concept, but that she maintains that we must take responsibility for this world and comport ourselves towards this world in a way that Augustine would undoubtedly describe as *cupiditas*.

In searching after his own being, we have seen that man mistakes his worldly past for the origin of his being thereby covering up his true origin in God. As Arendt explains it, man, having been born into the world, easily mistakes the world for the source of his being and looks to the world first rather than to God for immortality (what Augustine calls *cupiditas*) This is the result of man’s own sinful nature. Though tied to the world by habit, one is recalled from the world by the voice of conscience—an individual and internal process. Conscience is the voice of God commanding from within what the law commands from without. In fact, Arendt tells us that conscience speaks *against* the voices of others in the world who tell us who we are: “The world and its judgments crumble before this inner testimony” (Copy A, 323; Arendt 2003, 91).

In the context of love as return, Arendt presents others in the world as an obstacle to be overcome. Arendt tells us that, for Augustine, despite the sayings and judgments of others, no “togetherness” can lessen the burdens of conscience, presenting being with others as getting in the way of the acceptance of true being. In conscience, each man finds himself alone before God. In this way, Arendt says, we encounter in Augustine a much more personal God than God as the Supreme Being, a
God who speaks directly to the individual. In listening to the voice of conscience, I learn that my love of the world, and my joint constitution of it with others, is actually sinful pride. In constituting the world, I have imagined myself a creator and placed myself in the position of God (interestingly, this is a critique Arendt lodges against totalitarian ideologies, as I will show in the next two chapters). In my pride, I have looked to the world and not to God for immortality. Now I must humble myself before God. It takes an act of grace to enable me to positively take up the return to God as the source of my being.

Seen in this context, grace is viewed as a grant of power bestowed by God on the individual, rather than grace as God revealing Himself in history to all of mankind. This latter view of grace appears in Part III. In accepting God’s grace, I have been recreated; I am a now a novo creatura, and I return from the discovery of my source to see the world and myself with new eyes. For Augustine, in this context, it is the individual choice for God and against the world that is caritas. We can see that Arendt interprets both the search and the discovery as an entirely solitary affair taking place within the individual mind. The quest is prompted by concern over my own mortality; the question is after the “whence” of my own being, and the discovery happens within my own memory. Only by God speaking directly to me am I able to recognize my love of the world as sinful. And only by the gift of God’s grace to me as an individual am I able to turn my own “I will” into “I can.” In this context, others in the world can only get in the way of the return to the source of me being.
In returning to God as the source of my being, I recognize the structure of my being as “createdness” (Kreatürlichkeit), and I acknowledge the true meaning of my being as a created being (Arendt 2003, 61). In Part I, Arendt posited desire as the essential structure of the being of human beings. In Part II, it is no longer desire but createdness. This is where we see the theoretical resources Arendt will draw on for her later formulation of natality, of man as initium, as capable of beginning something new by virtue of birth. It is man’s beginning, Arendt says, and not the end that is determinative for man’s existence both here on earth and for eternity. While God is eternal, always was, is, and will be, man has a distinct beginning as a creation of God. Though man has the possibility of laying hold of eternal life, he nevertheless has an origin in God, while God has always been. He has no beginning (Er hat keinen Anfang) (Arendt 2003, 76).

Also unlike the immutable God, man is mutable, he is constantly changing. While God is the Supreme Being, the mode of human existence is becoming. Arendt writes: “whatever the creature is it had first to become. The structure of its being is genesis (fieri) and change (mutari)...the mutability of the creature is its specific mode of being” (Copy A, 291; Arendt 2003, 62). And also: “It’s being is determined by its origin (fieri)—it becomes, it has a beginning. Yet thereby it is already subjected to mutability; it has not always been what it is, but has only become so” (Copy A, 293; Arendt 2003, 64).

Having a beginning means that human beings are themselves beginners. We see that birth is itself the first beginning. It marks the appearance of a new human being in the world. As this human being is mutable, he is always changing. This means that with
each change, the person has become someone new that he was not before. This is why each human life is characterized by “the uniqueness and irreversibility of its course from birth to death” (Copy A, 297; 2 Arendt 2003, 68). Arendt indicates that the structure of genesis and change also means that human beings are capable of doing something new when she writes that human beings are “always createdness acting (verhalten) in some way or another” (Copy A, 292; Arendt 2003, 62).

In another way, Arendt demonstrates that men are beginners. She writes that man was created after the fabrica Dei. He has his beginning in God. But, the saeculum, she says, was initiated (initium) by man (Arendt 2003, 74). She also argues that in each individual case, men constitute the world anew by their actions. Man has his origin in God and the world has its origin in man. The world has its beginning in the founding act of men jointly constituting the world, and each individual can perform a new action in this world.

Regardless of belief in a creator God, according to Arendt, to have an origin, a beginning, is “a constitutive factor of human existence” and is “thus indifferent, to caritas and cupiditas” (Copy A, 292; Arendt 2003, 63). All human beings have a “not yet.” And regardless of belief in eternal life, according to Arendt, “The ‘not yet’ of life is not nothing, but the very source which determines life in the positiveness of its being...what it conveys is independent of the absolute ‘no more’ of death” (Copy A, 307; Arendt 2003, 76). It is the “not yet” of life, Arendt says, that “determines life in the positiveness of its being,” and not the “no more” (Copy A, 307; Arendt 2003, 76). “Human life,” she says, “owes its positive side to its past alone” (Copy A, 308; Arendt
2003, 78). Here in Part II, we already see Arendt formulating natality, as against mortality, as what is determinative for being with others in the world. It is determinative even outside of its Christian context of God as the origin of man’s being.

To have a beginning and to be a beginner is constitutive for human existence in this world. But, of course, for Augustine reconnecting to our origin is what guarantees the possibility of returning to our source after death: “This link with its own ‘not yet’ assures it of the eternity of its ‘whence’” (Copy A, 306; Arendt 2003, 76). In fact it is imperative that man return to his source lest his death mark his eternal alienation from God. It is only because our origin lies with God that we are able to return to God. Thus we see that having a beginning, an origin, is determinative both for worldly and for eternal existence. It is also noteworthy that for Augustine, we can be re-born. We can actually become a *novo creatura* by reconnecting to our origin. For Augustine, human beings have the possibility of the most radical new beginning that could be imagined in this world—to actually be re-born as a new creation. For Augustine, though, the return to God requires the transcendence of our becoming so that we can arrive at pure Being. It is our mutability that must be shed for the sake of eternal immutability. We see here in Part II that Arendt is thinking through the possibilities made available to her by reconsidering man in terms of natality and not in terms of mortality. Though while Augustine argues that the possibility of worldly beginnings must be cast aside for the sake of eternal salvation, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt will use religious terms to describe the possibility of beginning something new as the “miracle that saves the world” (Arendt 1998, 247).
The meaning of my earthly life is to return to the source of my being who is immutable Being. Having come from the eternal, I am destined to return to the eternal. Love of God in this context is the return to God who is summe esse. This love of God requires a simultaneous rejection of whatever, in my pride, I have made in the world, including whatever I have made of myself. I deny the world as the source of my being and love only what God has made in me and not whatever I have made of myself. Here we find that the right kind of self love is loving only that in us which God has created and hating whatever we have made of ourselves in the world. The language Arendt references from Augustine’s Tractates on the Gospel of John is quite strong. We are to love as God loves and “hate” as God hates. What God loves in us is what He himself has created, and what He hates in us is what we have made of ourselves. Therefore, when we love God, we love as God loves by hating our worldly self (Copy A, 331; Arendt 2003, 99). Here again, Arendt says, we are faced with a serious problem. If we are commanded to love thy neighbor as thyself, then how do we love a neighbor in the world that we must, at the same time, “hate” in his worldliness?

In loving God, man submits himself to God’s law which demands that he “be as God” (Arendt 2003, 85). The demand to be as God requires that man ascend to eternal Being by transcending the “becoming” inherent in createdness. Insofar as I am to return to immutable, eternal Being, and be as God, I must shed the mutability that characterizes temporal existence. I must “cast off” (abicere me) whatever distinguishes me as a unique individual, and transcend the distinctness that makes me, as Arendt will later describe it, a “plural” individual. I am able to transcend my “creatureliness”
(Kreatürlichkeit) and participate in eternity by reaching backwards to my origin in memory and forwards to eternity in expectation (Arendt 2003, 45). According to Arendt, this means

life’s factual course ceases to be the singular, invariable, and irreversible one of being toward non-being...the concrete course of life is no longer important...the interchangeability of life’s beginning and end lets life itself appear as no more than a mere distance stripped of any qualitative import. (Copy A, 313; Arendt 2003, 81-2).

Only in denying our temporal being in the world can we draw closer to God who is eternal Being. The world again, as we saw in Part I, has again become a desert to me and not a home.

Since Arendt’s chief concern is the relevance of the other, after interpreting Augustinian ontology, she says that her primary question is the following: “how does the self-denying creature meet the other (der Nächste)—and what, in this encounter, in the other’s role?” (Copy A, 340; Arendt 2003, 99-100). If, in the return to God as the source of being, one has to deny his own being in the world, including being with others, how is the other relevant, and what does loving the neighbor look like? As she did in the final chapter of Part I, in Chapter III of Part II, “Dilectio Proximi,” Arendt turns to directly address this question

Arendt explains that now that I have denied my own being in the world, the worldly being of the other can also have no significance for me: “Renouncing itself, it renounces all worldly relations as well” (Copy A, 341; Arendt 2003, 100). The other’s relevance is only that he too is a creation of God. What the other once was to me in the
world is no longer of any significance in light of this common source. As she concluded in Part I, Arendt again says it does not matter whether the other was understood to be a “friend or an enemy,” meaning that the worldly communities founded by men can have no import for one who has set his sights on eternity. In denying the world for the sake of eternity, I deny whatever “mutual ties” or connections I once had to others. Alternatively, since I cannot choose my neighbor (all have the same being before God), I cannot found any new community, political or otherwise, with those who may deliberately choose to build their lives together in the world. The historical world is to be denied (“a historic source of the creature would be the very token of worldliness”), and the foundation of new worlds are to be renounced (“it would be only the choice of cupiditas”) (Copy A, 342; Arendt 2003, 101). All men meet only in this same isolated and self-denying love. It is interesting to take note of a citation in Arendt’s original dissertation. In a footnote, Arendt references the protestant theologian Karl Holl, who argued that the essence of neighborly love remained hidden from Augustine, namely “its meaning as a will to self-sacrificing community” (Copy A, 345; Arendt 2003, 97). Again as we saw in Part I in her discussion of Saint Paul, here we also see Arendt as fully aware that Augustine’s philosophy of love is not necessarily the definitive and final statement of the meaning of Christian love, but recognizes that there are other interpretations of love as the impetus for, or the basis of a human community. This possibility is a question I will pursue in my conclusion.

As in Part I, we see again in Part II Arendt’s interest in human equality. All have the same origin, and all are equal as creations of God. As a created being, each person is
equally relevant, but only as a fellow created being: “The lover loves in him this equality, no matter whether or not the other understands it” (Copy A, 343; Arendt 2003, 102). The right love of neighbor in this context is precisely the denial of any original relevance: “to love all men so utterly without distinction that the world becomes a desert to the lover” (Copy A, 343; Arendt 2003, 102). I do not love him for what makes him distinct as a plural individual. It is his worldly individuality that is to be denied. Rather, I love all men equally, and only as I love myself—as a creation of God. This, Arendt maintains, “makes everyone the same, because with the disappearance of the world it removes the possibility of boasting (iactantia) which came precisely from the creature’s worldliness in comparing itself with others” (Copy A, 316; Arendt 2003, 85). Differences among men are no longer of any significance, be it family members, friends, or fellow citizens. This denial of the worldliness of the other means that even the death of my neighbor, as the end of his being in the world, should be of no significance. His death, like my own, marks the return to Being. This return is only what I should have been wishing for him all along. I do not simply love my neighbor as neighbor, even those closest to me; rather I love something in him, not what he is, but what I wish that he may be (volo ut sis) (Arendt 2003, 102).

In fact, human beings arrive at a greater equality to one another the more they shed their worldly individuality in order to arrive at pure being. In Part II, we again see Arendt exploring the nature of human equality in Augustine’s philosophy of love. Whereas in Part I, human beings were equal because they all desire eternal life, in Part II human beings are equal as all are created by God. Again we see that it is equality before
God that is of importance to Augustine and not the unique individuality of each human person. Indeed, we must transcend our own unique individuality and the individuality of the other. We love ourselves and the other only as a creation of God. In both contexts, Arendt presents Augustine as denying the relevance of being with others in their concrete, worldly existence.

Arendt concludes that love of neighbor, in the context of love as return, leaves each individual isolated before God as the source of his own being: “neighborly love leaves the lover himself in absolute isolation” (Copy A, 341; Arendt 2003, 100). Indeed, by denying them in their worldliness, this isolation before God is what we, in our love for them, are to encourage others to take up. Again we see that love cancels our original ties to the world and breaks up worldly relations (“I do not love what I concretely, mundanely encounter”), and love cannot serve as the in-between uniting one human being to another, or as the bond that would unite plural persons together in a human community (Arendt 2003, 103). These are the relationships which are to be denied so that we may transcend our own becoming in order to arrive at pure Being. Arendt says that in this context, where each person is viewed simply as an occasion to love only what God has created, Augustine fails to account for how it is even possible to have a “neighbor” at all, as someone with whom we are in some way linked: “Even those nearest to him concern [him] only in so far as he loves God in them” (Copy A, 343; Arendt 2003, 102). All original ties to others in the world must be cut. As in Part I, Arendt is doubtful this kind of “love” of neighbor can even be considered love at all. Certainly, she says, it is far from the kind of relationship we think of when we consider
two persons in a romantic relationship who choose to be with each other because of who they uniquely are as individuals.

In Part II, Arendt pursued the relevance of the other in the context of the return to God as eternal Being. What she has found is that the other is not relevant in his concrete, worldly existence. It is his unique individuality, as well as my own, that is to be denied. The concrete course of life has become a mere distance to be traversed and, Arendt argues, is radically devalued by Augustine. Once more, the vita contemplativa is the true life and not the vita activa in the world. Love of neighbor is merely a call for the other to seek the source of his being in God and ascend to pure Being, thereby denying his worldliness and any worldly ties we once might have had to each other. Furthermore, this love of the other remains centered on the self, in the sense that it is only once I have “made sure of the truth of my own being that I can love my neighbor in his true being, which is createdness,” and in the sense that my neighbor is merely an opportunity for me to love what God has created in him, “the very thing which he, on his own, is not” (Copy A, 343; Arendt 2003, 102). It is not really the neighbor himself who is loved at all, but rather God in him. Arendt concludes that the relevance of the other and the love of neighbor “is removed again, and the individual is left in isolation” (Copy A, 345; Arendt 2003, 103). No other individual in his uniqueness, or any being with others in the world can have any meaning for one who has returned to his origin.

Arendt’s concern for the uniqueness of the individual, the “distinctness” of plurality, in this case its denial, began here in her dissertation, and I will show how it remained a persistent concern for her in Origins and later in The Human Condition.
While plurality is something philosophers and theologians have disdained, and totalitarianism tried to destroy altogether, this uniqueness is something that, for Arendt, must be persevered, even celebrated, because it is what allows for the appearance of the new in human history. While it is here in her dissertation that Arendt’s concern for plurality first appears, and we see her evidently troubled by the implications of Augustine’s approach, it is also here where she finds the resources to combat this approach—ironically, from Augustine himself. It is from Augustine that she learns to see man as *initium*. It is also where she first develops her concept of the world and of memory. We will look more carefully at the influence of the dissertation on Arendt’s theory of natality and what it means for her positive philosophy of human freedom in Chapter Six.

3.5 Love as Shared Past

Always guided by her concern for the relevance of the other in Augustine’s thought, Arendt has found that love as desire and love as return have left “neighborly love incomprehensible in its true relevance” (Copy A, 348; Arendt 2003, 106). We have seen that love as desire requires that the self and the other be viewed only in terms of “for the sake of,” and so the other can have no relevance in his concrete, worldly existence. We have also seen that the return to Being has left the believer isolated in the presence of God, and so, again, the other can have no relevance in his concrete, worldly existence. Though in both contexts Arendt has identified a ground for human equality, for Augustine it is because of this equality before God that our own I-self and
the I-self of the other must be denied or transcended. In the context of love as desire, I must deny my own and my neighbor’s unique individuality in the world for the sake of the *summum bonum*. In the context of love as return, I must transcend my own uniqueness and the uniqueness of my neighbor as he appears in the world for the sake of ascending to pure Being.

Nevertheless, as Arendt says, we see that the commandment to love thy neighbor appears over and over again whenever Augustine speaks of love. Though Augustine himself did not recognize the inconsistencies in his reflections on love, we can see by Arendt’s persistence in pursuing the question after the relevance of the other, that it is important for Arendt’s own project to see if and how there is some way to account for the relevance of the other *in the world*, and to identify an empirical ground for the duties owed to the neighbor in Augustine’s thought. Since, as Arendt says, Augustine took the love of neighbor for granted, it is evident that this interest in the relevance of the other, in the significance of being with others in the world, is decidedly Arendt’s own. I will show in the next two chapters that her concern for human plurality continued to preoccupy her thought in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, including her interest in the relationship of the Jews to state and society, imperialism, and totalitarianism. In Chapter Six, I will demonstrate how Arendt uses the concepts of natality and the world to construct an anti-Augustinian political theory in *The Human Condition*. We see clearly again in this third and final part of her dissertation that her interest in the meaning and significance of the human condition of plurality—the fact that not Man, but men inhabit the earth—began here in her dissertation.
In pursuing an answer to her question regarding the relevance of the other, the third and final part of her dissertation investigates directly Augustine’s theory of social life (*vita socialis*). What Arendt concludes is that the neighbor’s relevance can only be demonstrated in a “wholly different context” (Copy A, 248; Arendt 2003, 28). It is in this context that Arendt investigates directly “the being of man among men” in Augustine’s thought (Copy A, 355; Arendt 2003, 115). I will show later in Chapter Six that an examination of Part III of her dissertation reveals much more about Arendt’s relationship to her first interpretation of Augustine than simply her interest in plurality.

Arendt draws on the resources made available by her interpretation of Augustine’s social thought for the development of her own positive political theory, especially for the two essential human capacities that make a shared political life possible, namely promising and forgiving. But we will set aside these other themes for now, including also, for example, the significance of shared history, and look only at her primary interest here in the relevance of the other, the in-between space that both relates and separates plural men in the world, as well as the two-fold character of plurality.

Arendt is interested in both the grounds of social life in Augustine’s thought and in its essential features. The foundation and character of human communities is an interest that motivates Arendt’s political thought throughout her career. We should note that, in this context, the *vita socialis*, or what might literally be translated as “social life,” should not be equated with the modern rise of “the social” that Arendt critiques in *The Human Condition*. Her usage of both the adjective *socialis* and the noun *societas* throughout Part III of the dissertation in no way implies that politics has become a mere
instrument to serve the needs of *animal laborans*. (More will be said about this in Chapter Six.) Rather, the Latin adjective *socialis* and noun *societas* mean more than men simply living alongside one another, but actually describes an alliance, fellowship, or confederacy of men. Arendt herself confirms this in *The Human Condition* when she discusses how the Romans were the last to use the noun *societas* correctly—to mean men allied together. In this way, it had a political connotation (Arendt 1998, 23).

For Augustine too, as Arendt explains it here, the *vita socialis* means more than men living merely alongside each other. She specifically defines Augustine’s usage of *societas* in German as “*die Verwandtschaft der Menschen und zugleich ihre Bundesgenossenschaft,*” which means “the kinship and, at the same time, the alliance of men” (Arendt 2003, 110). Throughout Part III, Arendt uses the noun form—*societas*—to indicate this alliance of men, and not to mean, simply, that men, like bees, are social animals. I will show in the next two chapters how Arendt’s interest in *societas*, as an interest in the “alliances” men have formed on a specific basis, continued in *Origins* in her concern with the Jewish people, with the nation-state, with pan-movements, and finally with totalitarianism itself. And in Chapter Six, I will show how it continues in *The Human Condition* insofar as she believes the original meaning of *societas*, which had a political meaning for the Romans, has been lost and replaced by “the social.”

Arendt argues in Part III that there is indeed a relevance for the other in Augustine’s thought, but that it is in an empirical, historical context. This context is the shared past all human beings have in common as fellow descendants of Adam. In this context, it is not the desiring or questioning individual alone before God that concerns
Augustine, not the being of Man as such, but rather the “being of man among men”
(Copy A 355-6; Arendt 2003, 115). In Part III, Arendt does find an answer to her research
question, although it is not an entirely satisfactory one for her. In her dissertation she is
evidently persuaded that being with others in the world can have relevance only when
viewed from an empirical, historical context. For Arendt, as she says in her dissertation,
we can understand the other’s relevance only as “of the world” (Copy A, 342; Arendt
2003, 102). Later, in her own work, we will see that, for Arendt, it is also only in the
historical world that the relevance of the other appears. But, in her later work, we also
find that, for Arendt, it is not love but the public sphere that can relate and separate
men, while at the same time establishing political equality and preserving their
uniqueness and individuality—a perspective that we can already see is in opposition to
Augustine’s in more than one respect. Nevertheless, I will show how she draws on the
resources made available by her interpretation of Augustine here in the dissertation for
her development of this political theory.

For Augustine, the worldly community is not arbitrarily founded nor it is
arbitrarily dissoluble. It is founded on a historical fact—the common descent from Adam
(Copy A, 350-351; Arendt 2003, 109). For Augustine, Arendt explains, the whole human
race is “rooted” in Adam as the single common ancestor of all men (Copy A, 351; Arendt
2003, 110). All men are descended from this one man and so first belong to the human
community, not by choice, but by generation. It is this common descent from Adam that
forms the basis of social life. This earthly community, to which all men belong as a
matter of course, precedes any “City of God” to which men belong as a matter of
decision. While God is the originator and sustainer of being as such, in this context all 
men derive their historical being from “the earliest past that is historically established: 
from the first man” (Copy A; 354; Arendt 2003, 113). All men share in this same past, a 
common origin in Adam, handed down from one generation to the next, and so share a 
common history. It is this shared history, carried through each generation, which, 
Arendt says, provides this society of men with an independent legitimacy of its own (an 
independent legitimacy Arendt will later embrace even as Augustine rejects it as sinful 
pride). As we recall, it is the historic world, constituted by men, that Augustine identifies 
as the saeculum. Arendt refers to City of God Books XII and XIV, where Augustine 
explains God’s twofold purpose in deriving all men from one man: first to unite all men 
by a likeness of nature, and second to unite all men by birth into the human society, 
through a blood relationship. Thus we see that for Augustine, Arendt writes, this human 
society “is both a fact of nature and a product of history” (Copy A, 355; Arendt 2003, 
114). Men share a common nature as members of the same human race, and they share 
a common history by generation. As I will explain further below, this is related very 
closely to what Arendt describes as the two-fold character of plurality in The Human 
Condition. This two-fold social nature is how Arendt explains the foundation of the 
societas in Augustine’s thought. But what are its essential features?

The society of men is premised on equality and is defined by interdependence. It 
is the common descent, Arendt explains, which establishes the basic equality of all men. 
It is not an equality of traits or of talents, but of condition. For Augustine, as 
descendants of Adam all men find themselves in the same situation. All share in the
same fate; all men are destined to die. It is their common mortality, which makes all men equal. And it is this shared situation, derived from a common origin, that forms the basis of human fellowship:

The individual is not alone in the world; he has companions of his fate ( consortes ) not merely in this situation or that, but for a lifetime. His entire life is regarded as a distinct fateful situation, the situation of mortality. Therein lies the kinship of men, and at the same time their fellowship ( societas ). (Copy A, 351; Arendt 2003, 110)

Although death is not yet understood in the society of men as the punishment for sin, death is nevertheless the great equalizer. It is also the basis of our camaraderie.

Knowing that my fate is not my own but yours as well is why men are able to understand one another, and a sense of community arises out of this fellow feeling.

For Augustine, the community of men is a social organism with men living not merely side by side, but with and for each other. It is the basic equality of men, Arendt says, that “permits us to understand men’s mutual interdependence, which essentially defines their social life in the worldly community” (Copy A, 351; Arendt 2003, 110). It is human equality which allows each man to be both a giver and a taker in the human community. The relationships between men are based on reciprocity. It is a reciprocal inter-dependent relationship rather than a dependent relationship as is the case with unequals (for example, the dependency of a child on his parent). In this interdependency, men belong to each other (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 122). According to Arendt, for Augustine love in this pre-Christian context is here simply understood as an expression of the interdependence of men (Copy A, 356; Arendt 2003, 115). Though
Arendt does not elaborate, this is an altogether different kind of love in Augustine than what she has previously been considering. We will return to look at the possibility posed by this pre-Christian conception of love in the concluding chapter. Social life is defined by this mutual interdependence, and it is man’s belief in the other, that the other will prove himself in their common future, that allows men to trust and mutually depend upon each other (We will return to these ideas in Chapter Six when we discuss “the power of promise” in *The Human Condition*). Without this belief, Arendt writes, quoting from *De fide rerum*, “concord will perish and human society itself will not stand firm” (Copy A, 369; Arendt 2003, 111). This mutual give and take, made possible by mutual trust, is what “ties” (*connectatur*) people together in a human community (Copy A, 368; Arendt 2003, 110). We see clearly here, again in this last part of the dissertation, Arendt’s interest in the “in-between” (*inter se*) that binds plural men together in a human community. As Arendt interprets him, for Augustine it is mutual trust which allows men to inter-depend on one another in the worldly community. In this case, it is the trusting give and take, and not love, that forms the “in-between,” which ties men together in a shared worldly community. It is this worldly community, where men share in the fellowship of their common condition and mutually depend on one another, that Augustine identifies as the *civitas terrena*. The problem for Augustine is that in their inter-dependence men depend not on God, but on other men.

As Arendt made clear in Part II of her dissertation, it is precisely this worldly *societas*, which, for Augustine, must be transcended in the return to God as the source of eternal being (and it will be exactly what Arendt later embraces). Is it possible that
this shared past can explain the relevance of the other and neighbor-love when it is this very past that must be denied for the sake of a future eternity? For Arendt, this is explained by the “two-fold origin” of man within Augustine’s philosophy. Whenever Augustine asks about the being of man as such, she says, he posits man as a created being whose origin lies in God as the source of all being. But, when he inquires into the “being of man among men,” Augustine posits man as a historical being who has his origin in Adam. Although man can ask himself out of the world, so to speak, this shared historical past is not simply erased, but remains definitive for his earthly existence, both for the *civitas terrena*, as we have already seen, and for the *civitas Dei* as we will see below. In this context, the other is relevant because we share a common history, and it is also from this shared past that the obligation to love one’s neighbor is derived.

In her discussion of the two-fold origin of man, we see clearly, more than anywhere else in the dissertation, the beginnings of Arendt’s concept of the two-fold character of plurality. On the one hand man is a created being whose individual source of being lies with God. The structure of his being is createdness. His being is determined by his origin; because he has a beginning, he is “becoming.” Each individual is born as a unique being in the world whose ultimate source of being is as a creation of God. Because God created *him*, no one else is like him. He is always createdness “acting in one way or another” (Copy A, 292). He is mutable, changeable, and therefore capable of the unexpected. We have already seen that Arendt describes this in her dissertation as man’s “creatureliness” (*Kreaturlichkeit*) (Arendt 2003, 79). For Augustine, it is precisely
this individuality that must be transcended if we are to ascend to God as pure Being, but, as we will see, for Arendt this distinctness is to be embraced.

On the other hand, we also see in Augustine’s social theory that man is a historical being. He has a common historical origin in Adam, and this kinship is the basis of his equality. Because he is equal, he builds a shared world together with other men who are like him and who are able to understand him. Equal human beings are able to relate to one another and understand one another because they have both a common origin in one historical man (Adam) and a common destiny (mortality). Men living in the world have a shared past and are able to make plans for a shared future. For Augustine, this shared history is to be interpreted as sinful, but again, for Arendt, it is to be embraced. Arendt presents man in the thought of Augustine as having “a two-fold origin” (doppelten Ursprung) (Arendt 2003, 124). On the one hand, as a created being his origin is in God, which makes him a distinct individual, while at the same time as a historical being his origin is in Adam, and this shared past makes him equal to all other human beings. We see in the dissertation the advent of the formulation of plurality that appears in Arendt’s more mature political theory. It is only in this two-fold sense, she argues, that the relevance of the other finally appears.

Arendt explains that, in the context of Augustine’s social philosophy, the acceptance of God’s grace does not simply cancel our shared worldly past, but rather this past is now newly experienced as sinful (a position Arendt, of course, later rejects). It is because of Adam’s first sin that God appeared as a man in history to redeem all men, as they are in the world, from the sin all have inherited through Adam by
generation. Our shared past is determinative for our redemption. All men are redeemed together because all men were found together in the same situation. The redemption made possible by the incarnation demonstrates the true basis of human equality. While, the neighbor is no longer viewed “as he happens to be in the world,” at the same time, his equality is made explicit by the message of salvation (Copy A, 358; Arendt 2003, 117). All men are mortal because each has inherited Adam’s original sin. All men are equally sinful and therefore equally in need of God’s grace. Grace does not erase this shared past, but it is now newly understood as sinful. Man’s equality “rests on the same sinful past even in the course of lives governed by Christ” (Copy A, 357; Arendt 2003, 116). It is significant that this shared, sinful past remains common to all men, both to the lovers of the world and to the lovers of God. It continues independently, Arendt says, alongside “the newly experienced being” (Copy A, 357-358; Arendt 2003, 116). It is from this shared past, newly experienced as sinful, that the other’s relevance can now finally be understood, and from which our obligation to love our neighbor is derived. For Augustine, the other is relevant because he is a constant reminder of one’s own sin, and we love him because our common sinful past is now recognized as a common danger.

Our common mortality, once viewed merely as a fact of nature, is now realized to be the “wages of sin.” But it is not death as the end of our being in the world that is to be feared, but rather the second and endless death—eternal estrangement from God. All men have inherited Adam’s original sin and so all are equally subject to this peril. It is from the knowledge of this common threat that our obligation to the other is derived. If the other is a fellow believer, then it is our duty to love him by struggling with
him against the temptations of the world, the fear being that he might succumb and
lose eternal life. If the other does not yet believe, then it is our duty to love him by being
a living testament to faith in God, the hope being that he might yet escape the danger
and find eternal life. All men being equally in danger; no one person is any more
relevant than another: “We cannot choose our beloved, as one in the same situation, he
is always given before any choice” (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 122). Each person serves
only either as a reminder of my own peril or as an opportunity to pay homage to the
grace of God. This is how Augustine develops the two cities concept. Because the only
distinction that matters is belief or unbelief, there can only be two communities, the
first founded on Adam and the other on Christ. Although there is a relevance here for
the other, it is, yet again, only in one respect—he is a help to me or I am a help to him.

The shared past remains active in the impossibility of complete isolation even for
one who has been redeemed. For the believer, being with others can no longer be taken
for granted, but must be actively chosen. To withdraw completely from the world would
be sinful because it would deprive the nonbeliever from the possibility of imitating my
faith. Being with others is now a duty of love. It is a necessity because, even in the
isolation of faith, I cannot escape the pre-existing world. The believer himself, while yet
living in the world, is never free from danger. While it is my responsibility to aid my
fellow believers in this struggle, I also need others to assist me in overcoming the
desires of the world. This is the reason for the foundation of the *civitas Dei*, the
community of the faithful. It is a community founded not merely alongside, but *against*
the world. As Arendt says, it “takes the past to turn mere sameness of belief into a common faith” (Copy A, 358; Arendt 2003, 117).

Believers are bound together in the community of faith by mutual love, and not by interdependence. Their tie to the world having been broken, they depend not on each other but on God: “Faith dissolves the bonds which tied men to the world in its original sense of the *civitas terrena*, and so it dissolves men’s dependence on one another” (Copy A, 361; Arendt 2003, 120). Worldly communities, Arendt says, “always isolate only one definition of being, in regard to which the community is a community” (Copy A, 349; Arendt 2003, 107). In contrast, the community of the faithful demands the person’s whole being as this is what God demands of him. Each becomes so much a part of the community that they make up one single body of Christ: “He has ceased to be anything but a member” (Copy A, 362; Arendt 2003, 120). Here again we see Arendt’s interest in the “in-between,” the bond that unites men together in a human community. According to her interpretation of Augustine, in the Christian community men are united so closely together that they actually become one. The in-between space separating plural men is destroyed, and the unique individual ceases to be anything but a member of this one body of Christ. In this way, loving myself, loving my fellow believer, and loving God are all accomplished in the same love. As we have seen, this community has a responsibility not to withdraw from the world, but rather to overcome it by endeavoring to draw each individual into the body of Christ. The community of the faithful views others in the world only as potential members of the body. The world will be “overcome” only when the entire world is transformed into the body of Christ (Copy
A, 359; Arendt 2003, 118). As we will see, this bears resemblance to Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism, which she sees as also aiming to annihilate the space separating plural men.

What Arendt argues in Part III is that grace does not erase our shared past or cancel the togetherness of men, but rather imbibes it with new meaning. This new meaning actually makes being with others a free choice, replete with obligations to the other. The other is relevant because we share the same past, a common history. We have both sinned and are in equal need of redemption. I see him now, not as he appears in the world, but either as one in whom God’s grace has been at work or as one who is in need of God’s grace. Once I know that our common inheritance from Adam is sin and death, I am obligated to love him by endeavoring his salvation. The past remains at work in my own life as a constant temptation. I need others in the Christian community to struggle with me against the world and its desires. In Part III, we see that the shared historical past, the worldly past, remains definitive for the founding and the nature of both the civitas terrena and the civitate Dei.

At the end of her dissertation, Arendt has found an answer to her research question. There is a relevance for the other arising out of Augustine’s social theory. The other is relevant because I share with him a common origin in Adam and a shared history. There is also grounds for the love of neighbor arising out of Augustine’s social thought. The obligation to love arises out of the equality of all men as descendants of Adam. We love every man as our neighbor because we share the same sinful past and therefore encounter the same danger. Arendt finds that the other can be relevant only
in a concrete, historical context, and that the duty to love can be derived from this empirical context. Nevertheless, Arendt finds that this relevance and the duty to love are merely provisional. Though the believer cannot retreat from the world, he views his relationships with others as a temporary necessity while living on earth. In eternity, once the fate of all has been decided, love will no longer be necessary.

Even in the context of a share historical past, Arendt concludes that there is no independent value or inherent meaning to being with others in the world for Augustine. The Christian, Arendt says, lives in the world “by mistake” (*Versehen*) (Copy A, 359; Arendt 2003, 118). All human communities in the world, even in this empirical context, are viewed from the perspective of eternal salvation. That is why for Augustine, despite all the many historical variations of cities and states founded by men, there are but two communities: the city of God and the city of man. I cannot choose who to align myself with, but am commanded to love both the “good and the bad” alike. Everyone is the same to me as an equal in his need for redemption. “This equality is the predominant fact that wipes out all distinctions” (Copy A, 353; Arendt 2003, 112). The neighbor is relevant because of his equality and not because of his individuality.

Furthermore, Arendt says, I do not love by neighbor “for his own sake, only for the sake of divine grace” (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 123). This indirectness, Arendt says, has the further effect of breaking up social relations: “It turns my relation into a mere passage for the direct relation to God himself” (Copy A, 364; Arendt 2003, 123). As I will demonstrate in the coming chapters, for Arendt, Augustine’s radical relativization of
being with others in the world contributed to the loss of an authentic political life in the contemporary Western world, a loss that has had disastrous consequences.

We have seen the advent of Arendt’s concern for plurality appear in her dissertation in several respects. Chief among them, is her guiding question after the relevance of being with others in a concrete, given world, and her inquiry into the grounds of the obligation to love thy neighbor in Augustine’s thought. We see that Arendt finds problematic the lack of relevance for the other as he appears as a unique individual in the world in the contexts of love as desire and love as return. Her argument in Part III that the other can only be relevant in an empirical, historical context anticipates her argument she will make later for the love of the world and against Augustine’s otherworldliness. Arendt will use resources drawn from her dissertation to develop this argument. We also see an interest in the dissertation in the “in-between”—the tie that can unite unique human beings together. In the context of love as desire, love cannot unite men with the others because the other is not to be desired for his own sake. Furthermore, love as desire aims to eliminate the gap between the lover and the beloved. In the context of the city of God, mutual love among fellow believers destroys the in-between so thoroughly that believers lose their individual selves in order to become one single body of Christ. We also find in her dissertation the experience of isolation and the desire to belong which will figure prominently in Origins. Finally, we see in man’s two-fold origin the nascent concept of the two-fold character of plurality: equality and distinction. On the one hand every man is unique in the sense that there never was or will be another person like him (the structure of createdness). On the
other hand, men are alike in the sense that they can communicate and make
themselves understood to each other through word and deed (kinship in Adam). In the
dissertation, for Augustine, because man has an origin in God, he is distinct as a created
being, while at the same time Augustine’s social theory presents men as equals who
together inhabit the earth and constitute the world. This conclusion is obviously the
most important to Arendt because it is the final sentence in her dissertation: “And with
that, the being of man is understood as derived from a two-fold source” (Copy A, 367;
Arendt 2003, 125).

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that totalitarianism is the first
government that has as its ultimate goal the complete eradication of the human
condition of plurality. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt argues that plurality is the basic
condition of both action and speech, and that it makes politics and the miracle of new
beginnings possible. But, as I have shown, it was in her dissertation on *Love and Saint
Augustine* that Arendt first asked about the meaning and significance of “the fact that
men, not Man live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt 1998, 7). Overall, in the
dissertation Arendt is troubled by Augustine’s desire to transcend human plurality in
two ways: first in the sense that according to Augustine, I must overcome my
“becoming” so that I can arrive at pure being, and also in the implications Augustine’s
philosophy of love has, in all three contexts, on being with others in the world insofar as
it deprives any being with others in the world or any joint action together in the world
of any inherent meaning. It is in the dissertation that the problem is first posed, and it is
the resources she found in the dissertation that enable her to address it. In *The Origins
of Totalitarianism we see this theoretical problem become a reality in the experience of the newest and most terrible form of government yet known to man. It is to this work that we now turn.
CHAPTER 4:

PLURALITY IN ORIGINS

In the last chapter I argued that Arendt’s concern for plurality first appears in her 1929 dissertation and is the primary theme of that dissertation. I argued that we can see her concern for plurality in chiefly three ways. First in her guiding question after the relevance of the other in Augustine’s philosophy of love. Second, in her interest in the ties that unite together unique individuals in a human community. And third, in her development of the two-fold character of plurality, namely, human equality and human distinctiveness.

I also argued that Arendt is ultimately unsatisfied with Augustine’s philosophy of love insofar as it demands that individuals transcend their own unique individuality and being with others in the world for the sake of eternity. Arendt finds that in two different contexts, love as desire and love as return, there can be no relevance for the other in his concrete worldly existence. She does find, however, that there can be a relevance for the other in the context of Augustine’s social thought. As we will see below, Arendt draws on this context for the development of her own ideas. This relevance comes from the same historical past all men share as descendants of Adam. She finds that this shared past provides an empirical ground for love of neighbor. Because all men share
the same past, all men are equally sinful before God. I love my neighbor either to save him or to struggle with him against the world. Still, she concludes that this responsibility to love is provisional for Augustine. From the perspective of love as shared past, love will no longer be necessary once the fates of all have been decided in eternity.

Overall in the dissertation, we see Arendt troubled by Augustine’s desire to transcend human plurality. According to Arendt’s interpretation, for Augustine, in the return to the source of my being, I overcome my own “becoming” so that I can arrive at pure Being. In the return, I transcend the unique I-self of my own being in the world and the unique I-self of others as they appear in the world. My life and the lives of others become mere distances to be traversed, stripped of any inherent import. Furthermore, the ties that unite human beings together in a community can have only relative meaning for Augustine. For Arendt, Augustine’s philosophy of love deprives being with others in the world of any independent meaning.

The Origins of Totalitarianism marks the beginning of Arendt’s project to restore the significance and inherent meaning of being with others in the world. In Origins, she demonstrates the potentially terrifying outcome of the loss of a common world that guarantees human equality and respects human individuality. In her account of anti-Semitism, Arendt explains how the Jews were long excluded from the body-politic of the modern European nation-state and from European society. As a result, they were not granted legal equality, nor were their differences genuinely appreciated. Jews were regarded either as social pariahs or as an individual parvenu. In her study of imperialism,
Arendt explains how the beliefs and practices of European imperialism, which denied the common origin of all human beings, permitted the rise of racism as an ideology.

In this chapter, I examine her account of both anti-Semitism and imperialism, and show that the concerns of her dissertation persist. She remains interested in human plurality, though in the specific context of the rise of totalitarianism. At the end of Origins, she argues that all human beings have the right to belong to a body-politic that affords and protects both legal equality and the expression of human distinctiveness. She affirms the great significance of human plurality and of being together with others in the world.

Margaret Canovan argues that The Origins of Totalitarianism represents a break with both the style and the content of Arendt’s early philosophical studies: “What forced her out of her life as an unpolitical intellectual studying antipolitical theology was of course the threat posed by Nazism” (Canovan 1998, 8-9). In contrast, I argue that Arendt’s concerns do not change radically. Rather, in The Origins of Totalitarianism we see that what was a theoretical problem in the dissertation has, for Arendt, become a concrete threat in the experience of the newest and most terrifying form of government yet known to man. As I already indicated in the last chapter, in what follows I intend to

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57 Arendt does call totalitarianism a novel form of “government” (Arendt 2004, 593). However, by her own understanding of “government,” totalitarianism does not qualify. Though I will use the term “government” to refer to the totalitarian regime in power, the reader should note that, for Arendt, the term government denotes a set of stable institutions that govern according to a known law with a hierarchy of authority. Totalitarianism, in contrast, is not stable, but is in constant movement. It does not govern according to a promulgated law, but rather according to an ideology and the leader’s interpretation of that ideology.
show how Arendt continues to consider and develop the dissertation’s themes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Chief among these is her concern for human plurality.

Arendt finished *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 1949, twenty years after she had completed her dissertation. It was not long after Arendt’s dissertation had been published in 1929 that Arendt had to flee Nazi totalitarianism for France in 1933. Arendt then had to flee again in 1941, this time from the spread of totalitarianism and to the United States. It was in 1943 that she and her husband first learned about the Final Solution (Young-Bruehl 2004, 184). And, it was nearly two years later that Arendt was able to begin writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, a monumental work that took her nearly six years (Young-Bruehl 2004, 200).

It might seem that after such a long time, and after the occurrence of such life-altering events, Arendt’s interests would have changed entirely. While her ideas did develop, Arendt maintained her primary concern for being with others in the world. Furthermore, there was no break, but rather a continued engagement with the same interests and ideas explored in the dissertation. Immediately after she had written her dissertation, Arendt began her work on Rahel Varnhagen in 1930, a work that would contribute greatly to the first volume of *Origins* on “Antisemitism.” Arendt’s study of Varnhagen and her milieu follows closely the relationship of the Jews to society as well as to the state in 19th century Germany. Arendt finished the last two chapters of this work, “Between Pariah and Parvenu” and “One Does not Escape Jewishness,” in France in 1938 (Young-Bruehl 2004, 90). Some of the historical facts and more importantly the themes of this book, especially in these last two chapters, are included by Arendt in her
volume on anti-Semitism in *Origins*. She spent much of her time in exile in Paris studying “her people” through her friendships and relationships with other Jews, and through her work with Jewish charities (Young-Bruehl 2004, 119). This period had a great influence on the ideas she develops in Book I of *Origins*.58

Her historical studies during this period also prepared her to write the second book of *Origins* on Imperialism. In a letter to Karl Jaspers in 1946, she writes that she learned to see historically from her husband (Arendt and Jaspers 1992, 31). She had met Heinrich Blücher, a former communist, in 1936 in Paris (Young-Bruehl 2004, 122). Arendt’s conversations with Blücher afforded her an education in politics, history, Marxism, and imperialism that she had not had before (Young-Bruehl 2004, 124). When Arendt finally came to write *Origins*, she worked on it together with her husband, who was well versed in Marxism and imperialism (Young-Bruehl 2004, 113-114). It was a volume that their conversations had been preparing her for ever since she met Blücher in 1936.

Although always guided by her concern for being with others in the world as we first saw it in her dissertation, Arendt’s experience with totalitarianism and her knowledge of the concentration camps brought a new sense of urgency to her work. While her investigations into human plurality in the dissertation were highly theoretical,

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58 Later on, after she had emigrated to the United States, one of her first positions was teaching a Modern European History course at Brooklyn College, which gave her the opportunity to study the Dreyfus Affair more carefully and to develop her considerations on what she later came to see as a “dress rehearsal” for the extermination of the Jews (Young-Bruehl 2004, 180).
her considerations in *Origins* are concrete and historical. Here she is concerned with those actual human events that created the conditions for totalitarianism. Her work takes on a new urgency because she believes that many of the modern conditions that created the opportunity for the emergence of totalitarianism are still with us. Now that totalitarianism has appeared, it is not unlikely that it will appear again. Her work also takes on a new imperative because of the nature of totalitarianism. Never before has a form of government aimed to entirely destroy the plurality of men—both their equality before the law and their ability to act, which arises out of their individual distinctiveness. Arendt’s intention in *Origins* is to make plain the conditions that allowed for totalitarianism’s development, so that we can build a new, man-made world that preserves and promotes human equality and human individuality. As in her dissertation, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she continues her study of human plurality, albeit in a more concrete way.

Arendt believed totalitarianism could not be likened to any previously known form of government. Totalitarianism is not simply a modern reincarnation of tyranny on a grander scale. Totalitarianism is new, not because of the sheer magnitude of its ruthlessness, but rather because it aims “to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual” and to reduce each and every person “to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these bundles of reactions can be exchanged at random for any other” (Arendt 2004, 565). The destruction of human spontaneity was pursued with unflinching determination in the concentration camps, the essential testing grounds for
totalitarianism’s experiments in total domination. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that totalitarianism is the first government to have as its ultimate goal the complete eradication of the human condition of plurality.

*The Origins of Totalitarianism* is the result of over six years of Arendt grappling with the questions: “What happened? Why did it happen? How could it have happened?” (Arendt 2004, 387). In an effort to provide an answer to these questions, Arendt traces what she identifies as the “subterranean stream[s] of European history,” which escaped the notice of the public and even “enlightened men,” and hidden from view “had been able to gather an entirely unexpected virulence” appearing at the surface only once they has become “crystallized” in the phenomenon of totalitarianism (Arendt 2004, 8). In *Origins*, Arendt attempts to identify “the chief elements of totalitarianism and analyze them in historical terms, tracing these elements back in history as far as I deemed proper and necessary” (Arendt 2004, 78). The intent is not to preserve this history for posterity’s sake, but to provide a genealogy of the practices, ideas, and mentalities that provided the “conditions of possibility” for the rise of this radically novel form of government. Arendt believes we must bear consciously the

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59 *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was written to answer the following question: how is it possible that such a regime could have arisen in the heart of Western Civilization, the birthplace of the rights of man? *Prima facie*, it appears unfathomable. Totalitarianism marked an almost complete break with “Western history as we had known it for more than two thousand years” (Arendt 2004, 167). Arendt says that when news of the concentration camps reached her in 1943, she reacted with “speechless outrage and impotent horror” (Arendt 2004, 387). It was not until two years later, in 1945, that she found herself able to reflect upon totalitarianism with, as she describes it, the “backward-directed glance of the historian and the analytical zeal of the political scientist” (Arendt 2004, 387).

60 I owe the phrase “conditions of possibility” to Dana Villa’s helpful comments.
burden our times have placed upon us. This means both understanding our past and taking responsibility for the future. We have a responsibility to the world we share in common. If we accept this responsibility, then it is possible to create a shared public life that will acknowledge basic human equality and that, at the same time, will provide a space for human distinction.

*Origins* is divided into three books: Antisemitism, Imperialism, and Totalitarianism. Though anti-Semitism and imperialism did not cause totalitarianism (human events, for Arendt, could always have been otherwise), they were the “streams” that cleared away any bulwarks that might have prevented its rise in Europe. Indeed, she argues that anti-Semitism and imperialism cleared the way for not only the emergence but the embrace of totalitarianism in Europe. In Book I of *Origins*, subtitled “Antisemitism,” Arendt endeavors to explain what, upon initial examination, seems simply outrageous—that the Jewish question, previously insignificant in world politics, would become the “catalytic agent” for the rise of the Nazi regime, a world war, and “the unprecedented crime of genocide in the midst of Occidental civilization” (Arendt 2004, 7). She argues that modern anti-Semitism arose out of the unique relationship of the Jews to the state and the peculiar relationship of Jews to society.

Arendt is firmly against the belief that the antisemitism of the Nazis is just the latest of many manifestations of European Jew-hatred in a long, unbroken tradition going back to the Roman Empire. For most of its history, antisemitism in Europe was grounded in factual realities. Hatred of the Jews was originally religious in nature, “inspired by the mutually hostile antagonism of two conflicting creeds” (Arendt 2004, 3).
While the former mode of antisemitism was grounded in actual differences between Jew and Gentile (for example, irreconcilable religious doctrines), modern antisemitism, as a secular, political ideology, was based on imaginary differences grounded in myth and superstition. The emergence of antisemitism as a secular political ideology opened up the possibility for the Nazi’s terrible but novel goal of the complete and total extermination of the Jews.

In Book II of *Origins*, “Imperialism,” Arendt again draws a sharp distinction between what might at first appear to be a merely modern incarnation of a much older human experience. 19th century imperialism was not simply a continuation of the centuries-old phenomenon of empire building that all the great powers had engaged in throughout history. On the contrary, during the period of modern imperialism, European expansion took on an entirely new character, limitless in scope and racist in nature. Arendt argues that imperialism arose out of “the economic and industrial developments in the last third of the nineteenth century,” in particular the capitalist pursuit of profit by the bourgeoisie, which the territorial boundaries of the nation-state were unable to contain (Arendt 2004, 159).

In the quest for profit, capitalist businessmen sought to exploit new territories for economic gain. For this, they required not just the sanction of their governments, but much more so, the full weight of the political and military power of the nation-state to be put at their disposal. During the imperialist era, the state and its power became a mere instrument of private wealth seekers, subservient to the necessities of profit-driven expansion. As the capitalist pursuit of profit was limitless by nature, territorial
expansion also proved to be insatiable. The brutal exploitation of territorial conquests and its indigenous populations required state sponsored, institutionalized violence. Such violence necessitated more than an economic justification. The doctrine of the natural superiority of the white race arose concomitantly with imperialism as the ideological justification, the only possible “excuse,” for the treatment of subjugated peoples as subhuman (Arendt 2004, 241).

While racism supplied the moral justification for imperialism, bureaucracy provided a new device for political organization and rule over foreign peoples who were, according to the doctrine of racial superiority, clearly unfit to rule themselves. Bureaucracy, or government by administration, was found to be the most effective means of organizing and institutionalizing the domination of a foreign territory and its people (Arendt 2004, 242).

Bureaucratic administration grew out of a tradition of military discipline. It required a minority of experts who issued rules and directives and a small army of petty bureaucrats who dutifully and reliably implemented and carried out policies formulated by the minority. Rule by decree proved to be more efficient than the rule of law “because it could be altered at a moment’s notice and did not necessarily involve the home government in a case of difficulties” (Arendt 2004, 277). As the petty bureaucrat thoughtlessly obeyed and carried out orders issued by an expert minority, the expert minority obeyed the obligatory forces of history and race. All, therefore, could abandon individual moral responsibility in service of a higher, natural law. Totalitarianism’s claim to global rule, its determination to eliminate so-called inferior races, and its
organization, based not on the rule of law, but on the will of a single leader, was made possible, in large part, by 19th century imperialism’s quest for global conquest, its racial justification, and its innovation in rulership—rule by bureaucracy.

19th century anti-Semitism and imperialism prepared Europe not only to acquiesce, but to welcome the rise of a new and terrible form of government, one which 2,000 years of Western Civilization could never have predicted. While Books I and II of Origins provide a historical analysis of the chief elements of 19th century European state and society that made totalitarianism, as a phenomenon, possible, Book III of Origins examines the more immediate precursors to totalitarianism as well as the organization of totalitarianism in power. The Origins of Totalitarianism is the first place we see Arendt developing her own original political theory. Origins is the work that marked Arendt as one of the most important political theorists of the 20th century. It is for this reason that I will be examining closely its relation to her dissertation. Arendt’s work on human plurality in the dissertation provided her with a perspective from which to evaluate the rise and consolidation of the totalitarian movement.

Because of the length and breadth of The Origins of Totalitarianism, I have divided my interpretation of the work into two chapters. This chapter will demonstrate the continuity between Arendt’s concern for plurality in her dissertation and her analysis of the relationship of the Jews to state and society, imperialism, and the pan-movements. Throughout, she is interested in “the relevance of the other.” In both Books I and II, she investigates the meaning and significance of being with others and human plurality. In Book I, she examines the relationship of the Jewish community to the
nation-state and society. In Book II, she looks at the relationship of Europeans to other peoples, and the relationship of national groups to each other.

In Book I on anti-Semitism, she explains how the absence of legal ties uniting Jews to the body politic created the conditions for the development of political anti-Semitism, and how the inability of 19th century society to adopt both legal equality and at the same time truly accommodate difference succeeded in distorting the relationship of Jews to society. In Book II, she also sharply critiques imperialism, racism, and the pan-movements for their rejection of human equality, which, she says, arises out of the idea of a common origin. Throughout Books I and II, she critiques the absence of a shared public sphere, which allowed for the emergence of totalitarian movements.

As in her dissertation, Arendt is concerned for an “in-between” that can, at the same time, unite human beings together in a political community, while also preserving human equality and distinctiveness. In her dissertation she demonstrated how this was absent from Augustine’s philosophy of love, while in Origins she shows how these ties were absent in 19th century Europe. In what follows, I will demonstrate that the interests of Arendt’s dissertation, namely human plurality, continue in Books I and II of The Origins of Totalitarianism. My interpretation of Books I and II of Origins does not include every point she makes in her argument, but rather it interprets Origins from the perspective of Arendt’s dissertation. I believe this interpretation allows us to see crucial points Arendt makes in these books that have not been emphasized by other scholars in the past.
4.1 Anti-Semitism and Plurality

In the first book of *Origins*, Arendt is interested in understanding how anti-Semitism came to be the mainstay of Nazi ideology. For Arendt, the Jews were not simply scapegoats, nor was the Holocaust just another, albeit more extreme, form of age-old Jew hatred. To claim the former is to deny the Jews human dignity, and to claim the latter is to provide the perpetrators the best possible alibi (Arendt 2004, 16). Arendt believes there are concrete historical reasons why it was the Jews who came to be at the center of events. In *Origins*, Arendt affirms that all human beings are responsible for the man-made world. No group of people, she says, “simply cease to be coresponsible” for the world “because it became the victim of the world’s injustice and cruelty” (Arendt 2004, 14).

Always guided by the relevance of the other, in both “The Jews and the State” and “The Jews and Society” Arendt explains the historical context and the human events that gave rise to modern anti-Semitism. In her analysis of the historical relationship of the Jews to the state, she describes how a minority of European Jews came to have a privileged position vis-à-vis the modern nation-state, while the vast majority of Jews were excluded and denied even the most basic rights of citizenship. In her analysis of the relationship of the Jews to modern European society, she argues that because of the conformism of bourgeois society, individual Jews had only two clear choices open to them—either to remain a social pariah or become a *parvenu*. For most Jews, however, the choice was exceedingly difficult, and so they lived a complicated social existence, like Rahel Varnhagen, somewhere “between pariah and parvenu” (Arendt 2004, 76).
In her analyses of the relationship of the Jews to the state and to society, Arendt continues her reflections on the nature and significance of human plurality first begun in the dissertation, but now in terms of the Jews in 19th century Europe and the emergence of modern anti-Semitism. In the context of the relationship of the Jews to the state, she is critical of the deliberate exclusion of Jews from citizenship in the nation-state, as well as the decision of a minority of wealthy Jews to actively separate themselves from the majority of citizens within the body politic. There was no inter se tying the Jews to their fellow men and preserving the legal equality of all. In the context of the relationship of the Jews to society, Arendt looks again at human equality and human distinction. She argues that 19th century European society would not allow Jews to have both legal equality while, at the same time, allowing the room for authentic differences. Instead, society, out of its own fascination, demanded Jews to be what they had always thought them to be. This situation created the image of “the Jew” and perverted the relationship of Jews to all of society. In her analyses of both the relationship of the Jews to the state and to society, Arendt is guided by the ideas and interests that first animated her study of Augustine: the in-between (inter se), equality (aequalitas), and distinction (initium).

4.2 The Jews and the State

The rise of modern anti-Semitism, Arendt argues, has to be seen in its proper context. According to Arendt, this context is the development, consolidation, and then disintegration of the European nation-state (Arendt 2004, 20). The primary source of
modern anti-Semitism in Central and Western Europe is to be found “in certain aspects of Jewish history and specifically Jewish functions during the last centuries” (Arendt 2004, 19). A select few Jews served as essential financiers to the developing nation-states in Europe, but at the same time Jews were not members of the nation nor did they belong to the body politic as citizens. Neither did they have a nation-state of their own. For this reason, they were entirely dependent upon the special protection of the European aristocracy. It was their special relation to the state, either the over-privileged few or the under-privileged many, that made them objects of suspicion, and it was exclusion from the body politic that made them vulnerable to anti-Semitic attacks.

The special relationship between certain Jews and the governments of the European nation-states has its roots in the emergence of the “court Jew” of the 17th century. Jewish finance had proved especially useful to feudal lords during the Thirty Years War. Unlike other peoples, the Jews had no territory or state of their own and were dispersed throughout Europe. It was “precisely because of their dispersion” that the Jews were able to help maintain and provision armies (Arendt 2004, 31). By the late 17th century, every noble household had an individual Jew or Jewish family who provided credit and often oversaw their financial affairs. In exchange for their services, individual court Jews were granted special privileges that they had previously been denied, such as the ability to live wherever they chose, travel freely, and the right to bear arms (Arendt 2004, 22).

The emergence of the modern nation-state in the 18th century saw the end of feudalism and the rise of absolute monarchs who were in need of credit to consolidate
their power. Concerned only with private investments, no group in society was prepared or willing to tie their own interests to the future development of the state (Arendt 2004, 21). Because the court Jews had long served as moneylenders to the European nobility, it was only natural, Arendt says, that Jews should play the role of principal financiers to the new nation-state and its expanding business affairs during the 18th century (Arendt 2004, 21). Indeed, as the rising middle class denied credit to the state, it remained in the interest of the state to continue its policy of preserving “the Jews as a separate group,” and to prevent their assimilation into a society that refused credit to the state (Arendt 2004, 22). From the very beginnings of the modern nation-state, Jews were singled out by their special relationship to the state and by their separation from the rest of the body politic.

Now the role of the court Jews, which before had been a private service to a single noble family, expanded to financing the public business of the 18th century nation-state. As small groups of court Jews could no longer meet the demands of the new state for credit, the state drew on “the combined wealth of the wealthier strata of Western and Central European Jewry” (Arendt 2004, 25). Arendt writes in a footnote that during the 18th century, “wherever whole Jewish groups got wealthy enough to be useful to the state, they enjoyed collective privileges and were separated as a group from their less wealthy and useful brethren, even in the same country” (Arendt 2004, 29-30). The greatest “privilege” these wealthy Jews were granted, Arendt writes, was simple equality—those basic civil rights which other citizens, as members of the nation, were granted at birth (Arendt 2004, 29). In this way, certain Jews became “intimately
linked to the businesses of their governments,“ and tied their destinies to its future
development (Arendt 2004, 29). At the same time, however, the great majority of Jews
remained without civil and political rights. It was in the interest of the state, who found
only wealthy Jews useful, and in the interest of wealthy Jews, who prized their
privileged position, to preserve this vast inequality among Jews. For this reason, a
minority of wealthy Jews “lost their ties” to the larger Jewish community, while the vast
majority of Jews remained without any ties to the body-politic at all (Arendt 2004, 32).

By the 19th century, as the demands on the state grew, so did its need for
finance. Wealthy Jews, located in the urban financial centers of Europe, combined and
entrusted their wealth to prominent Jewish bankers who could meet the new, enlarged
needs of European governments (Arendt 2004, 25). By the middle of the 19th century an
interconnected, elite Jewish banking community in Europe had formed: “Connections
were established among state bankers of different countries; intermarriage between
leading families soon followed, and culminated in a real international caste system
unknown thus far” (Arendt 2004, 85). These connections formed the basis for “a new
inter-European cohesiveness” of wealthy Jews, which, Arendt says, replaced to a certain
extent “the old bonds of religious and spiritual tradition whose gradual loosening under
the impact of Western culture for the first time threatened the very existence of the
Jewish people” (Arendt 2004, 40-41).

The Jewish banking elite became ever more family conscious, preserving family
ties through intermarriage which allowed them to maintain a group identity at a time
when religious ties were dissolving (Arendt 2004, 41). They were now a well-defined,
highly cohesive, highly coordinated group that rendered specific services to the state in exchange for specific privileges in return (Arendt 2004, 40). Although a small minority, wealthy Jewish bankers, because of their prominent position, were seen by the public to represent all of European Jewry. The formation of an international caste system “was all the more glaring to non-Jewish observers, since it took place when the old feudal estates and castes were rapidly disappearing into new classes...since these [the Jewish banking elite] were in the limelight, the Jewish people as a whole came to be regarded as a caste” (Arendt 2004, 85). Though separated from the larger Jewish community, because these Jews were in the public eye, they seemed to represent all of Jewry, and because of their special relationship to the state, they seemed to hold great power and influence over the state.

It was precisely because they lacked a territory and state of their own that Jewish families held an “inter-European advantage upon which the position of the Jewish bankers rested” (Arendt 2004, 39).61 Jewish banking families did not ally themselves with any particular government, regime, or party, but rather with governments as such (Arendt 2004, 38). For the Jewish bankers, “their loyalty [to the

61 Foremost among these wealthy Jewish banking families was, of course, the Rothschilds, whose founder, Mayer Amschel Rothschild established his five sons in the chief financial capitals of Europe with the express purpose of preserving this inter-European identity. This international presence allowed the Rothschilds to “serve simultaneously and concurrently the governments in Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Austria” (Arendt 2004, 39). In order to preserve their special status, the Rothschilds purposively avoided loyalty to any one government or nation-state. Arendt notes that it took the French Rothschilds only twenty-four hours “to transfer their services from the government of Louis Philippe to the new short-lived French Republic and again to Napoleon III” (Arendt 2004, 36). Interestingly, Arendt worked for a Rothschild while she was in exile in France, and, in this way, I would say she conducted a kind of field research on her topic (Young-Bruehl 2004, 120).
state] remained a personal affair unrelated to political considerations” (Arendt 2004, 31). These Jewish financiers were not interested in political power, but rather with the privileges that accompanied their unique position. To the state, this made the Jews trustworthy business partners, while at the same time it meant that wealthy Jews did not use their advantage to press for a Jewish state or for political rights for the Jewish majority.

As the modern nation-state granted citizenship only to their own nationals at birth, a small group of Jews financed states that did not grant their larger Jewish populations citizenship. When emancipation of the Jews did become a political question in the first half of the 19th century, Jewish banking families were opposed because they recognized the very real dangers associated with emancipation (Arendt 2004, 39). They protested against Jewish emancipation not only because it would have meant a loss of their special privileges, but because the assimilation of Jews into the nation-state would have meant the eventual loss of their unique inter-European status. Jews becoming citizens of their respective nation-states might jeopardize the international connections the rise of the banking elite had depended upon (Arendt 2004, 39). Their fears were not unfounded: “in the twentieth century, when emancipation was for the first time an accomplished fact for the Jewish masses, the power of the privileged Jews had disappeared” (Arendt 2004, 48). Ironically, the ties to the body-politic that would have afforded all Jews legal protections were opposed for the benefit of a small minority.

At the end of the 19th century, Jewish financiers “lost their exclusive and unique position” as state bankers to the bourgeoisie (Arendt 2004, 30). As Arendt explains in
much more detail in Book II, capitalist expansion overseas required protection only the state could provide. For the rising propertied classes, “imperialist expansion, together with the growing perfection of the instruments of violence and the state’s absolute monopoly of them, made the state an interesting business proposition” (Arendt 2004, 30). This meant that the “Jews lost their exclusive position in state business to imperialistically minded businessmen,” and overall “declined in importance as a group” (Arendt 2004, 26). Jews left public finance for private business, as the children of Jewish bankers struggled to assimilate into the broader society (Arendt 2004, 71). As a result, Arendt says, the ties that had bound together an inter-European Jewish community were considerably loosened (Arendt 2004, 72).

At this time, wealthy Jews lost their economic influence with the state and retained only their riches. However, a few privileged Jews were still able to provide unique and valuable services to the state as advisors and assistants in times of international conflict (Arendt 2004, 30). Their role as financial advisors, purveyors of news, and negotiators of peace treaties was only possible because Jews lacked a territory and government of their own. They were trusted with these responsibilities precisely because of their international status (Arendt 2004, 30). While a few individual Jews retained positions of influence, unlike Jewish banking houses, they had no need of the larger Jewish community, “and therefore they cut themselves off completely” (Arendt 2004, 26). At the end of this period, we have almost the same situation as at the beginning: “a few Jewish individuals in important financial positions with little or no connection with the broader strata of the Jewish middle class” (Arendt 2004, 71).
Nevertheless, because these Jews held positions that were highly visible, to the rest of society they continued to appear to be representative of European Jewry as a whole (Arendt 2004, 26).

With the advent of World War I, Jewish financiers disappeared from the European political stage altogether, and the bonds that had connected an inter-European group of Jews were dissolved: “The rapid decline of Europe after the war found them already deprived of their former power, atomized into a herd of wealthy individuals” (Arendt 2004, 26). It marked, Arendt says, the “extinction of a specific group-life” (Arendt 2004, 33). At the same time, the aristocracy they had depended upon for special protections was in decline. It was at this point, when Jews had lost all of their influence, that anti-Semitism became its most virulent.

For most of the nation-state’s short history, Jewish bankers were the only group willing to ally itself so closely with the interests of the state. Although, unfortunately, they did not use their position for political ends, because of their proximity to state sources of power, the Jews were identified with power (Arendt 2004, 42). Because of their unique relationship to the state, as each social class (or in the case of Austria-Hungary, as each nationality) came into conflict with the state, they directed their anger at those who seemed to represent it (Arendt 2004, 38). “Which group of people would turn antisemitic in a given country at a given historical moment depended exclusively upon general circumstances which made them ready for a violent antagonism to their
government” (Arendt 2004, 42). Even small, local Jewish lenders, who had no connection to the Jewish banking houses, were resented because they were viewed as being well on their way to political power. After all, “were they not only to well known for their relationship with the government?” (Arendt 2004, 53).

The special relationship of Jewish financiers to the state and the deliberateness with which they established themselves internationally, seemed to demonstrate the “fantastic concept” of a Jewish world conspiracy (Arendt 2004, 41). Onlookers saw that although governments might rise and fall, somehow the Jews maintained their close relationship to the state. They also saw prominent Jewish financiers located in every capital of Europe and their ties to other wealthy banking families throughout Europe. Because of their non-national, inter-European status, their proximity to power, and their great wealth, it could appear as if Jewish bankers controlled the fortunes of Europe. Arendt notes, however, that nothing could be farther from the truth. Indeed, had Jewish bankers used their position to press for citizenship, and had the Jewish majority been

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62 In Prussia, anti-Semitism among the aristocracy was the result of the reforms initiated after the defeat by Napoleon in 1807. The reformers’ advocacy of Jewish emancipation caused the nobility to associate their loss of power with the new freedoms granted to Jews by the state. When, after the Congress of Vienna, aristocrats regained some of their former influence, anti-Semitism lost its virulence (Arendt 2004, 46). However, the restoration of aristocratic privilege by the reactionary Prussian government led to the rise of anti-Semitism among the middle classes (Arendt 2004, 49). Aristocratic anti-Semitism was aroused then again with the establishment of the German nation-state under Bismarck. After abolishing the last remaining remnants of feudalism in the German government, Bismarck was accused by the aristocracy of being the paid agent of Jewish bankers when actually, Arendt writes, “the relationship was the very opposite; Bleichroeder was undoubtedly a highly esteemed and well-paid agent of Bismarck” (Arendt 2004, 50). Similarly, in the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire, where Jews had rendered the greatest services to the Hapsburgs and where the Rothschilds had long served as bankers to the state, whenever a nationality came into conflict with the monarchy, they turned anti-Semitic, and by the beginning of World War I all nationalities had come into conflict with the state (Arendt 2004, 60).
integrated into the body-politic of the nation-state, it is possible that anti-Semitism would have maintained its purely religious character rather than becoming a much more dangerous political ideology.

The first anti-Semitic parties that appeared in the late 19th century did not appeal to narrow interest or to a specific class, but to a general dissatisfaction with the state. The anti-Semitic parties claimed that they were not a party among other parties, but a party above all parties, foreshadowing the rise of the totalitarian movements (Arendt 2004, 54). They claimed that as a party above parties, they represented the interests of the national body as a whole, and that the nation needed to regain control of the state from the Jews. Furthermore, these parties organized themselves across state lines. Again they argued that the Jews were organized internationally and so must be fought internationally. Because, they argued, the Jews controlled all the governments of Europe, all peoples of Europe shared an identical interest in the elimination of the Jews. The claim of these parties to represent the nation in its entirety and their supranational organization demonstrated that they aimed not for rule over a single state, but over the entire European continent (Arendt 2004, 56).

Paradoxically, Arendt argues, anti-Semitism reached its climax not when Jews in Central and Western Europe were at the height of their power and influence, but instead when they had “lost their public functions and their influence, and were left with nothing but their wealth” (Arendt 2004, 13). This can be explained, Arendt says, by the lack of ties between the Jews and the national body. Echoing Tocqueville’s interpretation of the French Revolution, Arendt argues that throughout human history,
great power and wealth have often been tolerated because people view those who possess them as serving some necessary function for the good of society, even when that power is abused. “Even exploitation and oppression,” Arendt writes, “still make society work and establish some kind of order” (Arendt 2004, 13). It is only when the wealthy are viewed by others as serving no real function or purpose in society, that they are generally resented:

Only wealth without power or aloofness without a policy are felt to be parasitical, useless, revolting, because such conditions cut all the threads which tie men together. Wealth which does not exploit lacks even the relationship which exists between exploiter and exploited; aloofness without policy does not imply even the minimum concern of the oppressor for the oppressed. (Arendt 2004, 13)

Arendt argues that it was because the Jews had no ties, no in-between, to the other citizens of the nation-state that they were placed in a vulnerable position where they could be distrusted and even hated.

The Jews were dispersed throughout Europe, and they lacked a common territory and government of their own. As the nation-state was the principle political body in 19th century Europe, being without a state made the Jews vulnerable and dependent on the protection of states that were founded not on law, but on nationality. They were, as Arendt says “dependent on the history of other nations” (Arendt 2004, 17). Arendt also argues that because they had no state of their own, they lacked the opportunity to gain political experience—both political judgment and ability. The Jewish bankers did not use their unique relationship to the state to achieve any political advantage. They failed to see the political possibilities their access to the halls of power
might have afforded them. They did not use their position to demand equal civil and political rights from their respective governments for all Jews, which would have afforded them legal protections. Instead, Jewish bankers actually opposed emancipation. They lost their ties to the larger Jewish community and developed into an elite caste. When the larger Jewish community began a political movement of their own during the Dreyfus Affair, it was too late and a virulent form of political anti-Semitism had already arisen. Furthermore, it was not a movement for integration into the political bodies of their birth, but a movement to organize permanent resettlement in Palestine to set up a Jewish state. Because of the dominance of the nation-state system in Europe, this was the only way they believed they could gain the protection of legal rights. By this time, anti-Semitic parties had already formed and their influence already well established.

For most of their history the vast majority of Jews of the European diaspora were excluded from the rest of society, living in poverty. When a few Jews achieved success as money lenders to the nobility, they took great pride in their privilege. The privileges they were granted as court Jews, however, were only those same rights that citizens, as members of the nation, were entitled to at birth. Unfortunately, the court Jews and later the Jewish bankers viewed basic civil equality not as a right but as a privilege granted in exchange for services rendered. This is one reason why wealthy Jewish bankers opposed the emancipation edicts of the 19th century, which granted civil rights to the Jewish majority.
When emancipation did come, it was viewed as the gradual extending of special privileges, first to single court Jews, then to a larger strata of wealthier Jews, and then finally to all Jews rich and poor. It was not understood to be the long overdue granting of rights to which all Jews, as members of the body politic, were entitled to. Even when the persecution of German Jews had begun by the Nazis, a few individual Jews still believed they would be protected, not by equal rights they were owed under the law, but by a special relationship they had to the state. For example, a veteran of World War I might have believed that his wartime service afforded him special protections. Because Jewish financiers, from the beginning, had a special relationship to the state, the Jews viewed the rights of citizenship as a privilege. The great danger was, of course, that privileges can always be revoked, and under the Nazis they were.

The wealthy Jewish bankers always believed that their advantage lay in their inter-European status. They intentionally remained outside of the body politic of the nation in order to preserve this status, and they opposed emancipation for all Jews in part because they knew that citizenship meant the integration of Jews into the body politic of the nation-state. If Jews became nationals, Jews as a group would lose the inter-European status the position of the Jewish banking elite depended upon. Until the advent of imperialism when the bourgeoisie seized the reigns of the state, governments were more than content to foster this Jewish separation from the rest of the political body of the nation. Only members of the nation (persons born French or born German) were granted citizenship. The state itself similarly feared that the integration of the Jews would mean that the Jews, like the rest of society, would refuse credit to the state: “The
Jews were, from the state’s point of view, the most dependable element in society just because they did not really belong to it” (Arendt 2004, 127). When the emancipation edicts were issued, Arendt writes, there was “a palpable inconsistency that Jews received their citizenship from governments which in the process of centuries had made nationality a prerequisite for citizenship and homogeneity the outstanding characteristic of the body politic” (Arendt 2004, 21). Up until the mid-19th century Jews remained a separate group, outside of the body politic of the nation. They lacked citizenship and the basic rights that citizenship entailed.

In Book I of Origins, we see Arendt’s continued concern for plurality. She remains interested in human equality and difference, and in the ties that bind individuals to one another in a community. In her study of anti-Semitism, we see that Jews were not members of the nation or citizens of the nation-state, which grew out of the coincidence of a single, limited territory and a homogenous population. Though residing in this territory, the Jews remained as if they were a foreign people. Unlike the nationals who were tied together both as members of the nation and as citizens of the state, the Jews were excluded from both the national and the political body. The Jews were far from equal to the citizens of the state, and so they lacked even those basic rights citizenship would have afforded them. The Jewish bankers who were granted privileges did not use their position to advocate for equality for their fellow Jews, but instead opposed emancipation. As a result, Jews continued to be excluded from the political body, lacking any ties to bind them together with fellow citizens of the nation-state, and thus completely without legal protections. The Jews as a whole remained separate and
unknown, and the Jewish bankers aloof from both the rest of the society and the larger Jewish community. Although these wealthy Jews were in the minority and had few remaining ties to the larger Jewish community, because of their unique relationship to the state they were in the limelight and came to represent all of Jewry in the minds of the public. In the minds of many, their aloofness and their proximity to power made them suspicious.

If the Jews had been afforded citizenship, and had been integrated into the political community, if they had legal ties to and were known by their fellow citizens, it would have been more difficult to fabricate a Jewish world conspiracy. If they had been included in a shared political life in common with their fellow citizens, attacking the Jews would have meant jeopardizing the shared world that had been jointly constituted. Furthermore, if they had been granted citizenship from at the founding of the nation-state instead of much later, they would have understood themselves and would have been understood by their fellow citizens, as bearers of rights and not of “privileges.” If they had been equal to their fellow citizens from the very beginning, revoking their rights would have meant a violation of the very principles the state was founded upon.\footnote{Dana Villa sums up the problem nicely:}

\begin{flushquote}
Where civic life has become a vacuum or a farce, the forces of cultural barbarism can be counted on to fill the void. Any minority which withdraws from civic life or accepts the political exile imposed upon it by the majority risks losing not only its civil rights, but everything else. Such was the fate of European Jewry. (Villa 2000, 6)
\end{flushquote}

It is a great tragedy, Arendt says, that it was only ever their enemies and never their
friends who understood that the Jewish question was a political one (Arendt 2004, 77). When one of the first actions the Nazis took was to revoke citizenship of the Jews, they found that because of a history of exclusion, few people protested. We can see here Arendt’s positive argument taking shape. For Arendt, all human beings must be afforded rights, specifically the right to be citizens of a political body that recognizes all persons as equals from its founding. She comes to a similar conclusion at the end of her dissertation: Responsibilities to others arise out of a shared, historical world that men have jointly constituted together as equals.

4.3 The Jews and Society

Arendt also considers plurality in terms of equality and difference in her discussion of the unique relationship of the Jews to modern European society. She argues that political anti-Semitism, as discussed above, “developed because the Jews were a separate body,” and without ties to the citizens of the nation-state (Arendt 2004, 74). Anti-Semitism within society, on the other hand, developed “because of the growing equality of all Jews with all other groups” (Arendt 2004, 74). As a larger group of Jews became wealthier and more educated, they sought to enter and be assimilated into society. But as they became more like society, in terms of income and education, their remaining differences became all the more glaring. Arendt argues that they were not allowed to simply be who they were, but were forced into society’s pre-existing understanding of the possibilities of what it meant to be a Jew.
Jews who sought to belong to 19th century bourgeois society found that they were not “relevant” to the rest of society. In other words, the majority of Jews would never be accepted on equal terms or be permitted simply to be who they uniquely were. Instead, they were admitted only if they pretended to be something they were not. They were welcomed only if they accentuated their differences and played the part society demanded of “the Jew.” Because of their differences, and because they were not accepted as equals, Jews could remain social pariahs, or struggle to become a parvenu and be viewed as a groveling upstart. In fact, most Jews grappled with a confused status somewhere between. As Arendt writes, the chief question for Jews in 19th century European society was not “to be or not to be,” but to belong or not to belong (Arendt 2004, 112). This is the same question man confronts in Arendt’s dissertation. There man desires to belong to the world, but for Augustine this desire is misplaced. Here, in her study of imperialism, and also of minorities and stateless persons, Arendt affirms not a desire but a right to belong to a body-politic as essential for the protection of human equality and human distinctiveness.

In “Jews and the State” Arendt examines the disturbing outcome of the absence of legal ties uniting Jews together with non-Jews, in a political body. In the “Jews and Society,” Arendt examines the experience of Jews who wanted to be integrated into late 19th century bourgeois society, but who were forced to present themselves as someone they were not. In the first section, Arendt argues that the basic equality of the Jews was not recognized in European political life, and in this second section, she argues that the differences of the Jews were not appreciated, but instead distorted. The result in both
cases was widespread anti-Semitism, which now took a political form and also became an accepted opinion in society. Arendt explains how, with the end of the old feudal order in Europe, a new class system emerged based not on political inequalities, but on social inequalities. The old ruling elite was transformed into a aristocratic social class distinguished not by their role in governance, but only by their wealth. The status of an individual was now defined solely by his membership in a particular social class, bestowed on him at birth. This new class society, Arendt believes, “separated the nationals, economically and socially, as efficiently as the old regime” (Arendt 2004, 23).

The only group in society that did not belong to a social class were the Jews. As a group, they did not belong to the workers, the bourgeoisie, or to the aristocracy, and so they stood outside of society entirely. When the first educated Jews sought assimilation, they found there was “a peculiar law governing Jewish admission to society” (Arendt 2004, 76). A Jew seeking entrance discovered that he could not simply be assimilated, but would only be accepted as a Jew. Society demanded that Jews be as educated and as cultured as itself, but at the same time present themselves as uniquely Jewish (Arendt 2004, 77). Whenever Jews were admitted to society, they were by no means allowed to be simply integrated, but were expected to be something extra-ordinary. Arendt argues that this had a particularly negative effect on Jewish psychology and resulted in the so-called “Jewish type” (Arendt 2004, 75).

Although in the early part of the 19th century humanist intellectuals were well intentioned, by the end of the century individual Jews were granted entrance to society only because bourgeois society was bored with itself, and was now attracted to and
fascinated by “the wicked” (Arendt 2004, 83). In this section, Arendt is highly critical of late 19th century bourgeois society, arguing that it was highly conformist, hypocritical, and, in its boredom, fascinated by what appeared to be a vice—in this case, association with Jews. Though the peculiar law that governed society’s relationship to the Jews did not directly lead to the rise of anti-Semitic parties, it did, Arendt argues, succeed in perverting Jewish relations to society. Because the bourgeois saw the Jews as something wicked or criminal, when the call came to expunge the Jews from their midst, they were willing to do so. This explains the incredible disloyalty of bourgeois society towards the Jews once the Nazis came to power (Arendt 2004, 114).

In her study of the relationship of Jews to society, Arendt first looks at “enlightened Berlin” in the late 18th century. The new humanists who advocated for Jewish emancipation expected Jews to be educated and assimilated into German society as either the prerequisite or the expected immediate consequence of emancipation (Arendt 2004, 77). They believed political equality was only significant because of the more important social equality it would engender. These enlightenment humanists hoped that, through education, Jews would shed the narrowness of their religious traditions and customs (Arendt 2004, 78). They also hoped, though, that through education Gentiles would embrace the enlightenment value of tolerance for different human beings. It so happened, however, that:

the particularly tolerant, educated and cultured non-Jews could be bothered socially only with exceptionally educated Jews. As a matter of course, the demand, among the educated, for the abolition of prejudice was very quickly to become a rather one-
sided affair, until only the Jews, finally, were urged to educate themselves. (Arendt 2004, 77)

From the very beginning, when Jews sought assimilation, it became clear that it was not society that would change in order to accept Jewish differences, but that it was the Jews who would have to adapt themselves to its demands and desires.

The enlightenment humanists of Berlin wanted what Herder called “new specimens of humanity,” in order to show that friendships could be formed between all different kinds of people (Arendt 2004, 77). Humanists befriended Jews like Moses Mendelssohn not because they genuinely enjoyed his company, but more so because the friendship provided “living proof” of the “possible intimacy with all types of mankind” (Arendt 2004, 77). In order to provide the evidence these men of the enlightenment required as a demonstration of its values, the few Jews they befriended were expected to be “more alien, and hence more exotic, than they actually were, so that the demonstration of humanity as a universal principle might be more effective” (Arendt 2004, 78). For the enlightenment humanists of Berlin, Jews were the best possible proof, not only because of their proximity—they had searched the whole earth for these “new specimens of humanity,” Arendt says, “only to find them in their age-old neighbors”—but also because they were an especially despised people (Arendt 2004, 77-78). It was thought that because they were reviled, Jews would be “more intensely human individuals,” and would be free from the common prejudices found among Germans, but also, because of their more intense humanity, would be capable of producing “something genuinely new” (Arendt 2004, 78). On the one hand, Jews were
accepted into society if they were educated, cultured, and not like “ordinary Jews,” but on the other hand, they were accepted only because they were Jews and “because of their foreign exotic appeal” (Arendt 2004, 77).

Arendt writes: “One can hardly overestimate the disastrous effect of this exaggerated good will on the newly Westernized, educated Jews and the impact it had on their social and psychological position” (Arendt 2004, 79). A Jew who desired entry into enlightenment society could by no means simply be himself, but had to appear to be the person these new humanists required, while cutting any ties he had to the Jewish community (Arendt 2004, 81). Arendt describes this as a “tragic endeavor to conform through differentiation and distinction” (Arendt 2004, 88). Strangely, in order to promote human equality and tolerance for human differences, the enlightenment figures in Berlin demanded that Jews demonstrate an exoticness, an intensity, or a novelty that most Jews, like most other human beings, simply did not possess. While the humanists had good intentions, and had genuinely hoped to create a society that would embrace difference, they set a dangerous precedent. From this point forward, Jews would not simply be assimilated, but would have to appear to be someone society determined was exotic, or later criminal, enough to be of interest to them.

In 1806, when Prussia was defeated by Napoleon and Napoleonic legislation was introduced, the question of Jewish emancipation became a matter of public discussion. Ironically, the educated, so-called enlightened “exception Jews” who had sought assimilation feared general emancipation because “emancipation would liberate the educated Jews, together with the ‘backward’ Jewish people, and their equality would
wipe out that precious distinction, upon which, as they were very well aware, their social status was based” (Arendt 2004, 80).

When, in 1808, the government did grant full civic rights to all Jews, what the exception Jews had most feared became a reality. Once they had been afforded civil rights and political equality, because of the special attention Jews had been paid by the government that no other group in society required, they seemed all the more alien to the rest of society. At this time, those who had previously welcomed Jews into their society now saw the Jews they had befriended not as enlightened exceptions, but rather as representatives of a despised people and members of an oppressed group “in whose favor the state was ready to take exceptional measures” (Arendt 2004, 82). This realization turned not only the aristocrats, Arendt explains, but even the intellectuals anti-Semitic, and the humanistic hope for a truly mixed society came to an abrupt end (Arendt 2004, 83).

Though, Arendt writes, emancipation actually had little significance in terms of improving the political status of German Jews, it had enormous social consequences (Arendt 2004, 82). Educated Jews were now painted as a specific Jewish type. “The Jew” was depicted as “a philistine,” and “a principle of upstart society” (Arendt 2004, 83). Arendt argues it was not political anti-Semitism, but social discrimination that “discovered the phantom of ‘the Jew’” (Arendt 2004, 83). Because the government’s actions drew society’s attention to the inferior status of the Jews, whenever Jews were granted political equality, they paid for it, Arendt says, by becoming “social pariahs”
(Arendt 2004, 83). Jews were now only accepted into society because of the bourgeoisie’s morbid curiosity with all things they believed to be depraved or wicked.

Though the first educated Jews rebelled against their social situation, over the long term, Arendt contends, it produced a certain kind of conformism among Jews, which resulted in recognizable behavior patterns, a “Jewish type” (Arendt 2004, 88-89). Jews understood that in order to assimilate, they had to clearly distinguish themselves from the Jew in general, and “just as clearly to indicate that they were Jews; under no circumstances were they allowed to disappear among their neighbors” (Arendt 2004, 88). This was a tragic attempt, Arendt says, to try to conform through differentiation. Of course, this required a “continuous concentrated effort,” and living constantly with “an ambiguity which they themselves did not understand” (Arendt 2004, 88). Assimilated Jews felt themselves to be different from “the man in the street,” but also different from “ordinary Jews,” leaving them belonging neither to society or to Judaism (Arendt 2004, 88).

Arendt argues that every Jew, at some point, had to make the decision as to whether he would remain a social pariah, despised and on the fringe of society, or like wealthy Jews, become a parvenu, and play the role society demanded of him like an actor in a play. The “complex psychology of the average Jew,” Arendt contends, was based on an ambiguous situation. Jews felt simultaneously the pariah’s regret at not having become a parvenu and the parvenu’s bad conscience of having betrayed his people and exchanged equal rights for personal privileges. One thing was certain: if one wanted to avoid all ambiguities of social existence, one had to resign oneself to the fact that to be a Jew meant to
belong either to an overprivileged upper class or to an underprivileged mass. (Arendt 2004, 89)

Every Jew had to be either a pariah, a *parvenu*, or struggle with who he was somewhere in between. He could not simply be *who* he was, but rather had to fit into a predesignated social category.

It is critical, Arendt maintains, for understanding the social history of Jews during 19th century European society to recognize that:

Instead of being defined by nationality or religion, Jews were being transformed into a social group whose members shared certain psychological attributes and reactions, the sum total of which was to constitute ‘Jewishness.’ In other words, Judaism became a psychological quality and the Jewish question became an involved personal problem for every individual Jew. (Arendt 2004, 88)

For the educated Jews of Central and Western Europe, the Jewish question was not a *political* one, but rather a *private matter* of the utmost significance. Every Jew knew that his success or his failure was inextricably linked to the fact that he was Jew (Arendt 2004, 89). Jews behaved in ways that society desired, themselves fostering a caricature of the Jew that would be developed later by anti-Semitic parties. In 19th century conformist bourgeois society, Jews who tried to assimilate, because of their differences, were only accepted if they entertained a bored society (Arendt 2004, 90). The continental bourgeoisie were drawn to the wicked, and to the criminal, and it was only for this reason that they granted a few Jews admission to society. This meant that when the anti-Semitic political parties formed, they found that they could easily play to these
sensibilities in society. Society was ready to cleanse themselves of these perceived criminals when the anti-Semites called for it (Arendt 2004, 116).

During the modern period, and for the first time, Arendt explains, men encountered each other without the “protection of differing circumstances and conditions” (Arendt 2004, 75). The corresponding political inequalities were no longer able to explain the great differences between people. In a conformist society, differences are no longer accompanied by these older explanations (Arendt 2004, 75). “Hence,” she says, “the more equal the Jewish condition, the more surprising were Jewish differences” because there was no clear explanation (Arendt 2004, 75). This resulted in a peculiar attitude towards the Jews as well as a peculiar Jewish self-interpretation. On the one hand, their differences were resented, but at the same time they proved to be attractive. The social atmosphere was thus “poisoned,” she says, and all social intercourse between Jews and Gentiles, Arendt writes, was “perverted” (Arendt 2004, 75). Jews were either objects of discrimination or of a kind of perverse fascination. Arendt argues that, “[a]s long as defamed peoples and classes exist, parvenu- and pariah-qualities will be produced anew by each generation with incomparable monotony, in Jewish society and everywhere else” (Arendt 2004, 89).

When equality is not “recognized simply as a working principle of political organization in which otherwise unequal people have equal rights,” then it will be understood as “an innate quality of every individual, who is ‘normal’ if he is like everybody else and ‘abnormal’ if he happens to be different” (Arendt 2004, 74). For Arendt, there are real “differences that actually exist between people” that need to be
appreciated (Arendt 2004, 74). Equality is perverted, she writes, and becomes dangerous, “when a society leaves but little space for special groups and individuals, for then their differences become all the most conspicuous” (Arendt 2004, 74). For Arendt, in order to protect and guarantee the two-fold character of plurality, discovered in her dissertation, we must create political communities that are founded on equality before the law. Within that political framework, human differences can be allowed to appear as they truly are. Her model for this is Rahel Varnhagen’s “garrett,” where the most diverse individuals met together as equals, while, at the same time, honoring and acknowledging each other’s differences (Arendt 2004, 81).

Here, we see Arendt working with the same ideas she studied in her dissertation: equality and distinctiveness. We see from her account of the Jews and the state that in order to provide legal protections all people need to belong to a political community as equal citizens (equality). We see in her account of the Jews and society that when equality is understood not as a legal principle, but as a social principle, individuals are not free to be “the who” of who they are, but instead are subject to the demands of society (distinctiveness). In this case, society defines who Jews had to appear to be and where they belonged. Because Jews did not have legal equality and their differences were not accepted in society, it was as if they were foreigners in their respective countries. As we will see, the imperialists of the 19th century afforded the native peoples they encountered overseas neither legal equality nor respect for their differences. When the imperialists returned home, they brought with them a mentality, and a set of practices, that made it possible to perceive the Jews not just as foreign, but as radically
“other” and subhuman. Europeans began to exclude Jews from their definition of humanity, just as they had the black-skinned peoples of Africa.

4.4 Imperialism

For Arendt, the era of imperialism began with the “scramble for Africa” (1884) and ended with “the birth of the pan-movements.” Because certain fundamental aspects of this period “appear so close to totalitarianism,” this era marked a clear break from the 19th century (Arendt 2004, 167). Imperialism’s expansionism and pursuit of power foreshadowed totalitarianism’s contempt for the limitations of the nation-state and its quest for global domination. The racism of overseas imperialism and the tribal nationalism of the pan-movements was openly adopted by the Nazis. Race, they asserted, could explain all human events and provide a guide for the future. And, bureaucracy, the form of government imperialists relied upon, was the precursor to totalitarianism’s rule by a single leader and the absolute loyalty and blind obedience of ever party member.

Because of the affinities between the era of imperialism and totalitarianism, Arendt believes we should view these years (1884-1914) as “a preparatory stage for coming catastrophes” (Arendt 2004, 167). Overall, the era of imperialism, Arendt argues, was marked by a single question: “whether the Christian tenet of the unity and equality of all men, based upon common descent from one original set of parents would
be kept in the hearts of men” (Arendt 2004, 233). Because of hindsight, we know the unfortunate answer to this question. Nevertheless, Arendt believes it need not have been so. Men bear responsibility for the world and for their decisions and actions within it. Arendt’s historical analysis of imperialism provides insights that, if we so choose, could help us bear the burden of our times, and possibly to avoid similar man-made catastrophes in the future.

In what follows, I provide an interpretation of Arendt’s analysis of imperialism from the perspective of her dissertation. As I explain her study of 19th century imperialism, I do not include an interpretation of every position she takes, but instead offer a reading that focuses on the continuities between the ideas we find in her work on Augustine and the concerns and conclusions that she reaches in Book II of Origins. I believe these key concerns bear a remarkable similarity to one another. As in the dissertation, Arendt is ultimately concerned for the two-fold character of human plurality and the man-made world, and, like in her dissertation, it is this concern that guides her inquiry. We see her investigating the space “in-between” that can both unite

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64 In the eighteenth century:

In France, where the problem of black tribes had been met with the desire to assimilate and educate, the great scientist Leclerc de Buffon had given a first classification of races which, based upon the European peoples and classifying all others by their differences, had taught equality by strict juxtaposition. The eighteenth century, to use Tocqueville’s admirably precise phrase, “believed in the variety of races but in the unity of the human species.” In Germany, Herder had refused to apply the “ignoble word” race to men, and even the first cultural historian of mankind to make use of the classification of different species, Gustav Klemm, still respected the idea of mankind as the general framework for his investigations. (emphasis added; 233)
and separate equal, but distinctive individual human beings. Arendt is evidently dissatisfied with the possibilities for a shared political life that the traditional-nation state offered. She believes that imperialism temporarily provided the nation-state’s disintegrating society with a basis for unity, but that it ultimately broke all ties men could have to each other.

In her description of the development of the ideology of imperialism in Europe and in South Africa, she argues that the essential problem with racism is that it denies the common origin of mankind in Adam and therefore rejects the equality and solidarity of all men. This too is the key problem with the tribal nationalism of the pan-movements. Neither racism nor tribal nationalism, its continental counterpart, permits the individual person to appear as a unique individual. Instead they subsume the individual into a white race or into a nation that has general qualities embodied by every member. Because imperialism and the pan-movements deny the essential equality and solidarity of man, grounded in a common origin, they are world-destroying. They both eventually destroy the common world that men have built together and leave men completely isolated, lonely individuals. As we will see in the next chapter, because of their desire to belong at any cost, these isolated, lonely men will be equally willing to play the role of executioner or victim.

4.5 The Origin of Imperialism

The bourgeoisie were driven by the pursuit of profit, which Arendt argues is limitless by nature. Imperialism began in the late 19th century when the domestic
markets of European nation-states had been saturated, and new markets needed to be found for the pursuit of profit to continue. Imperialists sought to use the state’s power to guard their overseas investments and protect their limitless pursuit of wealth. In order to protect their growing wealth, they required more and more power. What imperialism then turned into, Arendt argues, was the limitless pursuit of power. Imperialism needed both an idea and a form of rule that would support the pursuit of profit and power. The idea that accompanied imperialism as the justification for the violent exploitation of people, as if they were raw materials, was racism. The form of rule over a foreign people who were no longer viewed as men, but as some other kind of animal species, and which enabled the governors to govern outside the rule of law and in contrast to the “idea of mankind” was bureaucracy.

Imperialism was initially promoted by the capitalist class, but it was also championed by intellectuals and by political parties on both the right and the left, who saw in imperialism a possible cure for all social ills. Late 19th century European society was sharply divided into classes. Intellectuals and statesmen alike shared “the conviction that the national body itself was so deeply split into classes, that class struggle was so universal a characteristic of modern political life, that the very cohesion of the nation was jeopardized” (Arendt 2004, 203). According to Arendt’s analysis, imperialism did stave off the disintegration of both the state and society, but only for a time. The security offered by the temporary unity provided by “the alliance between mob and capital” was a deceptive one (Arendt 2004, 196). In the end the cure proved
worse than the disease, and what was believed to be a source of eternal unity proved to be a source of perpetual war (Arendt 2004, 208).

Capitalism had produced for the bourgeoisie “superfluous wealth.” That is, money “needed by nobody though owned by a growing class of somebodies” (Arendt 2004, 197). While the rising bourgeoisie had fulfilled the basic function in modern society as producers, they had seemed to be fulfilling an important function that served the nation as a whole (Arendt 2004, 199). Once the domestic market had been saturated, and once “capitalism had pervaded the entire economic structure and all social strata had come into the orbit of its production and consumption system,” the bourgeoisie no longer served even this basic function as producers and stimulators of production (Arendt 2004, 197, 199). “The owners of superfluous capital,” Arendt writes, “were the first section of the class to want profits without fulfilling some real social function—even if it was the function of exploiting producer—and whom, consequently no police could have had saved from the wrath of the people” (Arendt 2004, 200). A new class of men who were growing tremendously wealthy because of “a social system based on maldistribution,” and who appeared to provide no real public purpose, was breeding resentment among the lower classes (Arendt 2004, 197).

Capitalism not only produced “superfluous wealth,” it had also, and for a longer period of time, produced superfluous men—“the human debris that every crisis, following invariably upon each period of industrial growth, eliminated permanently from producing society” (Arendt 2004, 200). These superfluous men “had not stepped out of society but had been spat out by it” (Arendt 2004, 247). At the end of the 19th
century, this group of permanently idle and resentful men were increasing in numbers, proving to be a growing menace to society and to the state (Arendt 2004, 200). That this growing group of *déclassés* and the dispossessed were an increasing threat to the safety and security of the rest of society was evident to all, while the men of “superfluous wealth” had nowhere to invest and so appeared to the rest of society not as stimulators of production, but as parasites on the national body (Arendt 2004, 199). Superfluous men and the men of superfluous wealth appeared to be on a collision course that would lead to the dissolution of the nation-state.

To the educated, as well as political representatives and government officials, imperialism seemed to offer a unifying principle for a society and body politic that was rapidly disintegrating from within. It seemed to be “an easy panacea” for all social conflicts (Arendt 2004, 196). First, imperialist expansion provided an outlet for superfluous wealth. Now, excess capital would be exported abroad. As they demanded and relied on government protection for their overseas investments, the men of superfluous wealth re-entered “the life of the nation” (Arendt 2004, 199):

Expansion then was an escape not only for superfluous capital. More importantly, it protected its owners against the menacing prospect of remaining entirely superfluous and parasitical. It saved the bourgeoisie from the consequences of maldistribution and revitalized its concept of ownership at a time when wealth could no longer be used as a factor in production within the national framework and had come into conflict with the production ideal of the community as a whole. (Arendt 2004, 200)

Second, expansion also offered the opportunity for the export of superfluous men. The unemployed, the dispossessed, and all those who, for whatever reason, stood outside of
and could not fit into class society, now emigrated to Africa and Asia looking for adventure and riches: “The new fact in the imperialist era is that these two superfluous forces, superfluous capital and superfluous working power, joined hands and left the country together” (200).

Imperialism seemed to have united the nation-state around the common interest of economic expansion:

Expansion appeared as a lifesaver, if and insofar as it could provide a common interest for the nation as a whole...in a society of clashing interests, where the common good was identified with the sum total of individual interests, expansion as such appeared to be a possible common interest of the nation as a whole. Since the owning and dominant classes had convinced everybody that economic interest and the passion for ownership are a sound basis for the body politic, even nonimperialist statesmen were easily persuaded when a common economic interest appeared on the horizon. (Arendt 2004, 203)

Secured by the power of their governments, nationals could now invest either their wealth or their work overseas (Arendt 2004, 200). The nation was united by a common desire for “profit-at-any-price” (Arendt 2004, 201). Parasites were now turned into patriots.

This is why, Arendt explains, nationalism at first seemed to provide a support to imperialism, despite the inherent contradiction between the natural limits of the nation-state and the conquest of foreign peoples (Arendt 2004, 203). When in Europe, a member of the British upper class felt himself more at home in the company of a Frenchman of the same class than in the company of a fellow Englishman of the lower classes. But abroad, in contrast to the colored peoples, men of upper and lower classes
felt the solidarity of their both being English (Arendt 2004, 205). In ruling foreign peoples, they could pretend to be “heroic servants of the nation” who glorified their English, German, or French race (Arendt 2004, 205). Nationalism can be made to appear not to contradict imperialism, Arendt argues, only if it tends towards racism:

The more ill-fitted nations were for the incorporation of foreign peoples (which contradicted the constitution of their own body politic), the more they were tempted to oppress them. In theory there is an abyss between nationalism and imperialism; in practice, it can and has been bridged by tribal nationalism and outright racism. (Arendt 2004, 203)

Superfluous wealth and the emergence of the superfluous men as “the mob” were, however, only the occasion for imperialism. The principle of imperialism, the unlimited pursuit of power, Arendt argues, was already an attitude implicitly held by the bourgeoisie (“though it had been hidden by nobler traditions”) (Arendt 2004, 208). The bourgeoisie were free to pursue unprincipled power politics only when there was available to them a large mass of people—the mob—who were free of all principles and who could be inspired by racial doctrines (Arendt 2004, 208). The temporary alliance of the criminal elements of the mob with the men of high society would provide a cover of civility to the most uncivilized behavior.

In this way, imperialism temporarily succeeded in uniting the nation, but it divided humanity “into master and slave races, into higher and lower breeds, into colored peoples and white men” (Arendt 2004, 202). Imperialism empowered the mob, afforded them an education in racism and in domination, and enabled them to transition seamlessly into totalitarian forms of organized domination. Imperialism,
instead of preserving the nation-state and the structural integrity of the body-politic (as intellectuals and statesmen had hoped), actually paved the way for its destruction and dissolution.

4.6 Imperialism and the Nation-State

While imperialism drew upon preexisting bourgeois attitudes, Arendt emphasizes that it was a completely new phenomenon. In her view, 19th century imperialism is a very different phenomenon from earlier European colonialism. The colonial experience involved groups of people leaving their homelands for the purposes of permanent settlement in an overseas territory, and with the explicit intent of creating a new life, a new home, and a new community (as they did, for example, in North America or Australia). In sharp contrast, imperialism originated in the capitalist pursuit of profit, and its purpose was solely to exploit the raw materials, as well as the people, of overseas territories. The imperialists were not interested in permanent settlement or in founding new communities. They were only interested in exporting the capital and the men required for dominating and violently exploiting foreign territories and foreign peoples. They sought to expropriate what wealth they could, exploit the peoples as if they were raw materials themselves, and then move on, like a swarm of locusts, to the next territory and people they could devour. Imperialists sought to acquire overseas territories, not as a site for a new settlement, but merely as stepping stones to pursue other territories, and then others, where greater and greater wealth could be expropriated.
Likewise, imperialism is entirely different from the much older experience of empire building, although these two phenomena may at first appear similar (Arendt 2004, 169). Arendt relies on the classic example of the Roman Empire to illustrate her point. What is significant about the Roman Empire is that Rome sought to integrate conquered peoples into the Empire. The Roman Empire was successful, Arendt says, only because it united heterogeneous peoples under a common law (Arendt 2004, 169-170). The law was the in-between that served to tie together plural peoples. Though the various peoples of the empire were vastly different from each other, when they became citizens they were equal under the law. Late 19th century imperialism lacked such a unifying principle. In fact, imperialism was based on the ideology of racism, a principle of separation grounded in the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others. The very form of governing that imperialists relied upon, bureaucracy, was intended to ensure that those they believed were inherently superior and therefore entitled to rule by virtue of birth would remain removed and aloof from their natural inferiors who were not fit to govern themselves.

Indeed, conquest of foreign territories by the nation-state, for Arendt, could never lead to an empire of the Roman sort because of the very structure of the nation-state itself. The nation-state grew out of the coincidence of a homogenous population, a nation, who lived and made their home within a limited territory. This nation shared not only a common territory, but a common language, a common history, and a common culture. In a footnote, Arendt references Ernest Renan’s definition of a nation (1882). He says it is: “the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to preserve worthily
the undivided inheritance which has been handed down” that are “the chief elements which keep the members of a people together in such a way that they form a nation” (Arendt 2004, 170). When this nation developed rules and laws to govern themselves, they founded a state. The law of this nation-state was the product of the consent of a homogenous population who were already united together by a common language, history, and culture: “The nation conceived of its law as an outgrowth of a unique national substance which was not valid beyond its own people and the boundaries of its own territory” (Arendt 2004, 171).

Therefore, of all political institutions, Arendt argues, it is the nation-state, which grew out of a homogenous people living within a limited territory, that is least suited to expansion. As the law of the nation-state was a unique outgrowth of a shared history and culture, it could not be the basis for integrating foreigners into an empire as it was not grounded in any universal principle, but particular principles unique to the nation. Citizenship in the nation-state was based solely on birth and membership in the nation (what is often referred to as jus sanguinis), and not on equality before the law. Foreign peoples could not become citizens of an empire based on the nation-state principle, and they could never be united together on the basis of a law that was unique to one nation. When the nation-state attempts to expand through conquest, as it did in the late 19th century, it can only impose its rule on other people. Its law cannot be used to integrate other nationalities, but can only be imposed upon them. Its rule will be based on force and not on consent. Empire building, Arendt argues, has only ever been carried out by governments which were based on law (civil states). The nation-state was not based on
law, but on the consent of a homogenous population to its own government. This means that when nation-states conquered other peoples, they would have “to enforce consent rather than justice, that is, to degenerate into tyranny” (Arendt 2004, 170). The nation-state, based on a homogenous population tied to a limited territory, was incompatible with the unlimited expansion of imperialism and its rule over peoples with different histories and traditions. Lacking a common history, tradition, and language—those qualities that bind a nation together—with citizenship based on nationality (by birth) and not on law, there was no principle to unite together conqueror and conquered. As a result, conquered peoples were not regarded as partners, but as property (Arendt 2004, 173).

The British Commonwealth demonstrates that nation-states and empire building in the Roman sense are incompatible. The British Commonwealth, Arendt says, “was never a ‘Commonwealth of Nations’ but the heir of the United Kingdom” (Arendt 2004, 172). The political structure of the nation-state was not expanded through the commonwealth, but transplanted by English colonists who remained members of the same British nation (Arendt 2004, 172-173). The colonists (for example, in Australia and Canada) remained tied to the British nation by sharing the same history, language, and political traditions. The British Commonwealth, Arendt says, follows the Greek model of colonization rather than the Roman model of empire building (Arendt 2004, 173). That the British nation has never been able to incorporate foreign peoples into her body politic, Arendt argues, is well demonstrated by the case of Ireland (Arendt 2004, 172). She says that (at the time she was writing) it remains to be seen whether or not the
British Commonwealth will be able to incorporate the territories it acquired through imperialism such as India (Arendt 2004, 173). In fact, we know that the territories were never able to be incorporated into the body politic of the United Kingdom.

When the British became imperialists in the late 19th century, they tried to avoid the inherent contradiction between the nation-state and expansion by leaving conquered peoples “to their own devices as far as culture, religion, and law were concerned” (Arendt 2004, 175). But this negative respect for foreign peoples’ way of life “did not produce a new way for peoples to live together” (Arendt 2004, 177). Instead it reinforced the imperialist belief in the superiority of man over man (Arendt 2004, 175).

The British intentionally kept national institutions at home separate from the administration of British possessions abroad (Arendt 2004, 176). The administrators of the conquered territories were not interested in applying the legal system and structure of their own nation-state to the “backward populations” who required oversight and were unfit to govern themselves. There was no “tie” connecting “the far-flung possession of the British Crown to the English nation” (Arendt 2004, 176). As a result, “the ‘natives’ could not but conclude that they were being excluded and separated from mankind forever” (Arendt 2004, 176).

It was not uncommon for colonial administrators to come into conflict with European statesmen at home who tried, at times, to restrain the actions of the administrators in regards to their treatment of the subject peoples, not necessarily out of concern for the people, but out of concern for the rule of law. Arendt says that a few statesmen knew by instinct that tyranny abroad would inevitably lead to the destruction
of the political body of the nation-state at home (Arendt 2004, 169). Ultimately, in order to remain consistent with their own political principles, the British eventually had to let their possession become independent. At the same time, imperialism led to the end of the rights of man and the dissolution of the nation-state on the European continent.

4.7 Hobbes and Bourgeois Philosophy

As we have already seen, imperialism was born when the capitalists’ unlimited pursuit of wealth came up against the limitations of the nation-state. When the bourgeoisie could no longer find investments at home, they looked abroad, but found that their investments would only be secure with the backing of the police power of the state (Arendt 2004, 182). The export of money, Arendt says, required the export of power, and more specifically, the export of the instruments of violence (Arendt 2004, 182). The endless accumulation of wealth meant the bourgeoisie now sought the endless accumulation of power. The bourgeoisie seized control of the state and its instruments of violence, and the “inherent law” of capitalism—limitless growth—was now applied to the political body (Arendt 2004, 170). The limitless pursuit of power became the conscious aim of the body politic and the ultimate aim of its policies (Arendt 2004, 184).

Political institutions, however, Arendt argues, are limited by nature. The unlimited accumulation of power, therefore, can never be the principle of a political body. When viewed from the perspective of the unlimited pursuit of power, the state, or any political community for that matter, will only prove an obstacle, and the state
along with its laws will have to be destroyed. When separated from the community it is
supposed to serve, Arendt explains, power is freed to become an end in itself, and
power will be sought for the sake of more power. Though the initial motive for pursuing
power was the protection of profit-seeking, late 19th century bourgeoisie came to
pursue power as a means to acquire more and more power. According to Arendt, the
political philosopher who envisaged a commonwealth fit for this new bourgeois man
and the new bourgeois state was Thomas Hobbes.

Although he wrote 300 years before the “scramble for Africa,” Arendt believes
Hobbes’s political philosophy outlines a picture of man as he ought to behave if he
wanted to fit into the emerging bourgeois society, and a picture of a commonwealth
that would correspond to the new interests of a new class (Arendt 2004, 191). She
interrupts her historical analysis of imperialism to provide an analysis of Hobbes’s
political philosophy from the perspective of imperialism. She argues that while Hobbes
presents his theory as an empirical analysis of human nature, the theory of man and the
theory of the state he sets up are inconsistent with each other. If men require security,
they would never surrender to a state—“the Leviathan”—that has power to destroy
them. What Hobbes provided instead, Arendt affirms, were the qualities of man and
state that would benefit the rising bourgeoisie (Arendt 2004, 188).

In this way, Arendt maintains that the “Man” Hobbes describes is not intended
to be a complete picture of a human nature, but rather a perfect picture of the new
bourgeois man (Arendt 2004, 187). This is a man who is completely isolated from all
other human beings, and who has no responsibilities to others. According to Arendt’s
interpretation of Hobbes, each man is interested solely in his own advantage, and relates to others only insofar as they can help him accomplish it. For Hobbes, she explains, power is defined as the accumulated control that enables a man to achieve his own advantage. Since power is what he needs in order to acquire anything else he desires, then each man is interested, first and foremost, in the acquisition of power. The desire for power after power is the fundamental passion of (bourgeois) man. Power is also what regulates the relations between individuals in the contest for power (Arendt 2004, 187). In this struggle, all men are equal because all men are able to kill; they are equal, she says, only as “potential murderers” (Arendt 2004, 187). It is the fear of his fellow men who are a constant threat—the need for security—that is the reason for the creation of the state: “The raison d’être of the state is the need for some security of the individual, who feels himself menaced by all his fellow-men” (Arendt 2004, 187). Individuals delegate their power to kill to the state in exchange for protection from being killed. This “commonwealth” is created not for any kind of vision of a common good, but only for the sake of each individual’s private good (Arendt 2004, 186).65

According to Arendt, Hobbes’s state is the only state imagined by political philosophers that is not founded on a constituting law, neither divine, natural, or even

65 All “so-called liberal” conceptions of politics, Arendt argues, that preceded imperialism’s power principle, like Hobbes, “simply add up private lives and present the sum as the laws of history, economics, or politics” (Arendt 2004, 194). According to these philosophies, the state is not a public matter, but an instrument for protecting the interests of isolated, private individuals whose coincidence of private interest, for Arendt, does not create a truly common, shared public life. Individual property acquisition, which had always been a private affair in Western Civilization, is made the affair of the state. The pursuit of wealth “replaces political action” (Arendt 2004, 195).
contractual, but merely on the sum of individual interests. Instead of reflecting any idea of a common good, the law of the state is quite simply “a direct emanation from the power monopoly of the state (and is not established according to human standards of right or wrong)” (Arendt 2004, 188). In delegating his power to the state, each individual is not only not required to participate, but is actually “excluded from participation in the management of public affairs that involve all citizens” (Arendt 2004, 189). Bearing neither the rights nor the responsibilities of citizenship (except obedience in exchange for security), Hobbes’s bourgeois man, Arendt argues, is now able to direct all his attentions to his private life. Provided the protection of the state, he is free to be a purely private individual, pursuing his own advantage (Arendt 2004, 189).

Human society within the Hobbesian commonwealth, as Arendt sees it, is a brutally competitive society of equal individuals each pursuing his own advantage. The value of each person in this society is not based on any inherent worth of the human person. There is no such idea in Hobbes’s philosophy. Each person is valued only so much as others esteem him—by the value of, as Hobbes says, “the use of his power” (Arendt 2004, 187). In other words, the worth of every individual is actually determined by the law of supply and demand (Arendt 2004, 187). In a competitive society made up of equal individuals, Arendt says that success will be due to chance, and for Hobbes, those who are unsuccessful will simply be excluded from society:

According to bourgeois standards, those who are completely unlucky and unsuccessful are barred from the competition, which is the life of society. Good fortune is identified with honor, and bad luck with shame. By assigning his political rights to the state, the individual also delegates his social responsibility to it: he asks
the state to relieve him of the burden of caring for the poor precisely as he asks for protection against criminals. The difference between pauper and criminal disappears—both stand outside society. The unsuccessful are robbed of the virtue that classical civilization left them; the unfortunate can no longer appeal to Christian charity. (Arendt 2004, 189)

All who have become outcasts from society, the poor, the weak, and the criminal, are thrown back into the state of nature and are therefore given free reign by Hobbes to use their equal power to kill. Arendt argues that “Hobbes foresees and justifies the social outcasts’ organization into a gang of murderers as a logical outcome of the bourgeoisie’s moral philosophy” (Arendt 2004, 190). This “gang of murderers” are those individuals who are first Arendt’s “superfluous men” and as we will see in her analysis of totalitarianism later become the “the mob” (Arendt 2004, 190).

Each individual in Hobbes’s commonwealth has no responsibilities to others, and has no right to resist the state in defense of another. He also has no permanent loyalties to the state, and he owes no further allegiance to the state in case of the commonwealth’s defeat in battle. Rather, the state is a temporary institution designed to provide security to each man from the other, and simply represents the accumulated power of each individual. Therefore, it lasts only so long as it serves each individual’s interest. According to Arendt, “membership in any form of community is for Hobbes a temporary and limited affair which essentially does not change the solitary and private character of the individual or create permanent bonds between him and his fellow-men” (Arendt 2004, 188). Though a citizen of the state, the man remains in his original isolation without any ties to others. The man Hobbes depicts, Arendt explains, cannot
be incorporated “definitely into any political community” (Arendt 2004, 187). If the state men have set up, the so-called Leviathan, is the aggregation of each man’s fundamental desire for power, then it must also, like man in the state of nature, pursue power after power. Indeed, Hobbes explains that each state remains in a perpetual state of war with every other and, as Arendt interprets him, for Hobbes the state can only survive by constantly extending its authority (Arendt 2004, 190). Although it took 300 years for the “Leviathan” to fully develop, Hobbes is the only great thinker, Arendt argues, “who, for the sake of the private good, conceived and outlined a Commonwealth whose basis and ultimate end is accumulation of power” (Arendt 2004, 186).

This power-seeking individual, who sets up a state in order to pursue power after power vis-à-vis other states, is exactly what Arendt sees in the bourgeois man and the bourgeois-controlled state of the late 19th century imperialist era. The endless accumulation of profit could only be protected by the corresponding endless accumulation of power. The bourgeoisie required the state, with its monopoly on the instruments of violence, as the means to achieve this end. Arendt argues that in the late 19th century, the bourgeoisie, originally prompted by greed, later openly adopted Hobbes’s philosophy of power and sought power as an end in itself (Arendt 2004, 191). What Hobbes theorizes is a commonwealth that serves perfectly the interests of the new bourgeoisie, and which provides justification for their unlimited competitiveness in a supposed science of Man. Hobbes provides a self-proclaimed scientific theory of the
endless accumulation of power that fit perfectly the aims and tactics of the imperialist era.

For Arendt, what is significant is that Hobbes’s theory does not establish a commonwealth, but rather it provides for the destruction of every political community. She argues that political bodies are necessarily limited by nature, and that “every political structure, new or old, left to itself develops stabilizing forces” (Arendt 2004, 184). A commonwealth founded on the desire for power will never stabilize, as its inherent principle is movement towards ever greater power. Hobbes’s state is not a stable political institution founded on law, but must constantly seek to accrue more power vis-à-vis other states (Arendt 2004, 190). Hobbes does not theorize a governing principle, she says, but a process. This endless process of power accumulation will eventually come up against what Arendt describes as the very real limits of the “human condition” (Arendt 2004, 192). Even though it is possible to surpass the boundaries of the nation-state, the earth itself is spatially limited. Once the imperialists had conquered the entire planet, they would necessarily have to destroy everything they had conquered in order to begin again the endless process of power accumulation (Arendt 2004, 192). But there is another reason, another reality of the human condition, she says, that explains why Hobbes’s philosophy of power can never be the principle of a political community—mortality: “Property owners who do not consume but strive to enlarge their holdings continually find one very inconvenient limitation, the unfortunate fact that men must die” (Arendt 2004, 194). The never ending pursuit of power cannot
be the principle of a state because of the human condition, first because the earth itself is spatially limited and second because the lives of human beings are temporally limited.

Hobbes theorizes a commonwealth where there are no ties between men. Having no public responsibility to participate with others in the affairs of the state or private responsibilities to others in society, the individual loses “his natural connection with his fellow-men” (Arendt 2004, 189). Society is made up of isolated individuals who compete ruthlessly against others for their own individual advantage. Those who do not survive are excluded from society altogether. When power is the ultimate aim of the individual and of the commonwealth, Arendt argues, every man must serve this aim. He is reduced, she says, to “a cog in the power-accumulating machine” (Arendt 2004, 195). Arendt affirms: “A commonwealth based on the accumulated and monopolized power of all its individual members necessarily leaves each person powerless, deprived of his natural and human capacities. It leaves him degraded into a cog in the power-accumulating machine” (Arendt 2004, 195). Power, according to Arendt’s understanding, should be a means to achieve some end rather than an end in itself. Within a political community founded on the rule of law, the law is above power, and power is only a means to enforce that law (Arendt 2004, 327). When it becomes an end rather than a means, it will destroy the power of every individual and then it will destroy all communities.

Hobbes’s philosophy contains nothing of modern race doctrines, which became the ideology of imperialism. But Hobbes did provide “the prerequisite for all race doctrines, that is, the exclusion in principle of the idea of humanity which constitutes
the sole regulating idea of international law” (Arendt 2004, 208). In an accumulating
society, besides race there is “no other unifying bond available between individuals who
in the very process of power accumulation and expansion are losing all natural
connections with their fellow-men” (Arendt 2004, 209). According to Hobbes, nations
are in a permanent state of war with each other, and foreign peoples are outside of the
social contract. This allows, she says, for the belief that nations are separated by nature,
that there is no “solidarity of mankind,” no idea of humanity, of which, she says, “the
most conclusive symbol is the common origin of the human species” (Arendt 2004, 208-
209). Like Hobbes, the early race-thinkers also denied this common origin of mankind.

4.8 Origins of Racism

The idea that accompanied imperialism’s unbridled pursuit of power was the
ideology of racism. Race-thinking, not yet formed into the ideology of racism, has a long
history in Europe. It was the forerunner to the ideology of racism, which would later
claim to be able to explain not only all of human history, but also to be able to predict
the future solely on the basis of race. Of all the ideologies that became widespread at
the end of the 19th century, it was only racism that “consistently denied the great
principle upon which national organizations of peoples are built, the principle of
equality and solidarity of all peoples guaranteed by the idea of mankind” (Arendt 2004,
214). The Nazi’s racist ideology would not have exercised such an international appeal,
Arendt argues, had race-thinking not already been a widely accepted opinion
everywhere (Arendt 2004, 210). Because race-thinking had such a long history in
Europe, it gave racism, which was not merely one opinion among others, but an all-encompassing ideology, the pretense of being grounded in the Western Tradition even though it broke with this Tradition entirely.

Modern race-thinking in Europe dates back to the early 18th century, when the French aristocracy justified their elevated position based on being the descendants of a superior Germanic race (the Francs) who had conquered the indigenous non-Germanic tribes (the Gauls) (Arendt 2004, 215). French aristocrats denied a common origin with their fellow Frenchmen, and instead claimed an original and eternal distinction from the French people (Arendt 2004, 215). They argued that their act of conquest demonstrated the natural superiority of the Francs and the slavishness of the Gauls. This doctrine, in denying a common origin with the French people, was meant to counteract the unity of the emerging French nation-state, and as Arendt states, was in clear opposition to the republican values of the French revolutionaries and the Rights of Man, which based nationality on citizenship rather than birth. This early race thinking attempted to combat the new idea of a nation of citizens with “a race of aristocrats” (Arendt 2004, 216). The idea of the Germanic origin of the aristocracy served to unite more closely the French aristocrats with German aristocrats, especially when they were in exile during the French Revolution. They felt more in common with their fellow aristocrats, who they believed shared their noble race, than with those who were born in the same territory and spoke a their same language. Even early race-thinking rejected the limits of the state in order to unite a supposedly superior race.
The first stages of race-thinking in Germany developed after the Prussian defeat by Napoleon and crystalized at the time of German unification. Unlike in France, German race-thinking was not a device for uniting the aristocracy and dividing the body of the nation-state into superior and inferior races, but rather for uniting all of the German people against French domination. It was invented by the middle classes who wanted to unite the German people on the basis of a common origin in order to set up a single German nation-state (Arendt 2004, 219). As the German states had varying histories, these early race thinkers relied upon the idea of unity based on blood and family ties:

A naturalistic appeal was born which addressed itself to tribal instincts as a possible substitute for what the whole world had seen to be the glorious power of French nationhood. The organic doctrine of a history for which “every race is a separate complete whole” was invented by men who needed ideological definitions of national unity as a substitute for political nationhood. (Arendt 2004, 220)

This kind of race-thinking might have lost its import and significance after 1871 had it not been such a useful device for modern imperialists who revived it in order to appeal to people under the “respectable cover of nationalism” (Arendt 2004, 221). In France, “race-thinking had been invented as an instrument of internal division and had turned out to be a weapon for national wars,” while German race-thinking “was invented as a weapon of internal national unity and turned out to be a weapon for national wars” (Arendt 2004, 221). In each case, these early race-thinkers denied the common origin of man and asserted the natural superiority of the Germanic people.
An even more dangerous kind of race-thinking was promoted by the German Romantics and won general approval among bourgeois society who wanted not so much to look down on other classes, but on other peoples (Arendt 2004, 221). Excluded from the aristocracy, the Romantics developed the idea of an innate nobility. As nature supplied the title and privilege rather than merit, it was a title that could never be revoked. The idea held that this innate, noble personality was passed down through generation and that its purity depended on purity of descent. The purer the blood, the greater the entitlement. The Romantics saw that a natural aristocracy could replace the class-based aristocracy. The idea was used to discriminate against other peoples who, it was believed, did not share this natural nobility—Frenchmen and Jews (Arendt 2004, 224). These two forms of race-thinking, the idea of Germans as a single family and the idea of a natural nobility, laid the groundwork for the ideology of racism as it developed in Germany.

Race-thinking in both Germany and England shared a similar feature: both saw the rights of man as a foreign French invention (Arendt 2004, 231). This explains why in England and Germany, race-thinking first developed along national lines, while in France, from the very beginning, race-thinking showed its “true antinational face from the very beginning” (Arendt 2004, 231). In England, race-thinking began with (surprisingly to us, perhaps) Edmund Burke and the English conservatives who, against the rights of man, asserted that inequality belonged to the English national character (Arendt 2004, 231).
English liberty was not a natural right, but an inheritance passed down from one generation to the next. The denial of the rights of man:

signified the direct acceptance of the feudal concept of liberty as the sum total of privileges inherited together with title and land. Without encroaching upon the rights of the privileged class within the English nation, Burke enlarged the principle of these privileges to include the whole English people, establishing them as a kind of nobility among nations. (Arendt 2004, 232)

Rights and liberties belonged to Englishmen and not simply to all men. They were inherited rights, not natural rights, passed down from the English forefathers. It was the emphasis on inheritance, Arendt says, that shaped the form the various English race theories would take.

The question of the rights of man as opposed to the rights of English man became especially poignant with the abolition of slavery in the British possessions in 1834. The abolition of slavery sharpened rather than solved the “race problem,” and provided fertile ground for race-thinking (Arendt 2004, 233-234). Polygenists, who denied the common origin of man and denounced the bible “as a book of pious lies,” Arendt explains, exerted a lasting influence on English race-thinking. Polygenism discouraged intermarriage and encouraged discrimination in the colonies against people of mixed origin. Because people of mixed origin were viewed as belonging to no single race, it was argued that they were not truly human beings. The main achievement of polygenism, Arendt argues, “was the destruction of the idea of the natural law as the uniting link between all men and all peoples…it arbitrarily isolated all people from one
another by the deep abyss of the physical impossibility of human understanding and communication” (Arendt 2004, 234).

It was the two central ideas of Social Darwinism, however, that had the greater influence on public opinion in England. First, the idea that man is related to animal life and that only small difference separate the “lower races” from beasts. Second, the belief that all life is engaged in a struggle for existence where only the fittest would survive. Social Darwinism had great influence not only in England, but also in Germany through the “science” of Eugenics. The idea was that one could surpass natural selection, and instead through breeding, it would be possible to shape an entire race of geniuses and supermen (Arendt 2004, 236). The appeal of this theory in England and in Germany was based on the desire of the middle classes to feel themselves as belonging to a natural aristocracy. They believed that great men from all classes, and not the landed nobility, were the true representatives of the English or German race (Arendt 2004, 237).

England had always been different from France and Germany in that they had colonies all over the world for much longer. The “bond between soil and people” had been dissolved long before the age of imperialism, and the English people required a principle on the basis of which to establish unity among the now physically separated English nation. “England as a nation had to devise a theory of unity among people who lived in far-flung colonies beyond the seas, separated from the mother country by thousands of miles. The only link between them was common descent, common origin, common language” (Arendt 2004, 238). In the 19th century, English radicals actually
promoted nationalism in the hopes that it would aid in extending British constitutionalism and the rule of law to the colonies. This idea, however, was easily translated into the belief in a “national mission,” which characterized English colonialism (Arendt 2004, 239). As long as the English saw their mission to spread throughout the globe English settlers who intended to live in the colony permanently and retain a link with England and its political traditions, Arendt sees this mission as not especially dangerous. The idea of a “national mission” as such does not “give up the idea of humanity,” though it views England as “the supreme guarantee of humanity” (Arendt 2004, 239). It was only when England sought to rule distant peoples as an elite caste “whose only function was [permanent] rule and not colonization” that the idea of national mission became explicitly racist and, as a result, much more dangerous (241). It was not an accident, Arendt maintains, that it was Benjamin Disraeli, the first English statesman to affirm race superiority, who had no interest in the English colonies or the colonists and wanted instead to “extend British imperial power” (Arendt 2004, 240). At the end of the 19th century, the theory of race unity, as Arendt calls it, and not English political traditions, came to be what united English imperialists living abroad (Arendt 2004, 239).

It was actually a Frenchman, Arendt says, who developed race-thinking into a full-fledged philosophy of history: the Comte de Gobineau who, in an attempt to explain the decline of the aristocracy in Europe, argued in his *Essai sur l’Inégalité des races humaines* (1853) that the fall of civilization would be “due to a degeneration of race and the decay of race is due to a mixture of blood” (Arendt 2004, 228). He relied on race as
the single principle, as a natural law, by which the course of all human events and the
decline of the human race could be predicted (Arendt 2004, 225-226). What Gobineau
was actually looking for, Arendt maintains, was a new inter-European elite who could
take the place of the titled aristocracy who had lost their positions. “Instead of princes,
he proposed a ‘race of princes,’ the Aryans, who he said were in danger of being
submerged by the lower non-Aryan classes through democracy” (Arendt 2004, 228).
Because of a superior origin, this race of princes were entitled to superior rights by
nature and by birth (Arendt 2004, 229). Gobineau’s theory of race was opposed not only
to democracy and to the idea of the essential equality of men, but to patriotism as well.
Loyalties were due not to country, but to the noble race to which he, and others,
belonged by birth, and this race was not limited to a single nation-state. Not long after
his death, at the turn of the century, his ideas became “a kind of standard work for race
theories in history” (Arendt 2004, 225). The ideology of racism would adopt the idea
that race determines all human events, both past and future.

4.9 The Boers and Racism

While race-thinking in Europe originated during the French Revolution, racism as
a way of life originated with the Boers in South Africa. The so-called “scramble for
Africa” had offered great opportunities for both superfluous wealth and superfluous
men. Both came to South Africa during the gold rush of the 1880s. It was in South Africa
that the superfluous men, or “the mob,” found that they no longer needed to be the
“lonely individuals” they had been at home (Arendt 2004, 250). Their fellows from all
over Europe had assembled there together with them to seek adventure and wealth. Furthermore, and to their great delight, they also discovered they no longer needed to feel themselves pariahs. Instead, as they learned from the Boers, they could become a master race (Arendt 2004, 247-248). When the mob returned home, they carried the belief in themselves as a master race with them. They had learned from their experience in South Africa, from the alliance between capital and the mob, that all of Europe would welcome and embrace this belief along with them.

How the superfluous men of Europe behaved towards the native peoples they encountered in South Africa was shaped by the behavior and beliefs of the Boers, who were the only European group to live with black Africans in complete isolation from the rest of Europe (Arendt 2004, 250). “Racism was used in this society of whites and blacks before imperialism exploited it as a major political idea” (Arendt 2004, 254). What we see from examining the experience of the Boers, Arendt argues, almost as if it was a test in a laboratory, is that racism is always tied to hatred for territorial limitations and a general rootlessness, and to an “activistic faith in one’s own divine chosenness” (Arendt 2004, 257). The Boers actually invented a new theology in order to explain their new beliefs and their exploitive relations with black Africans.

When the Boers first encountered the black African tribes, they experienced them as something incomprehensible. It was not simply because they were black, because they did not share the same color of skin. What truly shocked and frightened the Boers was that these people lived only from one day to the next. As nomadic hunters, they had not built a man-made artifice, what Arendt calls the man-made
“world”: “They had not created a human world, a human reality, and that therefore nature had remained, in all its majesty, the only overwhelming reality... they were, as it were, ‘natural’ human beings who lacked the specifically human character, the specifically human reality” (Arendt 2004, 251). As a people who were to coming to Africa from a Western Civilization that had long given up hunter and gatherer societies, almost so long ago that it was even beyond memory, these people appeared “alien beyond imagination” (Arendt 2004, 254). It was this fear, Arendt says, of human beings who were “like oneself,” but “still under no circumstances ought to be like oneself” that was the attitude that remained at the basis of the race society created by the Boers (Arendt 2004, 251). If the Boers had accepted the common origin of man, if they had acknowledged that the African tribes too shared their same humanity, they would have had to see something of themselves in the native peoples. Unwilling to do so, they had to develop new beliefs consistent with their new view of the vast inequality between themselves and the black Africans (Arendt 2004, 254). The Boers created a new theology, that Arendt argues was nothing short of heresy. She describes it as a “perversion of Christianity” (Arendt 2004, 256) Because her reflections on this new theology are so telling, I have included the entire passage:

It was tempting indeed simply to declare that these were not human beings. Since, however, despite all ideological explanations the black men stubbornly insisted on retaining their human features, the ‘white men’ could not but reconsider their own humanity and decide that they themselves were more than human and obviously chosen by God to be the gods of black men. This conclusion was logical and unavoidable if one wanted to deny radically all common bonds with savages; in practice it meant that Christianity for the first time could not act as a decisive curb on
the dangerous perversions of human self-consciousness, a premonition of its essential ineffectiveness in other more recent race societies. The Boers simply denied the Christian doctrine of the common origin of men and changed those passages of the Old Testament which did not yet transcend the limits of the old Israelite national religion into a superstition which could not even be called a heresy. Like the Jews, they firmly believed in themselves as the chosen people, with the essential difference that they were chosen not for the sake of divine salvation of mankind, but for the lazy domination over another species that was condemned to an equally lazy drudgery. This was God’s will on earth as the Dutch Reformed Church proclaimed it and still proclaims it today in sharp and hostile contrast to the missionaries of all other Christian denominations. (Arendt 2004, 254-255).

Instead of relying on their much older Christian worldview as a guide to help explain their new experiences and new fears, instead of endeavoring to understand an obviously much different people who were nevertheless still human, they found it easier to change their belief system and simply deny the Africans’ humanity altogether. They denied the Old Testament story that told of the common origin of men, all of whom were descended from one set of parents, which had long served as the basis of equality in Western Civilization. But they went even beyond denying basic human equality by declaring themselves gods and the Africans another type of animal species that was less than human. Each Boer saw himself as a kind of “natural deity” ordained with a divine role—to be “white gods of black slaves” (Arendt 2004, 252). According to the Boers’ new belief system, they were the “chosen people” and not the Jews. Their new theology allowed them a justification for oppressing, enslaving, and even killing the native Africans. For after all, they were not human, but beasts. They were the chosen people and this was God’s will for them on earth.
Because of the poor soil, each Boer family lived far from each other family and had to move frequently in order to survive in such a harsh environment. Arendt notes the irony of the fact that although it was the Boers’ shock at the rootlessness of the natives that led to the development of a new, racist theology, it was not long until the Boers themselves lost their original rootedness in the soil they had once had as peasant farmers in Europe. Each Boer family lived “parasitically” from the labor of their slaves and ruled over them in “absolute lawlessness” (Arendt 2004, 252). The Boers did no work themselves and only produced enough to live. Like the natives, they too now lived day to day. The Boers lived off of their slaves the way the slaves had lived off of nature, as if the Africans were raw materials existing in nature—just like “one might live on the fruits of wild trees” (Arendt 2004, 253). Living isolated from human society, Arendt says they lost their desire for human fellowship, for a territorial homeland, for “a patria” of their own (Arendt 2004, 256). No political body or communal organization kept the Boers together, and no definite territory was colonized (Arendt 2004, 252) They lived without a shared communal life that is able to check the excesses of human behavior, either through the opinions of society or the laws of the state (Arendt 2004, 252). The Boers saw the stability of law as a deprivation of freedom rather than creating the space for freedom. “The Boers,” Arendt argues, “were the first European group to become completely alienated from the pride which Western man felt in living in a world created and fabricated by himself” (Arendt 2004, 253). The Boer slave society was different from all other slave societies that Western man had created because “the black slaves did not serve any white civilization” (Arendt 2004, 252). In the case of the Boers, the black
slaves did not perform the necessary labor so that the whites would be free to create a world. When we examine the case of the Boers, what we find it that they became homeless, rootless, and isolated. What Arendt wants us to see here is that racism is necessarily isolating and world destroying.

When gold was discovered and the mob poured into South Africa from every corner of Europe, they encountered the Boer’s racism. It was this encounter that determined their attitudes and behaviors towards the black Africans. They quickly adopted the rootlessness, lawlessness, and racism that had been first developed by the Boers. The men of superfluous wealth and the superfluous men who came to South Africa had no intention of establishing permanent settlements or creating a new a political community. They came only for the gold and the diamonds. It soon became apparent to the mob, Arendt says, that they “would not even have to do the digging” (Arendt 2004, 258). The blacks now provided an “inexhaustible labor supply” in their hunt for gold and diamonds (Arendt 2004, 258). Ultimately, in the end, it was not the gold that attracted the mob to South Africa, “but this human raw material which promised a permanent emancipation from work” (Arendt 2004, 258). Like the Boers, the mob would require lawlessness in order to be able to exploit this material. In South Africa, the elite and the mob exploited the blacks without the trouble of the moral scruples of earlier British settlers, missionaries, or government officials (Arendt 2004, 259). The mob learned in South Africa “that through sheer violence an underprivileged class could create a class lower than itself, that for this purpose it did not even need a revolution” (Arendt 2004, 268) The leaders of the mob, like Carl Peters, who would later
become the type of man who would make up the Nazi elite, discovered in South Africa
“how peoples could be converted into races and how, simply by taking the initiative in
the process, one might push one’s own people in into the position of the master race”
(Arendt 2004, 268). It was in South Africa that the “superfluous men” became a “master
race.” They would return home to Europe with the knowledge of how to destroy the
worlds that had so cruelly spat them out. And they knew from their experiences in
South Africa that the whole mob of the Western World would embrace the cause
(Arendt 2004, 269).

Because of the experience in South Africa, Arendt says, the idea of race won out
over the older idea of higher and lower breeds that had been prominent at the
beginning imperialism, and which had still acknowledged the common origin of man. At
the outset, other peoples had been viewed as “alien and strange,” but nevertheless still
a member of the human species (Arendt 2004, 268). After the encounter with the Boers
in South Africa, European beliefs and behaviors changed not only there, but throughout
the possessions in Africa and in Asia. Now dark skinned peoples were believed to be an
“entirely different species of animal life” (Arendt 2004, 268). Everywhere foreign
peoples were no longer regarded as human. The race society that had been developed
by the Boers in South Africa, was transplanted throughout the globe. It was also
carefully studied and then carried back to Europe itself by the mob.
4.10 The Nature of Bureaucracy

The governing institutions that were developed in order to rule another people, who it was believed would never be fit to rule themselves, was bureaucracy. With bureaucracy, instead of representative institutions, there is administration, and instead of laws, there are decrees. Bureaucrats are each convinced of their innate right to dominate solely because of the color of their skin (Arendt 2004, 276). Because of this belief and because imperialism views each territory as only a stepping stone to the next, the administrators remain separate and aloof from their subjects. Arendt argues that it was this aloofness and indifference of the colonial administrators that made bureaucracy an even more dangerous form of government than despotism because it destroyed even “that last link between the despot and his subjects, which is formed by bribery and gifts” (Arendt 2004, 275). Even oppressor and oppressed “still live in the same world, still share the same goals, fight each other for the possession of the same things; and it is this tertium comparationis which aloofness destroyed” (Arendt 2004, 275-276). Compared to bureaucracy, Arendt tells us, these older forms of oppression look like guarantors of human dignity (Arendt 2004, 275). The colonial administrators had a genuine lack of interest in their subjects, and there was nothing that was allowed to be in common between them (tertium comparationis). Administrators did not allow for the rule of law that would have threatened a political community, much less the emergence of democratic institutions (For “a people” can never govern another people) (Arendt 2004, 277). Instead, they governed by decree, which allowed for policy to be
changed at a moment’s notice without having to consult the home government or fear the court of public opinion.

The imperialists’ endless pursuit of power was regarded as a necessary historical process—the law of expansion. Each territory conquered was, in the imperialists’ mind, only a stepping stone from which to conquer the next. From this perspective, there need not be deliberation or compromise in the making of laws because bureaucratic decrees simply adhere to the governing law of expansion. All bureaucratic staff must be completely and totally loyal to this necessary process. In other words, they should not have any individual opinions of their own, political or otherwise. Furthermore, they should not have any ambitions of their own, but should feel entirely satisfied as functionaries, in service of this all-encompassing law:

No matter what individual qualities or defects a man may have, once he has entered the maelstrom of an unending process of expansion, he will, as it were, cease to be what he was and obey the laws of the process, identify himself with anonymous forces he is supposed to serve in order to keep the whole process in motion. (Arendt 2004, 279)

Separation, rule by decree, and anonymity were the basic elements that characterized rule by bureaucracy, and later a totalitarian government. When, Arendt argues, Western man had lost pride in doing something of his own initiative, when he would rather serve the mysterious laws of history, and when he was convinced of his own racial superiority, then “the stage seemed to be set for all possible horrors” (Arendt 2004, 286).
4.11 Continental Imperialism

As the Western Europeans nation-states were hungrily devouring the globe, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, living within the so-called “‘belt of mixed populations’...that stretched from the Baltic to the Adriatic,” had neither states of their own, nor overseas territories (Arendt 2004, 299). Now they began to argue that they too were entitled to expand, and if it was not to be in Africa or Asia, then greater room would have to be made for their nation on the continent (Arendt 2004, 288). The leaders of what Arendt calls the “pan-movements,” namely pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism, which gained momentum during the age of imperialism, called for “a Germanized Central Europe or a Russianized Eastern and Southern Europe” (Arendt 2004, 291). This colonization of the continent, so to speak, was the ultimate purpose of the two primary pan-movements, and their motivating ideology was tribal nationalism. They appealed to the general feeling of rootlessness, and offered the masses a movement larger than themselves to which they could belong. The continental imperialism of the pan-movements did more than anything else to influence the foreign policy of the totalitarians, and the totalitarian movements based much of their appeal on the pan-movements’ ideology of tribal nationalism (Arendt 2004, 287).

The continental version of imperialism, the pan-movements, originated among those peoples of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires who had no specific territory or historical homeland of their own to lay claim. In Central and Eastern Europe, boundaries had shifted and people groups had moved for centuries: “Here were masses who had not the slightest idea of the meaning of patria and patriotism, not the vaguest
notion of responsibility for a common, limited community” (Arendt 2004, 299). Both empires were highly bureaucratic states with governments far removed from the people. Though Austria-Hungary had a party system, the people did not directly control the government. The people had never known what it meant to have responsibility for public affairs. As in Western Europe, society in the Austro-Hungarian Empire was sharply divided by classes, although the divisions tended to run along national lines. The Austro-Hungarian Empire attempting (unsuccessfully, Arendt notes) to use the old device of *divide et impera*, had fostered national antagonisms (Arendt 2004, 305). The big cities of both the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires were populated by masses of atomized, isolated individuals and superfluous men who stood outside both the “pale of society” and the “political body of the nation-state” (Arendt 2004, 309).

While the peoples of Western Europe had been able to stave off the disintegration of state and society through the nationalism fostered by imperialistic adventures overseas, the peoples of the East did not have the fortune of the coincidence of territory and nation at the basis of the nation-state and nationalism in the West. On the contrary, the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, Arendt argues were “rootless” peoples. At the end of the 19th century, they felt themselves as belonging to no territory, to no state, to no society. The “tribal nationalism” of the pan-movements grew out of this general atmosphere of “rootlessness,” characterized not only by a physical reality, but by a general mood (Arendt 2004, 299). Whereas, at this time, overseas imperialism had united the atomized peoples of Western Europe through nationalism and then later through racism, in Eastern Europe “tribal nationalism” united
together “all people of a similar folk origin, independent of history and no matter where they happened to live” (Arendt 2004, 289).

Unlike overseas imperialism, the pan-movement’s original motivation was not profit. It had no economic opportunities or overseas adventures to offer its members. It could provide its adherents no “tangible benefits” and it served “no immediate interests” (Arendt 2004, 290). Instead, “[c]ontinental imperialism had nothing to offer except an ideology and a movement. Yet this was quite enough in a time which preferred a key to history to political action, when men in the midst of communal disintegration and social atomization wanted to belong at any price” (Arendt 2004, 290). The possibility of belonging to a movement that spanned space and time, from the very beginning, is what appealed to the rootless masses.

The leaders of the pan-movements intentionally did not set up parties or use the language of the party system. The imperialist parties of Western Europe had claimed to be a party above all parties, uniting together the sharply divided classes, on which the party-system in Western Europe had been based, in the common national enterprise of overseas expansion. In this way, the imperialists had been able to use the language of nationalism, and imperialism temporarily reunited the disintegrating nation-state. For this reason, imperialism did not immediately appeal to racist ideology and did not immediately reveal its inherent state destroying character. In contrast, and from the very beginning, the pan-movements claimed to be a movement and not a party (Arendt 2004, 321). They relied on race-thinking and appealed to racism at the outset, and they never hid their opposition to the institution of the state. Unlike a party, the pan-
movements never had a specific platform, but claimed to embrace every human issue. These movements declared that the people and their interest were always prior to any state and to any state interest. States would come and go, governments would rise and fall, the only constant in history was the people. These movements were pan-movements because they transcended both time and space. The people were dispersed and territorially divided; only by transcending state boundaries could they be united together as one nation.

The ideology of the pan-movements was tribal nationalism, and leaders of the pan-movements appealed to a general mood, “the apprehensions of modern men as to what might happen to them if, isolated individuals in an atomized society, they were not protected by sheer numbers and enforced uniform coherence” (Arendt 2004, 302). Because the Germans and the Slavs of Central and Eastern Europe did not ever have a nation-state of their own, because they did not have a territory that had been their traditional homeland, and because they had been part of numerous migrations, nationality appeared to them as something you carried around with you wherever you happened to be:

Their national quality appeared to be much more a portable private matter, inherent in their very personality, than a matter of public concern and civilization. If they wanted to match the national pride of Western nations, they had no country, no state, no historic achievement to show but could only point to themselves. (Arendt 2004, 298-299)

Because of their rootlessness, the leaders of the German or Slav pan-movements did not identify nationality with outward qualities and experiences such as a shared history, a
shared culture, and a shared traditional homeland, but rather with an inward experience and innate qualities of the person—qualities of “the German” or “the Pole” (Arendt 2004, 292). Tribal nationalism identified nationality with the soul, and the soul as the embodiment of general national qualities. Its nationalism was an inward-turned pride unconcerned with public affairs, but concerned rather with every phase of private life (Arendt 2004, 292):

Tribal nationalities pointed to themselves as the center of their national pride, regardless of historical achievements and partnership in recorded events...they believed that some mysterious inherent psychological or physical quality made them the incarnation not of Germany but Germanism, not of Russia, but the Russian soul. (Arendt 2004, 308)

The leaders of the pan-movements told their followers that they were the “walking embodiments of something ideal [that] he no longer had to be loyal or courageous” because being born a German or a Slav, he was “the very incarnation of Loyalty, Generosity, Courage” (Arendt 2004, 320). Because being a member of the nation depended on innate qualities of the soul, one could belong to the nation wherever one lived or wherever one went, whether it be through “emigration, conquest, or dispersion” (Arendt 2004, 301). “Members of these peoples had no definite home but felt at home wherever other members of their ‘tribe’ happened to live” (Arendt 2004, 299). This kind of nationalism, or “tribal consciousness” rather, did not depend on the coincidence of a people and their traditional homeland, but a “folk community that would remain a political factor even if its members were dispersed all over the earth” (Arendt 2004, 299). The Pan-Slav and Pan-Germanic movements gave their members
both a feeling of pride regardless of accomplishments and a feeling of belonging to a national community wherever they happened to be. It was this “tribal consciousness” that held these peoples together (Arendt 2004, 291). It provided “a new coherence, a sense of mutual reliability among all members of the people” (Arendt 2004, 302).

Both the Pan-Slav and Pan-Germanic movements created new theologies to support their tribal nationalism. Like the Boers before them, they claimed that their nation represented God’s chosen people on earth. “The pan-movements preached the divine origin of their own people as against the Jewish-Christian faith in the divine origin of Man. According to them, man, belonging inevitably to some people, received his divine origin only directly through membership in a people” (Arendt 2004, 301). According to this new theology, one’s divine origin depended on membership in a particular nationality. Alternatively, rejecting membership in the pan-movement meant forfeiting one’s chosenness. “In which case he severs all bonds through which he was endowed with divine origin and falls, as it were, into metaphysical homelessness” (Arendt 2004, 301). Furthermore, according to this logic, enemies of the divinely chosen people were enemies of God (Arendt 2004, 300-301). Tribal nationalists, Arendt explains, always interpreted their position as being “one against all” (Arendt 2004, 293). They asserted that they were an absolutely unique people, and that they were incompatible with all others. That they were as different from other human beings “as a wolf is from a fox” (Arendt 2004, 302). They always denied, she says, “the very possibility of a common mankind” (Arendt 2004, 293).
The real reason, Arendt argues, these pan-movements were anti-Semitic, was that they saw in the Jews a genuine competitor to their claim to divine chosenness. The Jewish claim to chosenness was, in its original theological formulation, a claim to be the people who would bring, through the Messiah, the redemption of all of humanity. This, of course, had nothing in common with tribal nationalism’s claim to chosenness which destroyed “the idea of humanity” (Arendt 2004, 312). Nevertheless, “the mob was not much concerned with such niceties of historical correctness and was hardly aware of the difference between a Jewish mission in history to achieve the establishment of mankind and its own ‘mission’ to dominate all other peoples on earth” (Arendt 2004, 309). The leaders of the pan-movements did not concern themselves with whether or not there was a genuine Jewish problem in terms of Jewish deeds or misdeeds, numbers or power. Instead what they saw was a people whose claim to chosenness stood in direct contradiction to their own (Arendt 2004, 310). Their hatred of the Jews, Arendt argues, sprang from fear “that it actually might be the Jews that God had chosen, to whom success was granted by divine providence” (Arendt 2004, 311-312). The pan-movements claim to divine chosenness, Arendt says, would invariably put the Jews in their way (Arendt 2004, 310).

In their claim that each member of the nation was the walking embodiment of the German or the Russian soul, the pan-movements did not allow for the uniqueness of each individual person. Persons were not unique individuals, only the nation as a whole was unique. Arendt argues that within these movements “the particular reality of the individual person...is submerged in the stream of dynamic movement of the universal
itself…the difference between ends and means evaporates together with the personality” (Arendt 2004, 320). Within the movement, the individual is deprived of responsibility for his actions and even his capacity to act at all. Indeed, Arendt argues that this is what made the movements attractive. The individual only had to adhere to the power of the movement, to dedicate himself to its service, convinced of the holiness of the cause, and he need not bother with thinking or with judgment (Arendt 2004, 318-319). What this meant, Arendt says, was that “in the absolute contrast between the divine origin of one’s own people and all other nondivine peoples all differences between individual members of the people disappeared, whether social or economic or psychological. Divine origin changed the people into a uniform ‘chosen’ mass of arrogant robots” (Arendt 2004, 301).

The pan-movements denied the common origin of man and the “idea of mankind,” asserting their nation alone as God’s chosen people. Arendt believes that the great appeal of the pan-movements demonstrates a fear of what the “idea of mankind” represents. A recognition of this idea, of human equality, would mean an acknowledgment of each person’s equal responsibility for the world. The pan-movements offered an escape from this responsibility. “Tribalism and racism are the very realistic, if very destructive, ways of escaping this predicament of common responsibility” (Arendt 2004, 303). As we saw in the case of the Boers, Arendt also argues here, that it is “whenever people have been separated from action and achievements, when these natural ties with the common world have been broken or do not exist for one reason or another, they have been inclined to turn upon themselves in
their naked givenness and to claim divinity” (Arendt 2004, 310). Arendt states firmly that the theory of the divine origin of one people is evidently untrue:

The untruth of this theory is as conspicuous as it political usefulness. God created neither men—whose origin clearly is procreation—nor peoples—who came into being as a result of human organization. Men are unequal according to their natural origin, their different organization, and fate in history. Their equality is an equality is an equality of rights only, that is, an equality of human purpose; yet behind this equality of human purpose lies, according to Jewish-Christian tradition, another equality, expressed in the concept of one common origin beyond history, human nature, and human purpose—the common origin in the mythical, unidentifiable Man who alone is God’s creation. This divine origin is the metaphysical concept on which the political equality of purpose may be based, the purpose of establishing mankind on earth. (Arendt 2004, 301)

Both overseas imperialism and continental imperialism denied the relevance of the other. Both did not see others as “thy neighbor,” but argued they had no duties or responsibilities to them. The relevance of the other in Arendt’s dissertation can be explained by a shared history. Imperialism denies a common origin and a shared history, and so refuses to recognize “the other” as an equal.

4.12 Plurality in Imperialism

In her discussions of anti-Semitism and imperialism, we see Arendt concerned with the same ideas in the dissertation, except now in a historical rather than a philosophical context. She demonstrates how both anti-Semitism and imperialism deny the relevance of the other, and do not view the other as “thy neighbor.” In the first two books of Origins, Arendt is interested in the inter se, or the ties that bind unique
individuals together in a human community, while preserving equality and distinction. It is the failure of 19th century European society to create such communities that allowed for the emergence of totalitarianism.

In her account of imperialism, its structure, and its ideologies, Arendt’s theoretical touchstone is what she identifies as “the idea of humanity” or also “the idea of mankind” (Arendt 2004, 208, 214). Arendt argues that the essential question for all Europeans during the 19th century was whether or not “the Christian tenet of the unity and equality of all men, based upon common descent from one original set of parents” would be kept in their hearts (Arendt 2004, 233). She returns to this idea at key points in her analysis in order to demonstrate the fundamental problem with imperialism’s pursuit of power, with its racist ideology, and also with the tribal nationalism of the pan-movements, which, she argues, are all in direct conflict with this idea. The idea of humanity, Arendt says, arises directly out of the Christian belief in the “common descent [of all human beings] from one original set of parents” (Arendt 2004, 233). The idea is grounded in the belief that all human beings share a common origin. This central Christian tenet—the belief in a common origin—is the foundation, Arendt says, for human equality, for the unity of mankind, and for the solidarity of all peoples (Arendt 2004, 233). To deny this “common origin of the human species,” Arendt maintains, is not only to deny that all human beings are equal, but it is also to deny the essential basis for the fellowship of all men (Arendt 2004, 208). When Arendt uses the phrase “the idea of humanity,” she is referencing an idea that encompasses a belief both in human equality and in human solidarity. This idea of mankind, she says, also implies a
responsibility for our fellow men and for our shared man-made world (Arendt 2004, 303).

The idea of humanity that Arendt uses as a standard by which to evaluate the beliefs and actions that went along with late 19th century imperialism draws on the ideas she developed in Book III of her dissertation. In Book III of her dissertation Arendt concludes that there is, in fact, an empirical ground for the relevance of the other in Augustine’s thought. Though his philosophy of love as desire and his philosophy of love as return have both left “neighborly love incomprehensible in its true relevance,” there is a basis for the relevance of the other that can be identified in Augustine’s theory of the *vita socialis* (Copy A, 348). For Augustine, she says, the worldly community, or the *saeculum*, is founded on a historical fact. This historical fact is the common descent from Adam. For Augustine, all men share a common historical origin in the same set of parents, and it is for this reason that all men share the same human nature and the same human history. A shared nature and a shared history provide the foundation for the both the equality and the interdependence of men, and is the basis for human fellowship. Though for Augustine all men also have a common origin in God as the Creator, as Arendt indicates the return to the Creator does not simply cancel out our shared historical past. For Augustine, as Arendt interprets him, all men have a two-fold origin. The ultimate source of being is God, but the source of being in the world is Adam. Arendt argues that is only from this historical source, a common origin, that the relevance of the other is made clear. My neighbor is relevant because he has a shared nature and a shared past. Together we have jointly constituted the man-made world
and inter-depend on one another. Even for the redeemed, Arendt concludes, it is the common origin in Adam that demonstrates the essential equality and kinship of all mankind in the world. For Arendt, her primary point in book II is that both overseas imperialism and continental imperialism deny a common origin for mankind and the essential equality and solidarity it implies.

We see Arendt, as in her dissertation, interested in the ties that would bind together equal, but also unique, human beings. Throughout Book II, she depicts men in 19th century bourgeois society as having no bond to connect them to one another. She relies on her interpretation of Hobbes to demonstrate this point. Having adopted Hobbes’s theory of man and the state, men at the end of the 19th century live within a ruthlessly competitive society that leaves them isolated from their fellow man and powerless to act. At the end of the century, it is a society on the verge of total disintegration. Both overseas and continental imperialism offered the possibility of creating ties between fellow nationals and, seemingly, for preventing the complete breakdown of society. It also offered men who had been forced out of society the possibility of belonging. In Part I of her dissertation Arendt had described Augustinian man as fundamentally desiring to belong. Here Arendt actually follows the Augustine of her dissertation when she argues that the isolated men who were forced out of society were desperate to feel as though they belonged to something. The expansionist movements offered these isolated men the feeling of belonging to a movement that was larger than oneself.
Overseas and continental imperialism created temporary bonds between isolated men and afforded them a community to which they could belong. Arendt argues, though, that the unity these movements afforded isolated individuals came at great expense. Here we see Arendt, again, very concerned for the preservation of the unique individuality of each human person. In the dissertation, Arendt was troubled, from a theoretical standpoint, with the transcendence of the I-self Augustine’s philosophy of love as desire, and as return, required. Here, Arendt has already experienced the very real consequences of what forgoing an identity as a unique person can lead to. According to her analysis, it prepared the way for totalitarian movements.

In the case of imperialism, both overseas and continental, each person desired to belong and joined a movement that seemed to offer them the belonging they so desired. However, both forms of imperialism swept them up movements that required them to forego any individuality. The bureaucrat who ruled over a foreign people felt himself playing a role in the necessary movement of expansion; the German who joined a pan-movement felt himself a part of the greater destiny of his nation. Each person did not feel himself as a unique individual, but rather a part of a greater movement that transcended their own historical moment. In forgoing individuality by joining a movement, each person relinquished responsibility for their beliefs or actions. Everything they could have thought or might have done was subjected to the movement for overseas or continental expansion, and for the sake of the race or the nation. As a result men lost the sense of responsibility Arendt believes all men have for our shared world.
While overseas imperialism and continental imperialism provided bonds that united together the race or the nation, it divided humanity into different species and destroyed the solidarity of mankind. Both movements united a group of people on the basis of the superiority of the race or the superiority of the nation, and denied the basic equality and unity of all men. As Arendt emphasizes, overseas imperialists did not conquer with the intent of founding new human communities by establishing legal ties between themselves and the foreign peoples. Instead, because they denied a common origin, they saw foreign peoples as yet another raw material to exploit. They ruled over and dominated them the same way they ruled over and dominated natural resources. Continental imperialism also did not acknowledge a common origin and rejected the equality of other nations. In its various forms, racism and tribal nationalism either explicitly denied that all men were descended from one set of parents or claimed descent from a superior ancestral line. They argued that their origin, for example as Englishmen or as Germans, set them apart from and above the rest of humanity. As Arendt demonstrates, both overseas and continental imperialism actually had to invent new theologies in order to justify their actions and explain their beliefs. The Boers denied the creation story in the bible itself, and asserted themselves as God’s chosen people on earth. In the same way, leaders of the pan-movements denied that the Jews were God’s chosen people and claimed this position for themselves.

In her discussions of anti-Semitism and imperialism, we see Arendt concerned with the same ideas in the dissertation, except now in a historical rather than a philosophical context. She is interested in the *inter se*, or the ties that bind unique
individuals together in a human community. In her study of anti-Semitism, she concludes that anti-Semitism arose because a certain minority of Jews who were in the public eye actually opposed equality for all Jews and integration into the body politic. They remained a separate group removed and aloof from the rest of the nation. As a result, Jews became suspicious and the target of attacks, and they remained without legal rights to protect them when the attacks later became violent. Arendt continues to pursue her interest in human equality and human difference. She is interested, as in the dissertation, in how they can be reconciled. In the dissertation, difference was transcended for the sake of equality before God. Here, Arendt looks at how, when Jews became increasingly equal in terms of wealth and education, they sought to be a part of Gentile society; their remaining differences, however, were not truly accepted, but were actually distorted into a caricature of “the Jew.” Bourgeois society demanded that Jews be what they expected of them and not their unique individual selves, and certain Jews fostered this distortion when they were forced to play the part as the price of admission to society. This meant that, by a certain point, society was ready and willing to accept the picture of “the Jew” put forth by the anti-Semitic parties. Jewish equality and Jewish difference were never reconciled by the state or in society.

When we read Arendt’s study of anti-Semitism and imperialism, we see her again concerned for being with others in the world, and for the ties that bind human beings together, while yet guaranteeing both human equality and providing a space for human distinction. She concludes that Jews never had ties connecting them to the members of the nation-state. They never had equality, and their differences never
received authentic acceptance in society. For this reason, anti-Semitism was able to develop and grow throughout Europe. By the time the Nazis came to power, they were able, with great effectiveness, to use anti-Semitism, within the context of a racist ideology, to mobilize the masses. In her analysis of imperialism, Arendt adopts “the idea of mankind” from her dissertation and uses it as a basis of comparison in her analysis of overseas and continental imperialism. For Arendt, the problem with the ideologies of both forms of imperialism is that they deny a common origin, human equality, and human solidarity. While they unite one group of human beings together on the basis of race or nationality, they ultimately divide up all of humanity, and they set the stage for total war between people groups. These movements also turn their adherents into mere functionaries. Members lost their unique identity and responsibility for their beliefs and actions, and therefore they lost their responsibility for the world that we, as human beings, have built and share together. For Arendt what is most significant about these movements is that they deny human plurality—they deny equality, they deny individual uniqueness, and they break the ties that unite human beings together in the world. Arendt believes these movements prepared exactly the kinds of men who would be perfect members of a totalitarian movement and the perfect “citizen” of a government that aims to destroy plurality all together. I now turn to look at Arendt’s analysis of this movement and of this government.
CHAPTER 5:
PLURALITY AND TOTALITARIANISM

In the last chapter, I argued that, despite the time that had elapsed from her dissertation to the writing of Origins, there is a remarkable continuity between the problems Arendt first explored in her dissertation on Augustine and the concerns of her first major work of political theory, The Origins of Totalitarianism. In this chapter, I continue this line of argumentation, but now look more specifically at Arendt’s analysis of the phenomenon of totalitarianism itself, both the totalitarian movement and totalitarianism in power. I argue that Arendt’s concern for human plurality did not waver, but rather became more concrete and urgent in light of the rise of the newest and most terrible form of government yet known to man.

In her analysis of totalitarianism, we see Arendt continue to investigate the most significant themes of her dissertation, including men as the co-builders of the world, the two-fold character of plurality (equality and distinction), and the ties that unite unique individuals together in a human community (or the lack thereof). In her study of totalitarianism, we are also able to see Arendt beginning to develop her own original political theory, not just as a critique of totalitarianism but as a positive response to “the
For this reason, I also demonstrate in this chapter how Arendt relies on certain Augustinian concepts in order to develop her own thinking about politics. This demonstration will prepare us for Chapter Six, where I will outline the main features of Arendt’s mature political thought and show how it draws on Augustine, while, at the same time, offering a strikingly anti-Augustinian critique.

At the end of her historical and political analysis of imperialism, Arendt describes the immediate precursor to the rise of “the masses” and the totalitarian movement in Europe. Totalitarianism was preceded by the atomization and isolation of millions of people, people who could no longer trust in religion or look to society as a guide for what to think or how to act. Resentful of the real world in which they could no longer find a place, the masses found in totalitarian ideology a movement to which they could belong and an answer for every question. Arendt argues that totalitarianism depends upon the support of these masses, and it also rests on the belief that, by organizing these individuals into a single unit, human beings can become omnipotent.

Arendt’s study is of major significance, not only for historical reasons, but because she believes we still live under the same conditions today that allowed for the rise of totalitarianism in Europe: “totalitarianism became this century’s curse only because it so terrifyingly took care of its problems” (Arendt 2004, 620). Modern men have lost their faith in eternity, they remain isolated, and they have not yet identified a

66 *The Burden of Our Time* was the original title of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, and it was published under this title in Britain in 1951.
new source for human solidarity. For Arendt, as long as men lack worldly ties to each other, they may yet be tempted by the false promise of totalitarian ideologies. This is why Arendt ends her first edition of Origins with an affirmation of human plurality from the book of Acts: “Do thyself no harm; for we are all here” (Arendt 2004, 632). As I will demonstrate in the last paragraphs of this chapter, despite the fact that the conditions which made possible the rise of totalitarianism still exist, Arendt does see reason for hope. She places her faith in the possibilities made available by human plurality, and she admonishes all of us to do the same.

In Origins, Arendt argues that the final goal of totalitarianism is the eradication of human plurality from the earth. Totalitarianism aims to replace the infinite diversity among men with a single Man. If totalitarianism were to achieve its ends, each individual person would be replaced by an identical and replaceable “bundle of reactions.” Men would be deprived of their great capacity for spontaneity, a capacity which, Arendt argues, separates men from other animal species. This capacity “to begin something new” arises out of the fact that each human person is born wholly unique from every other and is therefore capable of doing or thinking something that has previously been unknown to man (Arendt 2004, 586). Men are dominated totally only when each person has been deprived of this capacity and, instead, is made equally ready and willing to be both executioner and victim. This requires the use of terror, which, Arendt says, can only be perfected in the concentration camps. But, before men are made ready for the camps, Arendt argues that they first have to be deprived of their “juridical person” or their equality before the law, and then of their “moral person” or
their ability to exercise and act upon their own moral judgment. This begins the process of turning all men, each unique and irreplaceable, into interchangeable functionaries that together make up one enormous and all-powerful Man.

This process began after World War I with the creation of “minority peoples,” and the emergence of hundreds of thousands of stateless persons who were deprived of their citizenship. Arendt describes these individuals as having been pushed out of the protective boundaries of the man-made world. They did not belong to a body-politic, so they were denied citizenship and stripped of the juridical person. Once totalitarianism seized the state, the treatment of stateless persons provided a model for the treatment of all persons who had once been counted citizens. These people were first denied civil and political rights, but then were stripped of their moral person—their ability to make a choice about right or wrong. Under the conditions of totalitarianism, the choices available were not between good and evil, or right and wrong, but between two evils. Every person was made, somehow, to be complicit in the monstrous crimes committed by the regime—even in the concentration camps. Once a person has been divested of his juridical and moral person, all that makes him a unique individual is stripped away, and he is readied to be made into a living corpse. Men in the concentration camps have become “ghastly marionettes with human faces,” and have been made into “bundles of reactions” (Arendt 2004, 586). Finally, he is equally willing to administer the gas chambers as he is ready to die in them, without the slightest resistance. It is only in the camps, shielded from the reality of the outside world, that man can be totally dominated in this way. This is the ultimate aim of totalitarianism in power. However,
despite the horrors of totalitarianism as Arendt describes them, she encourages modern men to have faith. It is because of plurality, she argues, because men can together begin something new, that the founding of a new human community is possible. Arendt argues at the end of Origins that this new community of men must be grounded in the right to belong. It is the right to belong, Arendt argues, that is the only inalienable right men have as human beings (Arendt 2004, 631).

In what follows, I will explain what Arendt means by a right to belong, beginning with her discussion of the treatment of minority peoples and stateless persons. Next, we examine the isolation and loneliness that is required of the members of totalitarian movements, and also the movement’s contempt for the “reality” of the world. Lastly, we see how Arendt argues we can guard against totalitarianism—in a renewed commitment to take pride in the world, and in man’s capacity to found a new community based on the right to belong. Throughout, I will demonstrate where and how Arendt draws on resources she first discovered in her study of Augustine. Because the idea of a man-made “world” is so significant to understanding Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism, I first return to the origin of this concept in her dissertation.

5.1 Belonging to the World

In Arendt’s dissertation, we see her develop a concept of “the world,” and her primary research question is always how, for Augustine, it is possible to love the other in the world. She explains that when Augustine discusses the world, he either means the created world already given to man, or he means the world built by men. In the case of
the former, this is the whole of the universe created by God—the heavens and the earth. It is the universe that, to man, appears as if it is eternal. As it is created by God, the universe is good. It is not this created world that is sinful. What is sinful for Augustine, Arendt argues in her dissertation, is when man turns toward this created world (and away from God) and makes out of it for himself a home. Man jointly constitutes the world together with others out of his love for the world. This is the second meaning of “the world” in Augustine. Men look to this man-made world to provide them with meaning and, insofar as the world they build together is durable, with a kind of immortality. Augustine believes that in loving the world we become enslaved to the world, and that the only way to find true freedom is by transcending the world and desiring eternity. As we saw, the puzzle for Arendt is how it can be possible for Augustine to affirm the command to love the other (who is yet in his concrete worldly existence) when we are commanded, at the same time, to transcend the world for the sake of eternity.

It is in the context of love as desire that we see Arendt first describing the world as the man-made world, and it is here that she describes it as “an already known world” (eine gekannte Welt) (Arendt 2003, 29). In other words, it is a world, she says, in which we have a sense of the world’s goods and the world’s evils. As we are born into this

67 Her interpretation of the world in Augustine’s thought is influenced by Heidegger. In my view, we actually do not see Augustine describing the world in the phenomenological way Arendt describes his thinking in her dissertation. In the first part of her dissertation, the concept of the world she begins to develop is much more Heideggerian than it is Augustinian.
world, we find ourselves having a pre-existing relationship with goods we desire, and it is natural for us to love objects in the world. This is what, she says, Augustine means by “habit.” The man-made world, then, provides us with a guide for human life, both what we should shun and what we should be attracted to.

The world also provides us with a kind of immortality. As we saw in the context of love as return, human beings are mortal, and they first become aware of their mortality by contrasting it to the seemingly everlastingness of the created world. Men build the world together in order to avoid the permanency of death and to make something meaningful of their lives that will last. Of course, for Augustine, this is futile. Looking to the world for immortality will carry us ever more assuredly towards eternal death.

Finally, in the context of love as shared past, we see Arendt developing “the world” as the location where men interact with each other as equals, and where they inter-depend on one another. The world is the place where the affairs of men happen, and these affairs together make up the story of mankind. Indeed, we see that it is only in the context of a shared past that the other can have any relevance for us. What we learn from the dissertation, then, is that for Augustine (as Arendt interprets him), “the world” is the human artifice that men have jointly constituted, and it is where men already find themselves at home. In this way, the world provides a guide for human life; it provides stability; and it infuses human togetherness with meaning in a shared history. For Augustine, however, we must reject whatever we have made of ourselves and the world for the sake of eternal life in God the source of all being.
It is this concept of the world, first articulated in her dissertation, that Arendt adopts as her own. However, in sharp contrast to Augustine, she argues that we should love the world. Arendt follows Augustine in arguing, at the end of Origins, that we should be grateful for the created world as it is given to us, and that we must accept that we are fabricators of the man-made world and not the authors of the given world. She breaks with Augustine, though, in arguing for our taking pride in the great capacities of man to build, together with others, a man-made world. At the same time, she also draws on the Augustine of her dissertation when she claims that it is man’s capacity to do something new that enables us to found a human community, to give laws to ourselves, and to guarantee the rights of all men. Ultimately, in Origins she argues that there is only one “natural” right that all men have, which springs from this unique human capacity, and that is the right to belong. Whereas Augustine insists that our belonging to the world must be transcended for the sake of eternity, Arendt argues that it is by reaffirming this right that human beings will be able to prevent the great “crimes against humanity” that she describes in Origins. Now that we have recalled Arendt’s formulation of the man-made world in her dissertation on Augustine, we are in a better position to understand what she means when she describes the masses as being alienated from the world, as well as her critique of totalitarianism’s constant movement that prevents the stability of a world from emerging, and finally her articulation of a right to belong to the world.
5.2 Minority Peoples and Stateless Persons

Arendt’s analysis of totalitarianism begins and ends with an explanation of and an argument for the “right to belong.” The right to belong to a political community, or the right to have rights, was first denied to human beings immediately after World War I. She argues that the totalitarian pursuit of the elimination of human plurality began with the emergence of minority peoples and stateless persons and the deprivation of their juridical person. It is in describing this phenomenon that Arendt first argues for a fundamental right to belong. For this reason, I begin my own study of her analysis of totalitarianism here, before turning to an examination of those other themes which first appeared in her dissertation and that reappear in Origins. At the end of this chapter, I will return again to Arendt’s argument for a fundamental human right to belong.

Arendt relies on the two similar cases of minority peoples and stateless persons in Europe after World War I in order to demonstrate the great importance of the right to belong. In sharp contrast to Augustine, Arendt wants us to belong to the world. For Arendt, we belong to the world by being a part of a political community where we are able to exercise the joint responsibilities of citizenship, and also where we are able to guarantee to each other equal rights. Once again, Arendt’s primary concern is for plurality in its two-fold aspect. She uses the case of minority peoples and stateless

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68 Arendt’s final chapter in Part II on imperialism argues that World War I marked the break with the 19th century and began the events of the 20th. It was the phenomena of these post-war years that were the immediate precursors to totalitarianism. It is for this reason that I treat the end of Part II as if it were the beginning of Part III on totalitarianism.
persons to emphasize, as she did in her discussions of anti-Semitism and imperialism, the need for equal rights and respect for distinctiveness. For Arendt, the minority peoples and the stateless persons were denied the right to belong to a political community, and were thus denied equality of rights, as well as a world in which their differences could be appreciated. In the paragraphs that follow, we will see that national majority governments based citizenship on a common national origin rather than on, as we saw in the last chapter, what Arendt calls “the idea of mankind.” All those who were of a different nationality and who did not belong to the national majority were denied equality. Similarly, millions of stateless person were also denied citizenship, legal equality, and a worldly community wherein their distinctiveness could be demonstrated and appreciated.

Arendt explains the emergence of large numbers of “minority peoples” as the result of the peace agreements that ended World War I, and, more specifically, the Minority Treaties. After the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, the nation-state system was imposed upon Eastern and Central Europe. Even though the nation-state was failing in the West as a result of imperialism, the statesmen planning the peace still took it for granted that the nation-state was the chief institution of the body-politic.

As we saw in the last chapter however, the nation-state grew out of the coincidence of a territorial homeland and a homogenous population. In comparison to the peoples of Western Europe, Arendt explains, the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe were intermingled and did not have strong ties to the land. This meant that, of
course, there would be large national minorities in each of the new successor states. Regrettably, in Arendt’s view, instead of considering the creation of multi-national democracies with citizenship based on equality of rights and not nationality, the statesmen created the Minority Treaties. Everyone, including the statesmen who framed the Treaties as well as the nationalities of Eastern and Central Europe, believed that rights could only be guaranteed by national majority governments. National majorities and minorities alike were convinced: “that true freedom, true emancipation, and true popular sovereignty could be attained only with full national emancipation, that people without their own national government were deprived of human rights” (Arendt 2004, 347). The Minority Treaties were considered necessary because it was assumed that only people of the same national origin, with a national majority government of their own, could enjoy the state’s full protection of legal rights.

The Treaties assumed that a government of the national majority could not be expected to provide legal protections and guarantees to those who did not belong to the majority. Instead, the League of Nations, a supra-national organization, was made the guarantor of minority rights (Arendt 2004, 345-346). Since the League of Nations was composed of nation-states with majority populations, the minorities naturally did not trust the League, and, in Arendt’s view, their distrust was well-founded. Instead of

69 The minorities, not trusting the League and in order to secure their own protection, created a Minority Congress. Arendt points out that the minorities outnumbered the so-called “state peoples,” and had they joined together, could have proved a significant challenge to the nation-state system. Even within the Congress, however, they could not see beyond their own narrow national interest: “national interest and not common interests of minorities as such formed the true basis of membership” (Arendt
intervening on behalf of oppressed minorities, these older nation-states used the forum of the League in order to stress the importance of duties owed by the minorities to the new states, and to emphasize assimilation into the national majority by the minority (Arendt 2004, 348). These nation-states knew only too well, Arendt argues, that “that minorities within nation-states must sooner or later be either assimilated or liquidated” (Arendt 2004, 348). Their speeches on the floor of the League, Arendt explains, made it clear that the majority governments were not responsible “for persons insisting on a different nationality” (Arendt 2004, 351). In their view, unless and until these persons assimilated into the majority and were “divorced from their origin,” the laws of the state need neither provide them legal guarantees of security, nor afford them protection of their basic rights (Arendt 2004, 351).

For Arendt, the major significance of the Minority Treaties was that for the first time millions of people were expressly acknowledged as being completely outside the legal system of the state, and that this was not accepted as a temporary condition but, rather, as a *modus vivendi* (Arendt 2004, 350). As she argued in her discussion of imperialism, the contradiction between the institution of the state and the consciousness of nationhood had been inherent in the nation-state from its very beginnings in the French Revolution, which had simultaneously declared the Rights of

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When the two largest minorities in Europe, the Germans and the Jews, could not agree on together protesting Germany’s policies towards its Jews, and when the Germans instead announced their solidarity with Germany, the Congress fell apart.

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Man and the sovereignty of the nation, but it was only after World War I that the triumph of the nation over the state was explicitly acknowledged and applied to the peoples of Eastern Europe. Now, “the supremacy of the will of the nation over all legal and ‘abstract’ institutions, was universally accepted” (Arendt 2004, 351). Only peoples who belonged to the national majority could be assured of protection. Even then, as we learned from the Nazis, people who possessed citizenship could be de-nationalized and, therefore, lose all previous protections (e.g. Germans with disabilities). With the final victory of the nation over the state, no one was truly safe. We see very clearly here Arendt’s concern for plurality. If equality of rights is premised on a denial of human difference, everyone who can be described as not belonging to the majority is in danger.

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70 In On Revolution (1963), Arendt writes:

The Revolution had come to its turning point when the Jacobins, under the leadership of Robespierre, seized power, not because they were more radical but because they did not share the Girondins’ concern with forms of government, because they believed in the people rather than in the republic, and “pinned their faith on the natural goodness of a class” rather than on institutions and constitutions: “Under the new Constitution,” Robespierre insisted, “laws should be promulgated ‘in the name of the French people’ instead of the “French Republic.” (Arendt 1963, 70)

Also: “The shift from the republic to the people meant that the enduring unity of the future political body was guaranteed not in the worldly institutions which this people had in common, but in the will of the people themselves” (Arendt 1963, 71).

71 Arendt writes:

Hitler contemplated during the war the introduction of a National Health Bill: “After national X-ray examination, the Fuehrer is to be given a list of sick persons, particularly those with lung and heart diseases. On the basis of the new Reich Health Law ... these families will no longer be able to remain among the public and can no longer be allowed to produce children. What will happen to these families will be the subject of further orders of the Fuehrer.” It does not need much imagination to guess what these further orders would have been. The number of people no longer allowed “to remain among the public” would have formed a considerable portion of the German population (Nazi Conspiracy, VI, 175). (Arendt 2004, 538-539)
The other group of people who stood outside the protections of the nation-state were the ever-growing numbers of stateless persons—persons who had no territory or home to belong to. These people were the result of the many civil wars, revolutions, and persecutions that followed World War I. Like the problem of minority peoples, the problem of stateless persons was also new and unprecedented in history, both in terms of scope and in persistence. However, the minority peoples, Arendt says, were only “half-stateless” (Arendt 2004, 352). Despite the fact that they needed special, supranational protection, de jure they belonged to a political body (Arendt 2004, 352).

Stateless persons, in contrast, belonged to no political entity. They were unable both to be repatriated to their country of origin or to be nationalized by their country of refuge. Once they had fled or been pushed out of their home territory, the large numbers of stateless people who flooded into Western Europe before the outbreak of World War II could find no one to accept them and were denied the traditional right of asylum.

Recalling her own experience, Arendt remarks that the only “country” the international community provided the stateless person was an internment camp (Arendt 2004, 361). The stateless were also not offered naturalization, as citizenship was a right reserved only to majority nationals. The attempts to protect stateless persons through international law also failed because, as Arendt argues, international law is no substitute for the protection the government of a sovereign state can provide to its citizens,

72 This demonstrates, Arendt argues, the complicity of the non-totalitarian states with the Nazis: “if the Nazis put a person in a concentration camp and if he made a successful escape, say, to Holland, the Dutch would put him in an internment camp” (Arendt 2004, 366).
regardless of where they travel or reside (Arendt 2004, 361). Before World War II, millions of stateless persons, lacking citizenship entirely, stood completely outside of the nation-state system and the protection of the law. These millions of stateless persons belonged nowhere, and were not protected by any domestic or international legal system.

Because he lacked both citizenship and the right to asylum, the very presence of a stateless person in a country of refuge was illegal, even though he had committed no crime. Stateless persons had no right of residence, which made them outlaws by definition and “completely at the mercy of the police, which itself did not worry about committing a few illegal acts in order to diminish the country’s burden of indésirables” (Arendt 2004, 360). Indeed, the power of the police, Arendt argues, grew in proportion to the growing number of stateless persons who stood outside of the law, and the greater the power of the police, “the greater the gradual transformation into a police state” (Arendt 2004, 365). If he was to regain his equal status before the law, as Arendt argues, the great irony is that he would have had to commit a crime:

If a small burglary is likely to improve his legal position, at least temporarily, one may be sure he has been deprived of human rights. For then a criminal offense becomes the best opportunity to regain some kind of human equality, even if it be a recognized exception to the norm. The one important fact is that this

73 As Arendt points out, the Minority Treaties were used to single out specific national peoples for eventual expulsion: “In Nazi Germany, the Nuremberg Laws with their distinction between Reich citizens (full citizens) and nationals (second-class citizens without political rights) had paved the way for a development in which eventually all nationals of ‘alien blood’ could lose their nationality by official decree” (Arendt 2004, 365).
exception is provided for by the law. As a criminal even a stateless person will not be treated worse than any other criminal, that is, he will be treated like everybody else. (Arendt 2004, 364)

Because he was an illegal resident, the stateless person stood outside of the protection of the law, and he would have had to commit a crime in order to find himself back within the law’s protective boundaries. At least within the context of the criminal justice system, he would be entitled to the same, equal rights as any other criminal suspect. For Arendt, there is no better demonstration of the denial of basic rights and privileges than the fact that in order to be considered a person worthy of the law’s protection, he would have had to become a criminal.

As she did in her analysis of Anti-Semitism and imperialism, Arendt again stresses the necessity of recognizing human equality while, at the same time, respecting human distinctiveness. Statelessness deprived individuals of their basic equality and of their unique identity. There is no greater proof, Arendt says, of their loss of equality than the fact that they needed to commit a crime in order to regain an element of it. In addition, they had lost the opportunity to express who they were through the expression of unique identities. The stateless, Arendt says, were desperate to obtain birth certificates from their country of origin as a symbol of the unique identity that comes with every human being’s birth (Arendt 2004, 365). The cry of the stateless person everywhere, Arendt says, was that “nobody here knows who I am” (Arendt 2004, 365). For Arendt, unique identities are only meaningful and can only be expressed within the context of a shared world—a world that is jointly constituted with others, and wherein equal rights are protected and the space for difference is respected.
Arendt uses this opportunity to draw attention to the failure of the idea of universal human rights, espoused by Western Civilization since the French Revolution, to provide genuine protections to minority and stateless peoples. The declaration of the Rights of Man, Arendt explains, had provided the assurance of protections to modern Europeans, who, with the rise of secularism and the end of feudalism, had no longer been sure of their places in society. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Rights of Man were declared in order to afford guarantees to men who could neither be sure of their equality before God, nor of their position vis-à-vis the state. Man himself, and not God or Tradition, was said to be both the source of these inalienable rights and their ultimate end, while the laws of the state were supposed to be derived from these same rights. (Arendt 2004, 369).

Arendt argues here, and then again at the end of Origins, that we cannot place our faith any longer in these so-called inalienable natural rights. Arendt argues that the experience of millions of people in Europe before World War II demonstrates that human beings who have nothing to rely upon but their “natural rights” will find themselves without protection. Indeed, there is no paradox in contemporary politics more poignantly ironic, Arendt says, than the discrepancy between modern Europe’s proclamation of inalienable human rights and the actual situation of people who were deprived of every right (Arendt 2004, 355). As soon as we were presented with the exact kind of situation in which the so-called inalienable Rights of Man should have been evoked, it became clear that the rights which were supposedly grounded in natural law were ineffectual.
The reason, however, that the inalienable Rights of Man proved to be incapable of affording rights to individuals is actually rooted in the French Revolution itself, which proclaimed “the people” to be the sovereign source of government: “man had hardly appeared as a completely emancipated, completely isolated being who carried his dignity within himself without reference to some larger encompassing order, when he disappeared again into a member of a people” (Arendt 2004, 369). It had turned out that, in order for “inalienable” rights to be protected, historically either a foreign or domestic despot had to be overthrown and the people declared sovereign. It became clear that if rights were to be protected, the sovereignty of the people would have to be assured. In this way, rights came to be understood as the right of a people and not of individuals.

Although the paradox was present from the beginning, it was not until the sudden appearance of millions of stateless people—people who were without any government protection—that this paradox came to light. The moment people appeared without a government and without a state, and who were supposed to be able to fall back upon their inalienable rights, they were nevertheless, practically speaking, rightless:

The conception of human rights, based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such, broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships—except that they were still human. (Arendt 2004, 380)
Right when the inalienable Rights of Man should have been asserted as inalienable, it
became evident that they could only be enforced by the state for the national majority.

The great “tragedy” of the nation-state, according to Arendt, is that it cannot
guarantee rights to individuals as citizens, but only as nationals: “In the name of the will
of the people the state was forced to recognize only ‘nationals’ as citizens, to grant full
civil and political rights only to those who belonged to the national community by right
of origin and fact of birth” (Arendt 2004, 296).74 The contradiction inherent in the
institutions of the nation-state lies in the difficulty, once again, of reconciling the two-
fold character of plurality—equality and difference. For Arendt, the contradictory
features of the nation-state, the institutions of the state on one the hand and the
consciousness of nationality on the other, can and should remain separate. It is the
supreme task of the state, she says, to guarantee the rights of each person “as man, as
citizen, and as national” (Arendt 2004, 297). The state is responsible for securing the
rights of all the inhabitants of its territory, regardless of nationality. According to Arendt,
the institutions of the state should be the great equalizer. Individuals who are
completely unique by birth should, nevertheless, be recognized as legal equals within
the institutions of the state. A mutual agreement, and not consciousness of a shared

74 Arendt notes that the stateless people themselves did not trust in anything but their
nationality to protect them. They looked either to their own majority state, in the case of the Hungarians
or the Germans, or to their international solidarity, as in the case of the Jews. Instead of invoking their
rights as individuals, they developed a “fierce, violent group consciousness and to clamor for rights as—
and only as—Poles or Jews or Germans, etc.” (Arendt 2004, 371). In Arendt’s view, everyone, including
the international community, nation-states, and the stateless peoples themselves, failed to insist upon
the inalienable rights of the individual as a human being and not as a member of his or her nation (Arendt
nationality, should be the tie that binds unique human beings together in a political community. In Arendt’s discussion of the situation of minority and stateless people, we see that if the state is understood as an instrument of the nation, then all people will always be in danger of being denationalized, becoming stateless, and, quite possibly, being exterminated.

One of the major problems of these interwar years, Arendt argues, was that it became apparent that no one, not even the most well-intentioned, seemed to be able to clearly articulate what rights were inalienable human rights, or how these rights were different from the rights of a citizen. Arendt argues that after all that has happened, it is evident that we must now clearly articulate what these rights are. For Arendt, the first right stateless persons lost was the right to a home: “this meant the loss of the entire social texture into which they were born and in which they established for themselves a distinct place in the world” (Arendt 2004, 372). The loss of a home, Arendt says, is, of course, not unprecedented. What was new, was the total inability to find a new one (Arendt 2004, 372). Suddenly, there was no nation on earth in which they could be assimilated, and “no territory where the could found a new community of their own” (Arendt 2004, 373). Stateless persons found themselves uprooted and homeless, with nowhere to belong and nowhere to go.

The second right that the stateless persons lost was the right of government protection—not only the protection of their own government, but of any government at all. Arendt argues that the “fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant
and actions effective” (Arendt 2004, 376). The stateless people had lost their homes and government protection, but, for Arendt, this implies the loss of much more. They had lost the right to belong to a man-made community, wherein their opinions would matter and their actions could have some purpose: “they have lost all those parts of the world and all those aspects of human existence which are the results of our common labor, the outcome of the human artifice” (Arendt 2004, 381). To put it another way, they have lost the right to belong to the man-made world, the world as Arendt first describes in her dissertation. The great calamity of the right-less, as Arendt puts it, is not that they are deprived of specific rights, but that they are deprived of the right to belong: “they no longer belong to any community whatsoever” (Arendt 2004, 375). The loss of a right to belong is crucial for Arendt. It is the loss of the right to have rights. The stateless “are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion” (Arendt 2004, 376). The right to have rights means, for Arendt, that all persons are entitled the right to make a home within a man-made world wherein one can be judged, not for what he is, but by his actions and his opinions (Arendt 2004, 376).

It is in her discussion of the problems posed by the presence of national minorities and stateless persons after World War I, that we first see Arendt relying on Augustine in order to put forward an original theory of politics that opposes Augustine’s own. We see the themes of her dissertation reappear in the idea of belonging, in the man-made world, in human equality and human distinctiveness, and in the ties that connect completely unique and individual human beings together in a community.
Arendt argues that each human person is born completely unique from any other. For this idea, she draws on Augustine. It is a “miracle,” she says, “that each of us is made as he is—single, unique, unchangeable” (Arendt 2004, 382). She says that this miracle can be reckoned with either in friendship or in love (Arendt 2004, 382). For it is love, she writes, that as Augustine says, wishes that you may be (“Volo ut sis”) (Arendt 2004, 382). We know, however, from Arendt’s dissertation, that this is not what Augustine meant. Wishing that he may be meant that I wish for him to be as God (sicut Deus). In other words, it meant to love him in such a way as to help him cast off all that made him a distinct individual in the world and instead, like God, be immortal and immutable.

Arendt uses the idea of “I want you to be” to mean total acceptance, in love, of who the person has been born as and is becoming, as a unique individual in the world.75

It is in the private sphere that man can be completely accepted, in love, for his differences. But a shared political life rests on equality “because man can act in and change and build a common world, together with his equals and only with his equals” (Arendt 2004, 382). Here we see Arendt relying on the concept of the man-made world that she developed in her dissertation. It is, like in the dissertation, “the result of our common and co-ordinated effort” (Arendt 2004, 383). It is possible for man, as homo faber, to create a human artifice, including laws and institutions, that guarantee human

75 In a brief but helpful article on Arendt’s usage of “Volo ut sis” in Origins, Margaret Miles argues: “from her [Arendt’s] reading of Augustine she gathered the suggestions that enabled her to imagine a generous love that was probably beyond Augustine’s wildest dreams, even in passages in which he extols loving the neighbor ‘in God’” (Miles 2002, 224).
equality, while at the same time allowing human uniqueness to appear. As in the dissertation, this world is again and again reconstituted by men who are acknowledged by their fellows as equals. Only equals can together build the world, and only within the man-made world can equality be guaranteed. Human beings agree to treat one another as legal equals in spite of, so to speak, the great differences between men. Equality within the public sphere is, Arendt affirms, the result of human organization. It is the result of a “decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights” (Arendt 2004, 382). Political communities, since the Greeks, have to varying extents resented the differences among men because these differences are a constant reminder that man is “not the creator of the world” (Arendt 2004, 383). These differences indicate the limitations of the human artifice—that man can build, but not create the world. For Arendt, we have to protect legal human equality, while at the same time appreciate human distinctiveness. This is why legal equality is so important—because it permits us

\[\text{76 Arendt notes:}\]

The reason why highly developed political communities, such as the ancient city-states or modern nation-states, so often insist on ethnic homogeneity is that they hope to eliminate as far as possible those natural and always present differences and differentiations which by themselves arouse dumb hatred, mistrust, and discrimination because they indicate all too clearly those spheres where men cannot act and change at will, i.e., the limitations of the human artifice. The “alien” is a frightening symbol of the fact of difference as such, of individuality as such, and indicates those realms in which man cannot change and cannot act and in which, therefore, he has a distinct tendency to destroy. If a Negro in a white community is considered a Negro and nothing else, he loses along with his right to equality that freedom of action which is specifically human; all his deeds are now explained as “necessary” consequences of some “Negro” qualities; he has become some specimen of an animal species, called man. Much the same thing happens to those who have lost all distinctive political qualities and have become human beings and nothing else. (Arendt 2004, 382-383)

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to acknowledge each other as equals before the law, entitled to certain rights of citizenship, while also allowing a space for human distinctiveness. Human differences have to be allowed to be in the private realm. The stateless people “lacked the equalizing of differences which comes from being citizens of some commonwealth” (Arendt 2004, 383). Instead, they were thrown back upon their mere differences, which can only be meaningful among others and within a shared world (Arendt 2004, 383).

Arendt, in her dissertation, discusses Augustine and the fundamental human desire he believes all men have to belong. This desire characterizes the human person as a desiring person. We see in Augustine’s thought that, although they mistakenly long to belong to the world, what they really desire is to belong to God. Interestingly, here Arendt takes the desire to belong and turns it into a fundamental human right—the right to belong. Belonging is no longer metaphysical; it is concrete and political. Furthermore, she is arguing that every human being has a right to belong to the world, in sharp contrast to Augustine for whom desiring and belonging to the world leads only to insatiable longing and then eternal death. For Arendt, it is not belonging to God that ultimately fulfills the human person, but it is in the belonging to the world that allows each person to express his humanity and the human condition.

Belonging to a human community is so significant for Arendt because it enables each individual human person to have legal equality and the opportunity to demonstrate through speech and action who he is as a unique person. It is only in a community that a person can show who he is. To deprive individuals of the right to belong is to expel them from humanity altogether:
Not the loss of specific rights, then, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever, has been the calamity which has befallen ever-increasing numbers of people. Man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity. (Arendt 2004, 377)

All that has happened to the stateless persons and to the victims of concentration camps has demonstrated that we cannot rely on a theory of inalienable human rights that have no authority but Man himself in the abstract. Instead, men must recommit themselves to establishing a new mutual guarantee for rights on earth by agreeing on the fundamental right to belong, the right to have rights, and by grounding these rights in specific human polities.

In the dissertation, Arendt argues that, for Augustine, men must transcend their belonging to the world for the sake of a future eternity. The world must become like a desert and not a home. In other words, Christians are to act as if they are travelers who are sojourning for only a brief time until, at the end of this life on earth, they find their true home in eternity. Arendt does not describe how this transcendence might look, practically speaking, though we do know from Part III of her dissertation that it would not entail a complete sequester from the outside world. It is clear however, that, for Augustine, looking to the world as the source of one’s unique identity is in fact sinful. In Origins, Arendt argues the exact opposite. She is very concerned about men who are “homeless,” meaning they have no worldly, political community to which they can belong, and in which they can express their unique identity. Homelessness, for Arendt means both a concrete, lived experience in the case of the minorities and stateless
persons, as well as a metaphysical condition. As we will soon see, “the masses,” for Arendt, might technically speaking have citizenship, but nevertheless are characterized by their feeling of not belonging to the world.

For Arendt, the opposite of homelessness is belonging to the world in both a concrete and metaphysical sense. This means that a person is able to belong as an equal citizen to a political community, and also that one can take pride in a political community that is built together with others. For Arendt, the world is the place where one’s words and deeds—one’s unique life story—can have meaning. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that human beings belong to the world. Not belonging to the world has very real consequences, as demonstrated by the problem of minority peoples and stateless persons, and also by “the masses,” which will be discussed in the next section. Being homeless means that a person is without the protection of a government. But, even more importantly, it means that without a man-made world to belong to, one is deprived of the possibility of expressing his or her unique identity. When men feel homeless, the temptation of totalitarian ideologies becomes all the stronger. In this way, we see Arendt adopting Augustine’s concept of the man-made world as she presents it in the dissertation, but she adopts it in order to provide a political theory that is opposed to Augustine’s transcendence of the world. She argues that belonging to the world is not only necessary for the protection of rights and for the pride of co-responsibility, but also that it is necessary for persons to be able to find meaning and make sense of human existence.
5.3 The Totalitarian Movement

The totalitarian movement, as Arendt explains it, emerged among masses who felt homeless, isolated, and lonely. Indeed, totalitarian movements and totalitarian regimes depend upon the support of the large group of atomized and isolated individuals that Arendt calls “the masses.” In her analysis of the emergence of the masses and the psychology of “mass man,” she emphasizes that the masses are made up of completely isolated persons. The chief characteristic of mass man, she says, is “his isolation and lack of normal social relationships” (Arendt 2004, 421). Returning to her interest in the “in-between”—what both unites and provides space for unique human beings within a community—Arendt argues that the masses have no ties to connect them to other people. They are alienated from other persons, and they are also alienated from a man-made world that, according to Arendt, has become unbearable for them. In the midst of a rapid breakdown of class society and great economic and political instability, the masses resent the indeterminacy of the world, and are attracted to ideologies that claim to be able to explain and predict all human events. The men who make up the masses feel superfluous and out of place in the world. The totalitarian movement provides something of great significance to which they can belong. In the paragraphs that follow, we will see below how Arendt revisits her interest in isolation and the “in-between,” as well as her concern for the man-made world in her analysis of the rise of “the masses” and of the relationship of the masses to the totalitarian movement.
Interestingly, Arendt’s mass man bears a significant resemblance to the account of isolation she provides in her dissertation. In Part I, the desiring man is isolated from that which can bring him happiness. He experiences this isolation as a longing that the goods of this world cannot satisfy. As Arendt explains it, for Augustine human beings will only be frustrated and anxious if they look to the world for happiness. In her analysis of the rise of the masses in *Origins*, Arendt presents the masses as also being thoroughly dissatisfied with what the man-made world can offer. Arendt characterizes their feeling as a “longing” for a consistency the human world cannot provide (Arendt 2004, 463). Instead of turning to faith in God, as Augustine would have them do, they turn to faith in the “salvation value” of ideologies that claim, like God, to be both infallible and omnipotent (Arendt 2004, 622). Here we also see a similarity between the masses and the man described in Part II of Arendt’s dissertation—a man who fancied himself, and not God, creator of the world. For Arendt, modern men are attracted to ideologies because they resent the fact that they are not the creator of the universe (Arendt 2004, 630). The ideologies, in which they mistakenly place their faith, teach them that man can re-create the world; indeed, that he can be omnipotent if only he organizes himself properly.

We also discovered in Parts I and II of Arendt’s dissertation that she was critical of Augustine’s philosophy of love precisely because she believes it left men isolated

77 That is, the “longing of the masses for a completely consistent, comprehensible, and predictable world” (Arendt 2004, 463).
from one another in the presence of God. For Arendt, it is not God and it is not modern ideologies on which we should rely to guide our shared life. We will soon see that, while Augustine would have us direct our faith beyond the world in order to find freedom from fear and from sinful pride, Arendt would have us renew our faith in ourselves, and in durable worldly institutions, in order to act in freedom. After her experience with totalitarianism, Arendt has seen the very real dangers and specific threats posed by men who are isolated and who have no concrete, worldly ties to one another. Now, her concern has become much more than a theoretical critique of Augustine’s philosophy; man’s isolation has become, in her view, a political crisis of the utmost import. Though she argues that we must be mindful of our limitations, human beings, for Arendt, do have the great capacity to found political communities that can provide a measure of stability to human affairs, as well a location for meaning to be generated. It is not in God or in ideologies that we must have faith, but in the human capacity to begin something new. We will return to this very important point at the end of this chapter.

Recall that Arendt describes the man-made world in Augustine’s social thought as being premised on inter-dependence, and that it was only within this context, as she argued, that there could be a specific relevance for the other. Here in Origins, in Arendt’s description of the masses, we see a man who believes he cannot depend on any other, but feels truly alone in the world. This is the feeling of loneliness. Because he cannot tolerate this situation, mass man rejects the world as it is given to him in favor of an ideology that can explain all human events with a single premise, and that addresses
every aspect of his life. Identifying totally with the movement, he feels safe from the insecurities of the world and free from the responsibilities of action.

According to Arendt’s account, totalitarianism rests on the support of these isolated, lonely individuals, while, at the same time, it is only the truly isolated person who can be reliably dominated in each and every sphere of life—the ultimate goal of the totalitarian movements. Totalitarian movements aim to organize and mobilize the masses, for it is in organization that they believe their omnipotence lies. But, before we turn to study totalitarian organization, let us examine more closely Arendt’s argument concerning the rise of the masses and the psychology of mass man.

Arendt distinguished the masses from “citizens” and from “classes.” According to Arendt, a citizen exercises personal responsibility for the handling of public affairs. The masses, in contrast, were (and still are today) made up of all those people who did not participate in politics, but rather who were politically neutral or indifferent (Arendt 2004, 415). They were made up of all those “non-joiners” who had stood outside not only all political organizations, but all social organizations as well. They were those who “for individualistic reasons always had refused to recognize social links or obligations” (Arendt 2004, 421). Arendt again emphasizes that the mass man is isolated and that there is no tie—no “in-between”—connecting him to his fellow man. We see this emphasis also in the distinction she makes between masses and classes.

Nineteenth century European society had been sharply divided into social classes, which had been precariously held together only by nationalism. The mass man who was attracted to totalitarian movements, Arendt maintains, emerged from “a
highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had been held in check only through membership in a class” (Arendt 2004, 421). Unlike masses, classes, Arendt explains, at least had common interests arising out of a shared economic and social status. Political parties were also based on class, and each class had designated certain “professional” politicians who would represent the class’s interest in parliament. Arendt argues that this party system prevented the development of a politically responsible citizenry; the members of the class who supported the party did not directly participate. With the breakdown of the class system—effected by war, unemployment, and inflation—the party system also collapsed, “and carried with it the whole fabric of visible and invisible threads which bound the people to the body politic” (Arendt 2004, 418). Once the classes disintegrated, only atomized individuals remained.

Out of the breakdown of the class and party systems, the masses emerged:

The fall of protecting class walls transformed the slumbering majorities behind all parties into one great unorganized, structureless mass of furious individuals who had nothing in common except their vague apprehension that the hopes of party members were doomed. (Arendt 2004, 419)

They no longer had any faith in the political system, and there was nothing at all to tie them to their fellow man in a shared world. The “threads” that had weakly connected them to their neighbor were broken. Although they shared a similar situation, they turned their bitterness inward and saw their own particular misfortune as unique. Arendt argues that this attitude could not provide a “common bond” because it was not based on a common political, economic, or social interest (Arendt 2004, 419). Even
though they were surrounded by millions of people who shared a common situation, they still felt themselves entirely alone.

For Arendt, whenever there exists a society that depends upon only a few professional politicians to administer public affairs, there will inevitably exist large numbers of people who take no part in public affairs, and who then have no sense of political responsibility. Whenever any other social ties, such as nationality or class, which bind them to their fellow man, are broken, these people will become “the masses”—a large group of people who no longer feel at home in the world. Arendt believes this is dangerous situation to be in because it is the masses to whom totalitarian movements will be the most appealing, and, conversely, totalitarian movements depend upon the existence of just such a large group of isolated individuals.

In order to demonstrate how much totalitarian movements depend upon the specific conditions of completely isolated and socially atomized masses, Arendt compares the Soviet Union, where Stalin had to create these conditions, to Germany, where they developed as a result of historical events. Because Lenin had actually fostered social organizations, Stalin had “to fabricate an atomized and structureless mass” in order to prepare the country for totalitarian rule (Arendt 2004, 424). In order to do this, he carried out the “liquidation” of the peasant class through artificial famine and murdered the small emerging middle class. By the time the liquidation was complete,

those who were not among the many millions of dead or the millions of deported slave laborers had learned “who is master here,” had realized that their lives and the lives of their families
depended not upon their fellow-citizens but exclusively on the
whims of the government which they faced in complete loneliness
without any help whatsoever from the group to which they
happened to belong. (Arendt 2004, 425)

Likewise, Stalin also erected institutional divisions among the working class, breaking up
“all solidarity and class consciousness among the workers” (Arendt 2004, 426). Over the
course of twelve years, he also liquidated the Soviet bureaucracy, and then, at the end,
he turned to the police who had carried out the other purges, demonstrating that truly
no one was safe (Arendt 2004, 426).

For Arendt, totalitarianism is a decidedly different phenomenon from
dictatorships, which keep intact non-political social bonds such as family or cultural ties.
In contrast, totalitarianism seeks to destroy any and all bonds between people. Stalin
aimed “to destroy all social and family ties” by threatening the friends and family of the
accused with the same fate. The effect of this “guilt by association” strategy, Arendt
explains, was that as soon as a man was accused his friends suddenly become his
“bitterest enemies” in an effort to save themselves (Arendt 2004, 428). Under these
conditions, it was better not to have any friends at all in order to prevent the possibility
of being denounced: “Merit being ‘gauged by the number of your denunciations of close
comrades,’ it is obvious that the most elementary caution demands that one avoid all
intimate contacts” (Arendt 2004, 428-429). Through fostering mutual distrust among
friends and family members, Stalin “succeeded in creating an atomized and
individualized society the like of which we have never seen before and which events or
catastrophes alone would hardly have brought about” (Arendt 2004, 429).
Because, as Arendt argues, totalitarianism depends upon the existence of the masses where they do not already exist, they have to be fabricated. Through his great purges, Stalin was able to effectively break up all social relationships, to destroy the inter-dependence and mutual trust that had previously existed in Soviet society, and to fabricate completely isolated, lonely individuals. The isolated men that make up “the masses” have none of the mutual trust and inter-dependence, as Arendt argues in Part III of her dissertation, that is so fundamental to the vita socialis in Augustine’s thought. She stresses again and again the fact that totalitarianism depends upon the loyalty of the masses, and that this loyalty can be expected only from individuals who have no ties to their fellow man, who feel themselves unable to depend upon and trust one another, and who feel completely alone in the world.

How far this isolation goes is demonstrated by the fact that even those in the elite circles, closest to the leader, Arendt explains, had nothing in common between them:

The isolation of atomized individuals provides not only the mass basis for totalitarian rule, but is carried through to the very top of the whole structure...there exists no interrelationship between those holding office; they are not bound together by equal status in a political hierarchy or the relationship between superiors and inferiors, or even in the uncertain loyalty of gangsters. (Arendt 2004, 528)
Here, Arendt maintains that totalitarian leaders do not even have the kind of expedient attachment held by members of criminal gangs. For Arendt, interests can be common only when there are “stable social bodies” that “provide the necessary transmission belts between the individual and the group” (Arendt 2004, 458). There must exist man-made institutions that provide the “in-between.” Conversely, where these bodies are absent, interests cannot be communicated, and joint action cannot be taken to realize these interests. Therefore, every person is isolated and feels that he cannot depend upon others. In other words, without the stable institutions provided by a man-made world, wherein one man can trust and depend upon another, men will not only be isolated, but will experience loneliness. The feeling of loneliness, in turn, makes men perfect candidates for totalitarian movements.

Beside isolation, mass man is also defined by the rejection of the world in which he lives. As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, it was first in her dissertation that we saw Arendt describe a man-made artifice, constituted by men who inter-depend upon and trust one another. She demonstrated her concern for this world by being troubled by Augustine’s desire either to instrumentalize it in “use,” or to transcend it for the sake of eternity. She argued that it is only within the context of a shared, historical world that love for the other makes sense.

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78 Arendt may have in mind here Book IV of *City of God*, where Augustine says that even robbers have common interests between them.
In *Origins*, she applies what was a critique of Augustine’s inconsistency within his philosophy of love of God and neighbor, to the very concrete and real rejection of the world in the 20th century. She believes that a contemptuous rejection of the world is characteristic of totalitarianism, and that a grateful acceptance of the world is critical to guarding against it. The masses rejected the world in which they found themselves because it had proven to be unpredictable and unstable, and so, in Arendt’s words, they longed for “a completely consistent, comprehensible, and predictable world”—a world that does not truly exist (Arendt 2004, 463). They abandoned the world in which they could no longer find a place in favor of a fictitious world where they could become an instrument of History or of Nature. Totalitarian ideologies, then, which build an entirely fictitious world, allowed these men an escape from the real one. They afford men a movement to which they can give themselves over entirely, and a program which encompasses every area of life. In this way, they can abandon all personal responsibility for thoughts or for behavior because the ideology, and the leader’s interpretation of its requirements, provides men an absolute guide for life. In Arendt’s view, the masses have abdicated their shared responsibility for the constitution and maintenance of the world.

According to Arendt, the chief characteristic of mass man is his isolation, while his primary feeling is one of superfluousness. In a society with high unemployment and overpopulation, the mass man felt expendable. Because of this feeling, he was greatly attracted to ideologies that thought in terms of centuries, even millennia. These ideologies afforded them the possibility that they could be a part of something of great
significance for the ages. Arendt tells us that they were eager to abandon themselves for the sake of the movement, to the point of losing all interest in their material well-being. We see Arendt returning to the theme of worldlessness so pervasive in her dissertation. In her dissertation, she describes the man who loves God as transcending the present, given world for the sake of an eternity outside of space and time. In *Origins*, Arendt specifically compares mass man here to a Christian contemplative: “compared with their nonmaterialism,” she says, “a Christian monk looks like a man absorbed in worldly affairs” (Arendt 2004, 419-420). What is surprising about the fact that totalitarianism has the support of the masses is not their attraction to evil, Arendt says, but rather their unflinching loyalty to the movement, despite any self-interest. Mass man “may even be willing to help in this own prosecution and frame his own death sentence if only his status as a member of the movement is not touched” (Arendt 2004, 409-410). This kind of loyalty, Arendt argues, can only be expected from a completely isolated individual. Having no ties to others, the isolated individual finds “his sense of having his place in the world only from his belonging to a movement” (Arendt 2004, 429). The masses were so alienated from the real world, and so desperate to belong to a fictional one, that they were willing to be put to death if only to prove the consistency of the ideology.

Arendt argues that the masses’ feeling of superfluity, their longing for a place within a movement that thought in terms of centuries, has a great deal to do with the condition of modern man. With the end of feudalism and the rise of secularism, modern men had lost the social structures and religious beliefs that provided an explanation and
justification for their place in society and in the hereafter. With the breakdown of classes came the dissipation of the only remaining social group to which modern man had belonged, and which had provided a guide for behavior. The masses that emerged from the breakdown of the class system were without a social community to belong to and without beliefs to explain their position in society or to guide their activities. Totalitarian ideology provided both a movement to belong to and a single, simple explanation for all human events, past and future. It provided “a fictitious home,” Arendt says, an “escape” from social disintegration and disorientation (Arendt 2004, 498). Much more so than the Christian ascetic, the mass man abandoned his home in the world.

The masses lost the pride that Western man had long taken in the world he had built and in the things he had done, Arendt says, and instead were satisfied simply to become a cog in a machine and to have leaned in the right direction, “in alliance with the secret forces of history or necessity” (Arendt 2004, 286). Unlike any earlier form of social organization, totalitarian movements completely absorbed the individual “to the point of complete loss of individual claims and ambitions” (Arendt 2004, 417). The mass man, as a distinct individual, completely disappeared into the movement, and turned into a mere functionary of the leader’s will.

Arendt believes human affairs are unpredictable because men’s actions can be spontaneous. The world is thus fraught with diversity and unpredictability. Totalitarian ideologies deny this, and, instead, radically simplify the world. Within the fictitious world invented by the totalitarian ideology, there is only a single explanation for all
human events: race in the case of the Nazis, or class in the case of the Bolsheviks. All human affairs are explained by this single factor alone, and this single explanation also makes possible the reliable prediction of the future. The leader of a totalitarian movement proclaims his intentions in the form infallible prediction or “prophecy” (Arendt 2004, 460). Indeed, the “chief characteristic” of a mass leader is his (assumed) “unending infallibility,” based entirely on his correct interpretation of the forces of history and nature (Arendt 2004, 459). This “language of prophetic scientificality,” Arendt says,

> corresponded to the needs of masses who had lost their home in the world and now were prepared to be reintegrated into eternal, all-dominating forces which by themselves would bear man, the swimmer on the waves of adversity, to the shores of safety. (Arendt 2004, 461)

It should have been precisely their consistency of explanation that scandalized men’s common sense. 79 However, having lost their home in the world, men lacked the “common” of common sense. For Arendt, in order for us to have faith that what we know is real, we depend upon the confirmation of others. Only when we have a shared life are we able to distinguish reality from fantasy. Absent this shared life, the masses were easily fooled by ideologies that did not even argue a position, but rather claimed universal validity rooted in science or history.

79 “Figuratively speaking, it is as though the masses demand a constant repetition of the miracle of the Septuagint, when, according to ancient legend, seventy isolated translations produced an identical Greek version of the Old Testament. Common sense can accept this tale only as a legend or as a miracle” (Arendt 2004, 463).
For Arendt, totalitarian ideologies deny the human condition of plurality:

From the viewpoint of an organization which functions according to the principle that whoever is not included is excluded, whoever is not with me is against me, the world at large loses all the nuances, differentiations, and pluralistic aspects which had in any event become confusing and unbearable to the masses who had lost their place and their orientation in it. (Arendt 2004, 497)

Totalitarian ideology rejects the diversity of men. All people in the world are divided into “us” and “them.” This “us versus them” mentality affords the masses simplicity, but also provides them with a new identity. This identity restored for atomized individuals a kind of “self-respect they had formerly derived from their function in society” (Arendt 2004, 468). Now, absorbed in the movement, he was defined by being a part of “us” and not one of all the “others” (Arendt 2004, 498). The Nazis, Arendt says, called this new community the Volksgemeinschaft: “This new community, tentatively realized in the Nazi movement in the pretotalitarian atmosphere, was based on the absolute equality of all Germans, an equality not of rights but of nature, and their absolute difference from all other people” (Arendt 2004, 473). Absolute equality, as opposed to legal equality, for Arendt, requires a wholesale rejection of human distinctiveness. Indeed, the totalitarian movement aims to permanently do away with any unique individual identity, and instead replace it with complete identification with the movement. Each person functions as an unthinking cog in the machine, which is identical and replaceable with any other.

Total identification with the movement requires that the individual be divested of all his own opinions, even belief in the ideology. Believing in the truth of the ideology
means that one can also change his own mind. Instead, the loyalty must be to the
movement and to the leader’s infallible interpretation of the ideology:

The fact that the most perfect education in Marxism and Leninism
was no guide whatsoever for political behavior—that, on the
contrary, one could follow the party line only if one repeated each
morning what Stalin had announced the night before—naturally
resulted in the same state of mind, the same concentrated
obedience, undivided by any attempt to understand what one
was doing, that Himmler’s ingenious watchword for his SS-men
expressed: “My honor is my loyalty.” (Arendt 2004, 430)

Even independent support of the ideology cannot be tolerated because it means the
individual retains his autonomy. The aim of totalitarian movements and totalitarianism
in power is total domination of every individual in every sphere of life. An individual who
retains his own beliefs is not yet totally dominated. This is why if a totalitarian
movement is destroyed, the individual members simply go back to their original
isolation: “Without the force of the movement, its members cease at once to believe in
the dogma for which yesterday they still were ready to sacrifice their lives” (Arendt
2004, 476). Total loyalty means that every member of the movement becomes a mere
functionary, and an instrument of the leader’s will. He is divested entirely not only of
thought, but of any responsibility for his actions. This means that every person becomes
implicated in the crimes that are committed, but at the same time can deflect
responsibility and accountability to the leader. In this way, Arendt argues, men are
deprived of their “ability to act” (Arendt 2004, 577). Totalitarianism, for Arendt, is an
entirely new type of regime because it is the only regime in history that aims to do away
completely with the capacity of man to act spontaneously. It has as its goal the
elimination of distinctiveness that human plurality entails and because of which man is able to do the unexpected.

5.4 Totalitarianism in Power

Just like totalitarian movements, totalitarianism in power demonstrates an extreme contempt for the reality of the world. However, now that the movement has seized the state, it no longer needs to behave as if, but is in a position to make its ideological fiction an actuality. Having seized the instruments of the state, violence is no longer used merely to frighten political opponents, but to organize “the entire texture of life” according to the ideology (Arendt 2004, 476). What matters is the realization of the ideological fiction regardless of the present state of affairs, despite facts or reality, and with an extreme contempt for the reality and the stability of a man-made world. In this second half of the chapter, I will follow Arendt’s analysis of the organization of totalitarianism in power. What we will see is that, above all else, Arendt is concerned for the preservation of a stable, man-made world and for the space for human plurality within this world. At the end of this section, I will return to what Arendt argues is the fundamental human “right to belong” to this world.

Arendt argues that the organization of totalitarianism in power is designed to both guard against the outside world, and, at the same time, to create a fictional world and to expand this world so that it encompasses ever more people and ever more territories. The intent is to “translate the propaganda lies of the movement, woven around a central fiction—the conspiracy of the Jews, or the Trotskyites, or 300 families,
etc.—into a functioning reality” (Arendt 2004, 477). In fact, after seizing the state, there is no longer any need for propaganda: “given the power to teach a whole nation the history of the Russian Revolution without mentioning the name of Trotsky, there is no further need for propaganda against Trotsky” (Arendt 2004, 535). Indeed, Arendt argues that the need for propaganda decreases correspondingly to the extent men are dominated. The more domination, the less need there is to convince. In the concentration camps, where men are completely dominated, propaganda was forbidden altogether (Arendt 2004, 453).

Once in power, the totalitarian leader is now in a position to make his “infallible” predictions come true. After seizing the state, Hitler moved to fulfill his prophecy that the coming of a war in Europe would spell the destruction of the Jews by actively exterminating them (Arendt 2004, 460). In contrast to every other regime type we have known in human history, totalitarianism pursues its ideological goals regardless of any utilitarian calculations and in spite of common sense. Hitler used the occasion of the war to speed up and not to slow down the extermination of undesirable persons, even when the use of resources directly conflicted with the war effort. In fact:

the danger of losing the war altogether was only another incitement to throw overboard all utilitarian considerations and make an all-out attempt to realize through ruthless total organization the goals of totalitarian racial ideology, no matter for how short a time...Neither military, nor economic, nor political considerations were allowed to interfere with the costly and troublesome program of mass exterminations and deportations. (Arendt 2004, 531-532)
Totalitarianism in power behaves as if its ideological fiction were truth, irrespective of material interests or facts on the ground. What matters is creating its fictional world and destroying the real one. Indeed, Arendt argues here, and again in *The Human Condition*, that facts and reality can only make sense in the context of the stability of the world. Absent a space where men have a life in common, there can be no “common sense,” as there is no one to verify our knowledge as reality.

Indeed, in order to realize the ideological fiction, totalitarianism in power has to guard *against* the reality of the outside world. Everything is organized so as to protect members and the people from facts. The leader and the elite members lie at the center, while surrounding them are the party members, who act as the “outside” world for them. Similarly, the party members are shielded from the outside world by sympathizers (Arendt 2004, 534). The whole purpose of the organization of totalitarianism is to protect its fictitious world, and, ultimately, it can only be protected through global conquest: the “organizations exclusive aim has always been to deceive and fight and ultimately conquer the outside world, its members are satisfied to pay with their lives if only this helps again to fool the world” (Arendt 2004, 499). As long as a competing reality remains, totalitarianism in power is not secured. Similarly, as long as any individual is not yet completely and totally dominated, totalitarianism is also not safe. Individuals must be deprived of any ability to think and act of their own accord. This is why totalitarianism in power must necessarily remain a “movement.” It has to constantly move towards greater and greater domination of more and more people. Since, for Arendt, as long as a man is alive he always retains the possibility—even if he
has been totally dominated within a concentration camp—of regaining his capacity to do and think something new, totalitarianism in power can never rest. Totalitarianism can remain in power “only so long as they keep moving and set everything around them in motion” (Arendt 2004, 408).

Totalitarianism in power must constantly keep moving, encompassing ever more people, in ever more territories. This movement prevents the stability of a man-made world from developing. Arendt argues that the challenge for totalitarianism in power is to seize the institutions of the state in a single country, while at the same time avoiding stabilization, which would halt the movement’s onward march towards global rule and total domination. For this reason, “the totalitarian ruler must, at any price, prevent normalization from reaching the point where a new way of life could develop” (Arendt 2004, 510). This is done by treating the original country where totalitarianism has seized power simply as a base from which to conquer new territories: “the country where they happened to seize power [is regarded as] only the temporary headquarters of the international movement on the road to world conquest” (Arendt 2004, 533). Every foreign country is not treated as foreign, but as a future domestic territory, and totalitarianism in power conducts its foreign policy as if it will achieve this goal: “Nazi law was binding beyond the German border,” and “treated the whole world as falling potentially under its jurisdiction” (Arendt 2004, 538).

The totalitarian state also designs state institutions so as to prevent a hierarchy of authority from developing. For Arendt, authentic authority places limits on, but does not abolish, human freedom, which is exactly what totalitarian domination aims to do.
(Arendt’s philosophy of freedom will be discussed in the next chapter). In order to prevent a hierarchy of authority from forming, the party sets up duplicate offices. In the case of the Nazis, as there was more than one institution that was assigned with the same task, and administration was also often shifted from one institution to another, it was impossible to know where the real authority lay. In addition, there was no written law that governed the regime, but only the will of the leader, which could change at a moment’s notice. The “planned shapelessness” of the totalitarian state had as its goal a condition of permanent instability (Arendt 2004, 514). Any legal or governmental structures will only prove an obstacle “to a movement that is being propelled with increasing speed in a certain direction” (Arendt 2004, 518). Without constant movement, the stability of man-made institutions would allow a “new way of life”—a shared life within a man-made world—to emerge. Within the space provided by these institutions, man would not be totally dominated, but would retain his freedom to think and to act. This is why the stability afforded to man by “the world” must be prevented at any cost.

The totalitarian movement cannot survive as a movement unless it continually has enemies it must fight and overcome in order for it to advance. It is for this reason, Arendt argues, that new enemies must always be “discovered” (Arendt 2004, 549). According to Arendt, the enemies of a totalitarian regime will not be political opponents, but rather are defined by the ideology and the leader’s interpretation of this ideology. The secret police, who are charged with arresting, imprisoning, and torturing these enemies, actually grow in power only after there are no more opponents of the
regime to spy upon: “Only after the extermination of real enemies has been completed and the hunt for ‘objective enemies’ begun does terror become the actual content of totalitarian regimes” (Arendt 2004, 545). The existence of an “objective enemy” is much more important for the totalitarian regime than who is first defined as such. The Jews were identified as enemies by the Nazis and the capitalists by the Bolsheviks, but neither actively opposed the regime: “If it were only a matter of hating Jews or bourgeois, the totalitarian regimes could, after the commission of one gigantic crime, return, as it were to the rules of normal life and government. As we know, the opposite is the case” (Arendt 2004, 548). Rather, Jews and “capitalists” were declared enemies because of what they unchangeably were, not for anything they believed or had done. “This consistent arbitrariness,” Arendt argues, “negates human freedom more efficiently than any tyranny ever could” (Arendt 2004, 558). Under a tyranny, one was punished for being an enemy of the regime. Though there was a serious risk involved, people were nonetheless able to hold beliefs and profess opinions of their own. Under a totalitarian regime, however, one can be punished regardless of what he believes or what he has done. Freedom, then, “has lost its distinctive mark because the consequences are shared with completely innocent people” (Arendt 2004, 558).

For Arendt, as long as men have the ability to think, “the category of the suspect” will include the entire population (Arendt 2004, 555). Because every person is expected to spy on his family, friends, and neighbors, and alternatively must fear them spying on him, mutual distrust and suspicion pervades every relationship, and every word that is spoken “becomes equivocal” (Arendt 2004, 556). In other words, no
promises can be made. In totalitarian regimes, the methods of the secret police become the way everyone deals with “his neighbor” (Arendt 2004, 556). Only where there is a “community of values,” Arendt says, where men have agreed on mutually binding rules of behavior, and where the possibility still exists for mutual trust, could suspicion be allayed (Arendt 2004, 555). In contrast to this community, under a totalitarian regime, where there are no laws to guide behavior, and where the officially prescribed line of thought changes from one day to the next, mutual suspicion, and not mutual trust, characterizes all relationships. Again, this distrust keeps men isolated from one another, and it prevents the emergence of a stable world, “a new way of life” from taking shape.

The conditions under totalitarianism are the exact opposite of the historical world Arendt describes in her dissertation; a world in which men trust and depend on one another.

As we also saw in the dissertation, memory is a unique faculty possessed by man, the enables him to re-present the past. It is in my memory that the meaning of my own being is discovered, and it is in our collective memory, or history, that the meaning of being with others is also found. Arendt relies on the memoria of her dissertation for her analysis of totalitarianism. Arendt argues that totalitarianism attempts to destroy memory’s power to re-present the past and to create “a world of living dead,” which is history (Arendt 2004, 624). She notes that when men are arrested, they are made by the secret police to completely disappear so that “it is as though they had never been born” (Arendt 2004, 561). All the detention centers, Arendt says, “are made to be veritable
holes of oblivion” (Arendt 2004, 561). While criminals are punished for something concrete and specific they have done,

undesirables disappear from the face of the earth; the only trace which they leave behind is the memory of those who knew and loved them, and one of the most difficult tasks of the secret police is to make sure that even such traces will disappear together with the condemned man. (Arendt 2004, 559)

The secret police attempt to erase the person from the earth, beyond any possible trace of their prior existence, and in so doing, to eliminate even the possibility of memory—what Arendt identifies as “the gift of memory,” which is so dangerous to totalitarian rule (Arendt 2004, 560). Those who are arrested and murdered in the concentration camps are denied even “the right to be remembered,” marking a break with the long-standing Western tradition, Arendt argues, which granted even the slain enemy the right to be remembered (Arendt 2004, 582). Memory of the dead allowed the death to mark the end of a life well lived. If memory if forbidden, the individual is denied even his own death, “proving that henceforth nothing belonged to him and he belonged to no one. His death merely set the seal on the fact that he had never really existed” (Arendt 2004, 583). The “gift of memory” is dangerous to totalitarian regimes because it recalls a past different from the fictitious world the totalitarian movement endeavors to create (for example, Trotsky’s role in the Revolution) (Arendt 2004, 560). Memory, as a faculty of the individual person, also recalls birth and the unique story that comes with birth and ends in an individual’s own death. Memory is what allows us to recognize each individual human life as an individual story, and our shared life as a web of stories enacted together. It is what makes possible the ascribing of meaning to human events.
Memory, as the capacity of man to recall a unique life-story and to generate meaning, must be destroyed if totalitarianism is to dominate men totally.

A totalitarian regime aims at what had never before been attempted—the complete eradication of human plurality and the total domination of every human being on earth. We have seen that the total domination of every human being in every sphere of life is only possible under conditions of global rule, and that as long as an alternate reality remains, total domination cannot yet be achieved. The concentration camps, however, are the laboratories where the experiment in total domination is carried out; men can be totally dominated within the camps. But before human beings are readied for the camps, they must first be made into “living corpses.” Arendt believes that the preparation of the population for the conditions of the concentration camps follows a logical process: “The insane manufacture of corpses is preceded by the historically and politically intelligible preparation of living corpses” (Arendt 2004, 576). The first step in the process is the killing of the juridical person in man. This is done by putting certain categories of people outside of the law. Enemies of the regime are not sent to the concentration camps for specific offenses they have committed. They did not do anything that could be linked to their reason for arrest (Arendt 2004, 579):

The aim of an arbitrary system is to destroy the civil rights of the whole population, who ultimately become just as outlawed in their own country as the stateless and homeless. The destruction of a man’s rights, the killing of the juridical person in him, is a prerequisite for dominating him entirely. And this applies not only to special categories such as criminals, political opponents, Jews, homosexuals, on whom the early experiments were made, but to every inhabitant of a totalitarian state. Free consent is as much an obstacle to total domination as free opposition. The arbitrary
arrest which chooses among innocent people destroys the validity of free consent, just as torture—as distinguished from death—destroys the possibility of opposition. (Arendt 2004, 581-582)

Totalitarian regimes kill the moral person in man as well as the juridical person. Under a totalitarian regime, people do not have clear choices between good and evil (Arendt 2004, 582). Everyone is made complicit in the crimes of the regime. Job holders, for example, obtained their position only because of a great purge that liquidated the bureaucracy (Arendt 2004, 557). Family and friends spy upon one another and denounce each other. Individuals are forced to choose between the murder of one person over the murder of another. Even within the concentration camps, the victims play the role of executioner. The choice is not between good and evil, but between murder or murder. Under such conditions, the very possibility of martyrdom is done away with. Martyrdom, Arendt affirms, is the ability to “act beyond one’s own death,” and it is only possible where there is human solidarity (Arendt 2004, 582). When no one else shares in your life story, and no one will continue to tell it or act within its ripples of effect, one’s actions can have no meaning. We see in totalitarianism’s destruction of the juridical and moral person in man the process of eliminating human freedom. Human beings are blocked from the freedom to act upon their moral judgments.

The camps are the central institution of a totalitarian regime because they are where the experiment in total domination is carried out (Arendt 2004, 587). Outside the camp, the conditions of the “real world” still operate and cannot be perfectly controlled. Inside the camps, however, the inmates are cut off from the man-made world, the world of the living, entirely (Arendt 2004, 571). In contrast to a man-made world of the
living, the camps constitute: “the world of the dying...in which punishment is meted out without connection with crime, in which exploitation is practiced without profit, and where work is performed without product” (Arendt 2004, 621). The camps, Arendt says, exist as if it is a “phantom world,” where everything that is done is real, but lacks “the structure of responsibility and consequences” (Arendt 2004, 575). Without the reality of the outside world and the verification of others living in the world, whatever happens remains “a mass of incomprehensible data” (Arendt 2004, 575). The camps have shows us, Arendt says, that it actually is possible under certain conditions to degrade men to such a point that they are deprived of the very thing that makes them human—their capacity to act—and, are instead made into a specimen of an animal species (Arendt 2004, 586). Within the camps, the real world of the living is shut out, and, behind the fences, a world of the dying, “a phantom world,” is set up. In contrast to a living world, where men can speak and act freely, in the world of the dead, men are dominated totally.

Arendt explains “total domination” as the organization of the “infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual” (Arendt 2004, 565). Arendt’s original interest in human plurality, in “the relevance of the other” in her dissertation, has become a concern of urgent political importance. Because of totalitarianism, we now know that the danger of destroying human plurality—the equal dignity and the distinctiveness of each human person—is a very real threat. Total domination seeks to reduce human beings “to a never-changing identity of reactions, so that each of these reactions can be exchanged at random for any other”
In order to turn an individual person into a “bundle of reactions,” his spontaneity must be eliminated. This means his capacity to do something new or unexpected, to freely choose his actions, which springs from what Arendt calls “natality” in *The Human Condition*, must be destroyed: “For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man’s power to begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events” (Arendt 2004, 586). Individual human beings are irreplicable, and being distinct and different from one another, each person is capable simply by having been born a new person of thinking, saying, or doing something unanticipated. It is this great capacity of a man to begin something new out of his own resources that totalitarianism attempts to eliminate. It attempts to turn a unique human being into not merely an animal, but a perverted animal: “for Pavlov’s dog, which, as we know, was trained to eat not when it was hungry but when a bell rang, was a perverted animal” (Arendt 2004, 565). The concentration camps rob each person of his capacity to act and to do something new, by making each person superfluous. In the camps each person is first deprived of his or her unique physical appearance and reduced to a single category of persons (Jew, homosexual, communist, etc.). Then, through the most horrific torture imaginable, corresponding to nothing that a person has done, he is robbed of his individual psyche and his individual personality (Arendt 2004, 584-585). Under these conditions each person is made ready to be both executioner and victim without protest. Finally, by denying him the right to be remembered, his death is made just as anonymous as his life. It is as if he was never born in the first place.
For Arendt, the concentration camps demonstrated that when everything is permitted, it is in fact possible even to create “something that does not exist, namely, a kind of human species resembling other human species” (Arendt 2004, 565). The belief that everything is possible means also that everything is permitted. This is what the totalitarian leader and the elite circle around him believe in more than anything else, more than the ideology they profess. They believe that if only human beings are properly organized, everything is possible—what common sense and “normal people,” Arendt maintains, refuse to believe (Arendt 2004, 568). Despite this belief in omnipotence, “the totalitarian form of government,” Arendt maintains, “has very little to do with [the] lust for power,” which has defined the tyrannies of the past (Arendt 2004, 527). Instead, totalitarianism has invented an entirely new concept of power—power through organization. Totalitarianism actually believes that human beings can become omnipotent only if they are properly organized:

The trouble with totalitarian regimes is not that they play power politics in an especially ruthless way, but that behind their politics is hidden an entirely new and unprecedented concept of power, just as behind their Realpolitik lies an entirely new and unprecedented concept of reality. Supreme disregard for immediate consequences rather than ruthlessness; rootlessness and neglect of national interests rather than nationalism; contempt for utilitarian motives rather than unconsidered pursuit of self-interest; “idealism,” i.e., their unwavering faith in an ideological fictitious world, rather than lust for power—these have all introduced into international politics a new and more disturbing factor than mere aggressiveness would have been able to do. Power, as conceived by totalitarianism, lies exclusively in the force produced through organization. (Arendt 2004, 540)
This new concept of power is not understood in material terms, militarily or economic, but only in terms of proper organization (Arendt 2004, 541). Power is understood as the ability to make the world entirely consistent with the ideology through the organization of all men into one single unit. All the complexities of the world must be made to agree with and follow from the ideologies’ one single premise (i.e. the Jewish world conspiracy). Totalitarianism seeks the power to make every person in the world and every human event correspond perfectly to the ideology:

The aggressiveness of totalitarianism springs not from lust for power, and if it feverishly seeks to expand, it does so neither for expansion’s sake nor for profit, but only for ideological reasons: to make the world consistent, to prove that its respective supersense has been right. It is chiefly for the sake of this supersense, for the sake of complete consistency, that it is necessary for totalitarianism to destroy every trace of what we commonly call human dignity. (Arendt 2004, 590)

Unlimited power can only be attained if every human being is completely and totally dominated in every aspect of life, and only when each person behaves and reacts according to the rules of a fictitious world. Because human beings are beginners by virtue of birth—that is, they are capable of thinking and doing something new—totalitarianism will ultimately never be successful; for as long as new individuals are born into the world, it cannot eliminate this great capacity of man. Totalitarianism, Arendt says, vastly underestimates the power of men acting together within a shared world. We will discuss this power and the promise of plurality in more detail in the next chapter.
5.5 Arendt’s Political Theory

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed the context in which, according to Arendt, we first became aware of the right to belong. This context was the situation of millions of minorities and stateless persons after World War I. Arendt also demonstrated the great significance of the right to belong in her analysis of the rise of the masses, made up of millions of people who, Arendt argues, belonged to no social organization or community whatsoever, but were completely isolated. For Arendt, the right to belong entails belonging to a state as a citizen with equal rights, and feeling a part of a political community wherein one is free to exercise moral judgment and political co-responsibility. Absent this belonging, a person is deprived of their juridical and moral person. First, they lack the protection of equal rights, and are vulnerable to expulsion, even extermination. Second, they also lack the space in which the exercise of their moral judgment, through word and deed, can have meaning. Furthermore, when men do not feel at home in a shared world, the experience of loneliness makes them vulnerable to the false promise of totalitarian ideologies. These ideologies hold an extreme contempt for the both the created world and the man-made world. In their great hubris, they imagine that men can be the authors of the universe, not only the makers of the world, and that they have the power, through organization, to re-create the human condition. In Origins, Arendt argues for the significance of the right to belong, and this right is a right to belong to the world that men have jointly constituted, where equality is guaranteed and difference respected. Arendt has turned Augustine’s “desire to belong to eternity” on its head.

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We are now able to see Arendt’s concern for plurality even more clearly. Arendt is troubled by Augustine’s admonishment to transcend plurality, and we will see in the next chapter that she does think Augustine bears some responsibility for our loss of what she identifies as the *vita activa*. She is deeply disturbed, however, not by totalitarianism’s attempt to transcend human plurality, but by its attempt to eradicate it all together. Furthermore, her concern for plurality in this context is urgent because Arendt believes the conditions that allowed for the growth of a totalitarian movement still exist today:

> Political, social, and economic events everywhere are in a silent conspiracy with totalitarian instruments devised for making man superfluous...The Nazis and the Bolsheviks can be sure that their factories of annihilation which demonstrate the swiftest solution to the problem of overpopulation, of economically superfluous, and socially rootless human mass, are as much an attraction as a warning. (Arendt 2004, 624)

Because totalitarianism remains a threat, and because it aims to destroy human dignity, it must be a concern for all of us. Arendt argues that we must bear consciously the burden our times have placed upon us. This means we must try to understand how totalitarianism responds to the needs of modern men, and rethink and reorganize our collective lives in order to guarantee respect for human dignity.

Totalitarianism aims to destroy this “respect for human dignity,” which, Arendt says, implies respect for the two-fold character of plurality. First, it implies recognition of one’s fellow men as “co-builders” of the world—respect for equality. Second, it also implies recognition that all men, like oneself, are “creative,” that they “can bring forward something so new that nobody ever foresaw it”—respect for distinctiveness
(Arendt 2004, 623). We see Arendt relying on the concept of the man-made world, and men as co-builders of the world who as equals inter-depend on one another, that she first developed in her dissertation. She also takes from her dissertation Augustine’s ontology of man. For Arendt, men have an distinct origin, and so they are in a state of “becoming” and not Being. That means that they are mutable, in a constant state of change, and, because of their beginning, are always bringing something new into the world. She relies on Augustine’s ontology of man as he appears in the world, but, against Augustine, argues that we should not transcend our becoming, but rather should take pride in what she says is our great capacity to begin something new.

At the end of Origins of Totalitarianism, Arendt provides us with the framework of her own original political theory. It is a theory that she will further develop in The Human Condition, which we turn to in the next chapter. Arendt argues that totalitarianism’s crimes—crimes previously unknown to man in either quality or proportion, crimes that the Ten Commandments did not foresee—have made us realize that neither the Judeo-Christian creation myth nor a belief in natural law “is secure enough to constitute a basis and source of authority for actual laws” (Arendt 2004, 625). As we have already seen, she also does not think the modern nation-state is well-suited to protect rights because the only people who “belong” are majority nationals; citizenship is based on a common national origin, instead of the basic equality of all persons. Anyone else of a different national origin is not included within its legal framework. If citizenship is based on nationality, it is always possible that certain categories of persons can be excluded from the protection provided by the state.
Furthermore, as we saw in the previous chapter, Arendt argues that modern bourgeois society views the responsibilities of citizenship as a burden. Instead, a few professional bureaucrats manage the affairs of the state, leaving everyone else free to pursue unlimited acquisition and unbridled competition. Nationalism can only temporarily hold men together in such a competitive society, as it is ultimately based on exclusion. Without firm beliefs and without worldly ties to one another, modern men will remain vulnerable to totalitarianism’s temptations. What we need Arendt argues is “a new foundation for human community as such” (Arendt 2004, 627).

“The conscious beginning of the history of mankind” is possible because human beings are capable of doing something together that is new and previously unknown to man (Arendt 2004, 627). It is possible because men are distinctive, and therefore capable of doing something new, and also because men are equal, and are therefore capable of doing something new together. However, human beings are not capable of everything (as totalitarianism would have us believe). We are not omnipotent. Modern man has resented the fact that he is only the builder and not the creator of the world. Arendt argues, however, that the proper attitude towards the limits of human capabilities is gratitude. By being thankful for what has been given to us freely—our lives, the existence of man and the created world—we affirm the limits of human powers. Politically speaking, Arendt says, gratitude would start by acknowledging human differences, by affirming the plurality of men:

In the sphere of politics, gratitude emphasizes that we are not alone in the world. We can reconcile ourselves to the variety of mankind, to the differences between human beings—which are
frightening precisely because of the essential equality of rights of all men and our consequent responsibility for all deeds and misdeeds committed by people different from ourselves—only through insight into the tremendous bliss that man was created with the power of procreation, that not a single man but Men inhabit the earth. (Arendt 2004, 631)

Like Augustine, Arendt argues that human beings must accept the limits of our capabilities with a kind of humility. However, in sharp contrast to Augustine, Arendt encourages us to take pride in our creative capacities. We can give laws to ourselves, and, in so doing, create a political community where distinct human words and deeds can become meaningful, and where equal rights are guaranteed.

Arendt argues that the only “given condition for the establishment of rights is the plurality of men” (Arendt 2004, 629). There is only one “crime against humanity,” that is the attempt to deprive human beings of the human condition of plurality (Arendt 2004, 628). Correspondingly, there is only one human right, Arendt says. That right it the right to belong. It is the right each person has to belong to the world. In other words, it is the right to belong to a man-made political community as a citizen, or the right to have rights: “The concept of human rights can again be meaningful only if they are redefined as a right to the human condition itself, which depends upon belonging to some human community” (Arendt 2004, 631). Divine revelation or natural law, Arendt argues, “is not sufficient for the establishment of a new law on earth” (Arendt 2004, 629). Only through mutual agreement, made possible because “we inhabit the world with other men,” can we guarantee this right (Arendt 2004, 629). The risks of not guaranteeing this human right are great—“if we do not attempt this, there are plenty of
indications that the mob...will take over and destroy where we are unable to produce” (Arendt 2004, 630).

Arendt argues that new polities, limited in nature, must be founded, but not on nationality. Instead, they must be founded on the right of all men to belong. This right, she says, should be the pre-legal basis for new, specific, political communities. Now, we turn to Arendt’s mature political theory in The Human Condition. It is chiefly in this work that Arendt argues for the great promise afforded to us by the human condition of plurality. It is also where she develops a political theory based on concepts discovered in Augustine, but which encourages love for the world instead of a love that transcends the world.
CHAPTER 6:
PLURALITY AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

Thus far, it has been my intention to demonstrate that plurality is the overarching theme of Arendt’s dissertation (insofar as it aims to discover the “relevance of the other” in Augustine’s philosophy) and that plurality, including both respect for human equality and regard for human distinctiveness, remained the driving concern of Arendt’s political thought from the 1929 dissertation through The Origins of Totalitarianism. Arendt’s writings in the late 1950s and early 1960s represent an affirmation of the man-made public world and human plurality against totalitarianism’s aim to destroy this world and eradicate human plurality from the earth. In The Human Condition, Arendt develops further the political significance of human plurality, while also articulating more specifically the human condition of natality and its implications for our shared public life.

In this chapter, I aim to show how the central concerns and most innovative ideas of Arendt’s mature political thought, which she developed in response to totalitarianism, can actually be traced back to her dissertation. Arendt draws upon theoretical resources she first encountered in her early study of Augustine not only for her concept of the world, but also for her articulation of all three of the activities within
what she identifies as the *vita activa*—labor, work, and action. In addition, she draws on her early work on Augustine in her conceptualization of the human faculties that enable human beings to guarantee an element of stability to the inherent un-predictableness of human affairs—the faculties of both promise-making and forgiveness.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt identifies Augustine as the philosopher who is responsible for elevating the *vita contemplativa* above the *vita activa*. Even more problematically, he affirms this life as open to for all and, indeed, as a requirement for salvation. In response, she makes an argument for the reclamation of the meaningfulness of the life of action. To do so, she reappropriates Augustinian concepts precisely to counter Augustinian otherworldliness.

Against the other-worldliness of Augustine and the philosophers within the Western Tradition, and against the world-destroying nature of totalitarianism, Arendt’s mature political theory affirms that existential meaning can be found by acting together in the common world. Contra Augustine, who encourages us not to be at home in the world, but rather to comport ourselves towards it as if we are pilgrims on our way to our true eternal home, Arendt would have us found (and re-found) a public world, which we can belong to, and in which we can be at home. More importantly, Arendt would have us embrace this common world as the location for the expression of human freedom and as the site for the creation of meaning.

Finally, in *The Human Condition* Arendt demonstrates what, for her, is truly “the relevance of the other” (*Relevanz des Anderen*) (Arendt 2003, 24). It is here that the “single question of the author” (*eine einheitliche Frage der Verfasserin*) that first
appeared in her dissertation is finally answered (Arendt 2003, 24). This relevance is not to be found in Augustine’s *util/frui* distinction (I love the other because he is neither above or beneath me, but beside me), nor is it to be found in estrangement from the world and its desires (I love my neighbor because he too can return to God and transcend his own becoming for the sake of Being). For Arendt, the other is not *loved* for his own sake, and in his concrete worldly existence, but rather the other is *respected* both in regards to his equality and his distinctiveness.

### 6.1 Between Past and Future

Before we examine more carefully the influence of Arendt’s dissertation on her mature political thought, I will provide a general introduction to the principle work that is generally considered to be her greatest contributions to political theory, as well as the concerns that motivated it: *The Human Condition* (1958). This introduction will afford us the background required to be able to study more closely and to understand in context, those key concepts which, together, constitute the essential features of her political thought. Though this chapter will emphasize the influence of Augustine on *The Human Condition*, interpretations of other essays and works will be included where appropriate.

As we saw in the last two chapters, Arendt believes that certain features of the modern world made possible the rise of totalitarianism, which she understands to be the most terrifying form of government yet known to man. Furthermore, she believes that those features *still* characterize modern society: “homelessness on an unprecedented scale, rootlessness to an unprecedented depth” (Arendt 2004, xxvi).
Carefully considering these features, as well as responding to them is what she takes to be “the burden which our century has placed on us” (Arendt 2004, xxvi). Indeed, for Arendt, it is a responsibility we cannot ignore. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* demonstrates what may be the terrifying and murderous outcome of choosing not to comprehend and attentively face up to reality (Arendt 2004, xxvi).

Now that totalitarianism has made its appearance, Arendt argues, it is not impossible that it will reappear again, especially given that the conditions that made possible its rise are still present in modern society. For Arendt, in order to prevent such a terrifying possibility, we *must* think what we are doing. In “thinking what we are doing,” one of her primary purposes “is to trace back modern world alienation” to its origins (Arendt 1998, 6). This includes examining the past in order to reclaim an authentic experience of public life, so that we can provide a new guarantee for human dignity in the future. This the main task of *The Human Condition*.

As we saw in *Origins*, with the end of feudalism and its accompanying political and religious traditions, men lost their specific place in the political order, as well as their faith in the promise of eternity. The political philosophies that arose as a refutation of feudalism—its inequalities and religious superstitions—taught that all men were

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80 Arendt writes:

Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us—neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. (Arendt 2004, xxvi)
equal by nature. However, with the concomitant rise of the nation-state, the rights of individuals became increasingly associated with the sovereignty of the nation, and were guaranteed by a state in service to the nation. When the moment came when men were most in need of these so-called inalienable rights in the early 20th century, we saw that, in reality, they were without any protection.

Furthermore, Hobbes and other modern political theorists within the Liberal tradition taught that the primary purpose of government was merely to protect the rights of individuals to pursue the unlimited accumulation of private wealth. The new bourgeois society that emerged during the 19th century was more than content to delegate individual political responsibility to an increasingly bureaucratic state run by bureaucrats, mere functionaries, whose chief characteristic was a certain thoughtlessness and obedience to decrees from above.

In The Human Condition Arendt argues that modern society is run as if it were an enormous household. The chief task of professional politicians and civil servants is seen to be the protection of private economic interests. The primary concern of government is to secure the needs of life for society, while this same society is made up of individuals who, themselves, care only for the process of endless consumption. What totalitarianism in Europe taught us is that a society made up of such individuals, individuals who have lost their faith in the traditions of the past, who are in constant competition with each other, and who bear no responsibility for a shared public life, are easily transformed into lonely (and political impotent) masses. For the reasons we discussed in the last chapter, the masses are easily tempted by the false promises of
totalitarian ideologies—ideologies that claim to offer men an answer to every question
and a position within a movement of world-historical proportions.

While it is only recently that human beings have been able to retreat from the
human condition into the universe (the famous “Archimedean point”), Arendt believes
that world alienation, as a wide-spread phenomenon, originated in the Christian
thought of Augustine. Arendt abandons the Western tradition’s search for meaning
outside of this world and affirms the human person acting and speaking within a public
space as the primary vehicle for the possibility of creating meaning. The purpose of this
chapter is to show how concepts which appeared in her first analysis of Augustine
reappear in her later political thought. All of these concepts, however, were used in the
development of a political theory that has the love of the world and not transcendence
of the world as its explicit aim. Arendt’s political thought embraces rather than denies
human existence as it has been given in this world and in time.

Arendt believes we are now living between the past and the future. The Western
tradition is no longer normative for our political or social lives, nor for our religious
beliefs. However, that does not mean we cannot reclaim certain ideas and practices, as
well as create new realities in order to build a world where human equality is respected
and guaranteed under the law, and where human distinctiveness is able to be expressed and appreciated in a public sphere shared and sustained by all.\textsuperscript{81}

6.2 Animal Laborans and Homo Faber

In the last chapter, I included an explication of the concept of “the world” as it appears in Arendt’s dissertation and reappears in \textit{Origins}, I return to this concept here in order to demonstrate the connection of Arendt’s dissertation to her mature political theory. Here, we will look again at Arendt’s description of Augustine’s world concept, so that we can compare it to her concept of the world in \textit{The Human Condition}. What we find is that Arendt adheres to Augustine’s two-fold concept of the world as it appears in her dissertation, and relies on this conception for her development of the idea of man as \textit{animal laborans} and also as \textit{homo faber}. In \textit{The Human Condition} she writes that the given world is the world of the heavens and the earth, “the sun, the moon, and the stars,” which follow a “circling path for a time span that to us mortals, bound by earthly time, lasts from eternity to eternity,” while, “the human artifice of the world separates human existence from all mere animal environment” (Arendt 1998, 1, 2). While

\footnote{81 Arendt writes: Antisemitism (not merely the hatred of Jews), imperialism (not merely conquest), totalitarianism (not merely dictatorship)—one after the other, one more brutally than the other, have demonstrated that human dignity needs a new guarantee which can be found only in a new political principle, in a new law on earth, whose validity this time must comprehend the whole of humanity while its power must remain strictly limited, rooted in and controlled by newly defined territorial entities. (Arendt 2004, xxvii)}
Augustine’s ontology is meant to encourage transcendence of the world, Arendt’s account of the human condition is intended reaffirm its embrace.

In her dissertation Arendt argues there are two ways in which Augustine uses the term “the world.” The first world concept refers to the universe in its entirety and all the creatures in heaven above and on earth below. All that God created ex nihilo, and which constitutes the divine fabric. The second world concept refers to the world built by men on the ground of the created earth (fabricare ex aliquo), as well as the lovers of this world: “For the world is the appellation given not only to this fabric which God made, heaven and earth...but the inhabitants of the world are called the world...all lovers of the world are called ‘the world’” (Copy A, 258). For Augustine, the heavens and the earth created by God are what he refers to as the divine fabric (fabrica Dei), while the world built by men, the historical world, is what he refers to when he uses the term saeculum. Arendt writes, “If Augustine speaks of the transiency of the world, he is always thinking of the world constituted by men (this shows most clearly in his use of the term saeculum)...it is the temporalization of the world that is expressed in referring to it as saeculum” (Copy A, 304).

Arendt describes the “divine fabric” as retaining a wholeness and a completeness despite the comings and goings of each individual part that together make up the whole. It is the harmony of all the parts that constitute the beauty of the universe. As each single part is a natural phenomena (i.e. the stars) or a member of a plant or animal species (including human beings), their goings are constantly being replaced by new arrivals, and so the divine fabric retains its continuity and universality.
(Copy A, 296). In her dissertation, Arendt references Augustine’s *Confessions*, Book IV:

“‘So, much hast Thou given them, for they are parts of things which do not exist all at once, but, by passing out of being and by coming into being, they all constitute the whole, of which they are parts’” (Copy A, 296; Arendt 2003, 67). Because of the continual cycle of life, the universe appears to be everlasting. Within the context of this seemingly imperishable harmony of the universe, human beings experience time as the coming and going of individual parts, while the universe appears to be eternal and is itself indifferent to the coming and goings of its parts (Copy A, 296-297). From the perspective of the *fabrica Dei*, human beings are just one among many species, and a single person is only one member of the many interchangeable parts that make up the human species as a whole. From the perspective of the *fabrica Dei*, “life is divested of the uniqueness and irreversibility of its course from birth to death” (Copy A, 297). In this respect, human beings are not distinctive individuals, but identical members of an animal species.

While men “find” (*inveniere*) themselves in the divine fabric, men “make” (*facere*) a world of their own out of the divine fabric (Arendt 2003, 72). When man builds the world, he does not do so as God created the divine fabric, *ex nihilo*, but rather he constitutes the world on the basis of the pre-existing divine fabric *ex aliquo* (Arendt 2003, 71). In Arendt’s dissertation, she describes the building of the world as “making,” either in Augustine’s Latin (*facere* or *fabricare*) or in her native German (*machen*) (Arendt 2003, 72). Additionally, when Arendt talks about the building of the man-made world, she indicates that men build it *together*: “he lives in world he has made jointly
with the rest” (mitkonstituiert) (Copy A, 323; Arendt 2003, 75). The “world,” in this sense, is a human world built together by men. Unlike God, who both initiates and sustains all beings who would not be had the Creator not called each into existence, man in his “making” (fabricare) “confronts his product as an outsider...man can withdraw from it at any time, and its existence will not cease” (Copy A, 301). Whatever man builds now exists and endures, as well as decays, independent of their fabricator: “man confronts his product as an outsider” (Copy A, 301). Since man “lacks true creative power” he cannot create anything out of nothing, he can only turn the divine fabric into his own country (patria) and establish himself as a “resident” (Bewohner) or a “dweller” (habitatores) (Arendt 2003, 87, 90).

When Augustine refers to the world in this sense, he means not only the human artifice built by men, but also the human community founded by men, as well as the lovers of the world who have made their home (Heimat) in the world (Arendt 2003, 36). It is out of their love for the world, Augustine says, that men have built a home (or “dwelling”) on the ground of the divine fabric (habitare in fabrica): “what happens by our will is guided by love of the world which for the first time turns the world, the divine fabric, into the self-evident home of man” (Copy A, 300). Man makes the world in order to suit it to himself; he builds a homeland that he, in turn, loves (Copy A, 301). Men also make objects within the world that are desired as goods. My love for the world also makes my own life within the world a good to be desired as well, while the end of man’s being in the world is the evil most to be feared. Indeed, as Arendt writes in her dissertation, it is man’s desire to make something permanent and lasting out of his own
life that motivates him to found the *patria* in the first place (Copy A, 258). In building a home and in founding the *patria*, man seeks a kind of worldly immortality (*unvergänglichsein*) (Arendt 2003, 73).

The world constituted by men on the basis of the divine fabric is an already a pre-existing world that new men are continuously born into, and that provides stability for each newcomer: “Since he is born into the world...and thus of the world, the pre-existing world is for him a present, accessible one” (Copy A, 302). Man already finds himself “after the world” that he is born into (Copy A, 302). The individual takes the world as the source of his being because he is born into this world, it is what he is first familiar with (Copy A, 322). Having been born into the man-made world, we already know that which is considered a good and to be desired and that which is considered an evil and to be avoided, and because the world is already there, it is natural for us to love it as our home. Still, because every man born into the world is a new person, he has the chance to contribute something new to its constitution. In this way each new person “sets up the world anew, [and] he simultaneously sets himself up as one who belongs to the world” (Copy A, 319).

In constituting the world, human beings “temporalize” (*verzeitlichung*) heaven and earth (Arendt 2003, 74). In other words, against the background of the seemingly eternal cycle of life, men create a world where things happen in sequence. This historical world, the *saeculum*, is the location where human affairs are conducted, and it is by our own individual actions that “we share in events in the world” (Copy A, 299). It is a world where men rely on speech to tell each other who they are and to make
judgments about others, and it is also where men boast in comparing themselves to others (Arendt 2003, 91). Furthermore, the world, governs the way men act towards one another (Arendt 2003, 100). This worldly community has a common past and arises out of a shared history. It was founded on the basis of a common origin in Adam (Copy A, 351). It is this common origin and shared history which gives the world made by men an independence and legitimacy of its own (Arendt 2003, 109).

In her dissertation, Arendt makes clear that, for Augustine, love of the world is always *cupiditas*. It is a desire for something that can never satisfy and a turn towards the world as the wrong “before.” In this way, love of the world is always sinful pride. If our desire is to be satisfied in eternal life, we must turn away from the world and return to God as the source of our being. In Part I of Arendt’s dissertation, we saw that the lover of the world lives in constant anxiety. No good in the world can satisfy our desire because the possession of any worldly good can always be lost against our will. Because worldly goods are mutable, they will not last, and so cannot be relied upon: “no earthly good can lend support to its instability” (Copy A, 258). If we desire goods in the world, we will live in constant fear. In clinging to one good and then the next, I actually forget myself over the world (*dispersio*) (Arendt 2003, 39). According to Augustine, this life can not really be described as life at all, but rather as a living death (*mors vitalis*) (Arendt 2003, 31). Only eternity in God is a good that can be possessed without interruption. Loving the world is senseless because it can not satisfy. For this reason, the tie to the world must be cut because it is determined by fear. In loving the world, I belong to the world; in loving God, I belong to eternity. Now, if we live in love that is rightly directed
towards eternity, which Augustine calls *caritas*, “the world becomes a desert (*Wüste/eremus*) and not a home” (Arendt 2003, 36, 97, 100). Viewed from the perspective of the eternity, all other goods in the world, including our self, and even our own neighbor, should not be desired, but should be “used” for the sake of eternity (*Um-Willen/propter*) (Arendt 2003, 46-7).

We saw in Part II of Arendt’s dissertation, that the love of the world that constitutes the world is also, for Augustine, described as *cupiditas*. For men to love what they have made on their own, of themselves, and in the world, is what Augustine calls pride (*superbia*) (Arendt 2003, 87). In building the world, men imagine themselves to be creators, when in reality they can only be fabricators: “this is why pride is the perverse imitation of God” (Copy A, 319). The prideful man looks, not to God, but to the world as the source of immortality. Furthermore, in depending on himself, man denies his dependency on God for his very being, and denies his need for grace (Copy A, 319).

Conscience (*conscientia*) is the voice within that calls upon man to renounce the world, and to return to the true source of Being. In memory, man is able to recall his origin in God, and, through grace, he is able to transcend the world in the approach to eternity. In the return our Creator, we are now able to choose ourselves out of the world (*electio ex mundo*), a choice as powerful as death in separating us from the world (Arendt 2003, 83; Copy A, 316). Once again, in the loving return to God, we find that the world is to be regarded as a desert (*Wüste*) and not as a home (Arendt 2003, 97). It is as if we are sojourners in a foreign country, and its speech an *aliena lingua* (Arendt 2003, 90). The judgments and determinations of the world are now meaningless, and what the world
values now appears worthless. Augustine admonishes us to “love not to dwell in the building, but dwell in the builder” (Copy A, 300-301). In discovering ourselves as a creation of God, we learn that the meaning of our being is to return to God, our Creator. For this reason, I must deny my own worldly past for the sake of a future eternity. In acknowledging my createdness, I recognize my dependence upon God in humility. The neighbor is also now understood to be relevant only as a created being, and we love our neighbor when we direct him to also transcend his worldly being in the return to God. In this way, I deny not only my own worldly being, but also the worldly being of others, and all worldly relations I have founded. I love everyone as God does. There can therefore be no distinctions, but rather all are equally loved as creations of God. This equality removes the possibility for boasting (iactantia), which came from man in his worldliness, comparing himself to others (Copy A, 316). Loving as God does (sicut Deus) becomes increasingly possible the more I cast off my own worldliness (abicere me) in order to arrive at pure Being (Arendt 2003, 85).

In Part III, we saw that Arendt does see a historical ground for the love of neighbor, but that the community established on the basis of this love is bound together in their fight against the world. We again see Augustine distinguishing between two loves: love of God or love of self. Despite the multiplicity and diversity of earthy communities, for Augustine there exists only two “cities.” The City of God (civitas Dei) is made up of all those who have turned towards and love God, while the earthly city (civitas terrena) is made up of all those who have made their home in the world, and direct their love, not to God, but towards their worldly self (Arendt 2003, 119-120). Each
city has been founded (*gegründet*) on the basis either of love of God or love of self (Arendt 2003, 119).

The City of God, Arendt explains, is different from any other kind of worldly community we know, not only because of the direction of its love, but because it demands the whole person. Worldly communities “always isolate only one definition of being, in regard to which the community is a community,” while the City of God “demands the whole man, as God demands him” (Copy A, 349; Arendt 2003, 109).

Indeed, each person ceases to be a distinct individual, but rather believers are drawn together in mutual love as one single body of Christ (Copy A, 362). This mutual love replaces the mutual trust that governed the inter-dependence of men in the earthy society. Also, the community of the faithful, Arendt notes, is not grounded on a pre-existing reality in the world, but rather on the basis of a possibility outside of the world—the possibility of eternal life with God (Copy A, 349).

Arendt argues that, in Augustine’s thought the Christian command to “love thy neighbor” arises out of our shared past. As fellow descendants of Adam, we have all inherited original sin. It is precisely for this reason that God appeared as man in the

82 As I already indicated in chapter two, by “one definition of being,” Arendt may have in mind what she describes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as a “principle of action”:

Therefore what the definition of governments always needed was what Montesquieu called a “principle of action” which, different in each form of government, would inspire government and citizens alike in their public activity and serve as a criterion, beyond the merely negative yardstick of lawfulness, for judging all action in public affairs. Such guiding principles and criteria of action are, according to Montesquieu, honor in a monarchy, virtue in a republic and fear in a tyranny. (Arendt 2004, 602)
historical world, so that we may all be redeemed from our habitual sin in this same world (Copy A, 357). Even though our love is now directed towards God, we nevertheless remain in the world. The community of the faithful, then, is bound together by their common fight against the world, which cannot be accomplished in isolation: “he cannot act by himself, only with others” (Copy A, 359). Fellow believers love one another by supporting each other in the fight against the temptations of the world. Being called upon to overcome the world, they also love the non-believer because of our shared past, now newly understood as sinful. Each believer sees him or herself in the other. A believer would yet still be tied to the world, but for the grace of God. Loving the other who has not yet cut his tie to the world means endeavoring his salvation. However, because the ground of this love is a shared sinful past, caritas is necessary only as long as the world lasts (Arendt 2003, 123).

We have already seen in the dissertation that Arendt finds Augustine’s philosophy of love problematic, particularly its otherworldliness. She concludes that the definition of love as craving is contradictory because craving in the world implies satisfaction in the world. Augustine argues while we are craving beings for the entire duration of our earthly life, nevertheless we can only find fulfillment after death in eternity (Arendt 2003, 253). Arendt asks: “How can we be a desiring, questioning beings, and not make demands upon the world?” (Copy A, 265). She also finds Augustine’s definition of love as craving problematic because it deprives the world in which we find ourselves of any inherent value or independent meaning. The one who desires eternity is no longer concerned (angehen) for the world (Arendt 2003, 50). Augustine’s uti/frui
distinction affords the world value only in its use. This “for the sake of,” she says, radically relativizes the world (Relativierung der Welt) (Arendt 2003, 50): “Augustine proceeds to strip the world and all temporal things of their value and to make them relative” (Copy A, 256). Especially troublesome for Arendt is the fact that man’s own being in the world becomes something to be used rather than enjoyed: “Man’s own I (Ich) is like everything else: a mere thing, to be used for the true life he seeks in the absolute future” (Copy A, 282; Arendt 2003, 49-50). We love ourselves properly when we crave our self as a future self as an eternal being, while, at the same time, “despising” (verachtet) the self as it is given in the world (Arendt 2003, 42).

Furthermore, insofar as we are to love the neighbor as we love our own self, we despise him in his worldly being as well. Any original relationship with the other must be eliminated for the sake of eternity including, Arendt says, friendship (Copy A, 284-285; Arendt 2003, 53).

Arendt is equally unsatisfied with Augustine’s definition of love as return to the source of Being. Again we find that this definition of love deprives the world of any meaning or significance for the one who has returned to God and now recognizes the meaning of his being as createdness. In this recognition, I choose myself out of the world. Through memory, where the past meets the future, I can participate in eternity as the “eternal now” here in the present. From the perspective of eternity, everything I have made of my self and built with others in the world “is brought to naught” (Copy A, 330; Arendt 2003, 98). As a creation of God, I come from God and am meant to return to Him. This “two-fold before,” Arendt argues, makes life’s beginning and end

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interchangeable, and the actual course of life in the world loses all significance (Arendt 2003, 64). It is regarded as only a “matter of time” (Copy A, 308). Death, even the death of a loved one, loses its import, as it is recognized as the return to Being (Arendt 2003, 103). As the meaning of my being is to return to God, I must transcend the mutability of my worldly self in order to arrive at pure Being. As I now love the other as God does, only as a created being, I must love all men equally (Copy A, 317; Arendt 2003, 84). In this context, it is difficult to imagine, Arendt argues, how one can have any kind of specific belonging to the other (zugehörigkeit), while he is yet in the world (Arendt 2003, 101). Certainly, she says, in this context, caritas is entirely different from worldly love (dilectio carnalis) (Arendt 2003, 101). In both the context of love as desire and love as return, Arendt argues, I remain isolated, and the world becomes a desert to me (Arendt 2003, 36, 71).

It is only in Part III that Arendt finds an empirical ground for the relevance of the other. She finds that our responsibilities to the other are grounded in a shared historical past—a common origin in Adam. For Augustine, it is this historical fact that is the foundation of social life within the world. However, once one has accepted God’s grace, this common origin and shared past are now newly understood as sinful. My neighbor is my equal not simply because we share a common historical origin, but because of a shared sinful past. All have sinned and fallen short of the grace of God. Because we are all sinners, again I cannot choose who to love. I must love all equally, either as one in whom grace is at work, or as one who has yet to accept God’s grace. Again, the worldliness of the other is bypassed. Even here, the obligation to love the other, Arendt
finds, is derived from the perspective of eternity. I am not permitted to withdraw from
the world entirely because, in doing so, I deprive my neighbor of the opportunity to
return to God. Rather, believers are called upon to overcome the world. In this context,
Arendt finds that the command to love is provisional. I love the other by fighting with
him against the world, a fight no longer necessary in eternity. This has the effect, Arendt
argues, of breaking up (zersprengt) relationships in the world because they are regarded
as merely provisional (vorläufig) (Arendt 2003, 123). Our shared life in the world, Arendt
concludes, “is made radically relative by eternity” (Copy A, 365).

Now, as we turn to The Human Condition, we will see how similar the concepts
Arendt first explored in her dissertation are to her articulation of the vita activa. Arendt
relies on the same two-fold conception of the world—as divine fabric and as the
saeculum—for her development of the idea of man as animal laborans and also as homo
faber. As we examine her political thought, we will find that she relies upon these same
concepts in order to delineate between the private realm and the public world. She
rearticulates the distinctions within the vita activa to reaffirm the common world as the
proper “in-between,” which both brings us together and separates us, and to reclaim
our understanding of this world as the space where freedom is experienced and
meaningfulness created.

Arendt argues that, with “the rise of the social,” we have lost our understanding
of the distinction between the private and the public realm, and those activities related
to the maintenance of life and those related to the common world (Arendt 1998, 28,
38). In the modern world, these distinctions have been lost to us because the activities
of the private sphere have been made a “collective” concern (Arendt 1998, 33). This has
given rise to a curious hybrid realm she identifies as “the social.” With the rise of the
social, society is viewed as if it were an enormous family, and the sole purpose of
government is seen as the administration of a single household. Arendt argues that this
distinctly modern phenomenon has resulted in not only the loss of a common world, but
even a proper understanding of it, much less an appreciation of its significance. Arendt
distinguishes between the human condition of life and the activity of labor on the one
hand, from the human condition of worldliness and the activity of work on the other, in
order to reclaim our understanding of the importance of a common world. Arendt
argues that it is only in building a common world that we distinguish ourselves from
animals, and it is only in acting within this world that we are able to experience the
highest possibility of our humanity.

The human condition of life, specifically life on earth as it has been given to man
as “a free gift from nowhere,” is very closely related to the description of the fabrica Dei
we see in Arendt’s dissertation. According to Arendt, “labor” is the human activity which
arises out of the human condition of life, and includes all those activities which are
necessary for the preservation of life, including the production of food necessary to
sustain individual life, as well as the reproduction necessary to preserve the species as a
whole (Arendt 1998, 8). Arendt explains the human condition of life as a “process”:

Cyclical, too, is the movement of the living organism, the human
body not excluded, as long as it can withstand the process that
permeates its being and makes it alive. Life is a process that
everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear,
until eventually dead matter, the result of small, single, cyclical,
life processes, returns into the over-all gigantic circle of nature herself, where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition. (Arendt 1998, 96)

Every living being is subject to biological needs and the individual “ever-recurring life cycle,” and, in this way, human beings are no different (Arendt 1998, 7, 19). This is why she refers to the laboring human being as an *animal laborans*: “The *animal laborans* is indeed only one, at best the highest, of the animal species which populate the earth” (Arendt 1998, 84). Subject to the needs of the body, man exists “not as a truly human being but only as a specimen of the animal species mankind” (Arendt 1998, 46). Through the life process, human beings remain connected to all living organisms and the animal environment (Arendt 1998, 2). Furthermore, human life and the individual’s life cycle exists within the larger cycle of life as a whole. Within this “gigantic circle of nature” there is “no beginning and no end” (Arendt 1998, 96):

> Nature and the cyclical movement into which she forces all living things know neither birth nor death as we understand them...Without a world into which men are born and from which they die, there would be nothing but changeless eternal recurrence, the deathless everlastingness of the human as of all other animal species. (Arendt 1998, 96-97)

In laboring to provide for the needs of the body, a man is not free, but is a slave to his needs (Arendt 1998, 83). Everything that must be done in order to keep oneself alive are necessary activities. Thus, labor’s activities are not freely chosen and belong in the private sphere. It is in this sphere that human beings come together out of necessity and not in freedom—either to labor next to one another or the coming together that is necessary for procreation. Thus the family and the household corresponds to the human
condition of life and the activity of labor that arises out of it (Arendt 1998, 30). The private sphere is the realm of inequality and force, both to rule over those under one’s command (i.e. children), and in the strength that is required to produce the means of subsistence (Arendt 1998, 88). Rulership is justified in the private realm because it is the only way to master necessity so that man can join his equals in the public realm (Arendt 1998, 32-33). To be free means neither to rule or be ruled. Because the private sphere is the realm of necessity, hierarchy, and rulership, providing for the maintenance of life is anti-political. Indeed, it must be mastered, so that I can join my equals in the public realm, which is the location of freedom.

As we saw in her dissertation, Arendt describes human beings as establishing a home for man on the grounds of the divine fabric. *Homo faber*, she says, builds “a man-made world” out of “God-created nature” (Arendt 1998, 139). What was the “divine fabric” in the dissertation is referred to in *The Human Condition* as “the animal environment,” “natural surroundings,” or “the cyclical movement of nature’s household” (Arendt 1998, 2, 7, 137). Arendt calls the activity that builds a human artifice on the basis of the natural environment “work,” and she calls the human condition that gives rise to it “worldliness” (Arendt 1998, 7). The activity of “work” builds an artificial world of objects out of and against the background of the natural environment (Arendt 1998, 2). The worldly objects, which are made by men and used by him “give rise to the familiarity of the world, its customs and habits of intercourse between men and things as well as between men and men” (Arendt 1998, 94).
Arendt uses the same term she uses in her dissertation, *fabricare*, to describe man as a maker. *Homo faber* “fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice” (Arendt 1998, 136). For Arendt, what distinguishes men from other animals is man’s capacity to build a world that provides a measure of permanence and durability opposed to the futility of the endless cycle of life: “without being at home in the midst of things whose durability makes them fit for use and for erecting a world whose very permanence stands in direct contrast to life, this life would never be human” (Arendt 1998, 135). This is why she refers to man, as the builder of worlds, as *homo faber*, as opposed to the “animal” of *animal laborans* (Arendt 1998, 84). Animal laborans labors with his body, while *homo faber* builds an artificial world out of natural materials (Arendt 1998, 136). The most important purpose of the world built by men, Arendt argues, is precisely to turn it into man’s “dwelling place” (Arendt 1998, 152). “The world, the man-made home erected on earth and made of the material which earthly nature delivers into human hands...constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can be at home on earth (Arendt 1998, 134). Like the lovers of the world who, in Arendt’s dissertation, turn the divine fabric “into the self-evident home of man,” *homo faber* builds the world “as his home on earth” (Copy A, 300; Arendt 1998, 168).

For Arendt, like Augustine, man is not a true creator: “where God creates *ex nihilo*, man creates out of given substance” (Arendt 1998, 139). As *homo faber*, man constructs his products out of raw materials: “work always has some material upon which it is performed and which through fabrication (the activity of *homo faber*) will be
transformed into some worldly object” (Arendt 1998, 91). This means that man stands outside of his product, unlike God who, as we saw in the dissertation, is both the source and the sustainer of the being of all beings.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes, the fact that all things built in the world, however durable, deteriorate and decay, is a “sign of their being products of a mortal maker” (Arendt 1998, 137). Arendt explains how, although man may build something, after his work is completed, his fabrications “have an independence of their own, however modest, which enables them to survive even for a considerable time the changing moods of their owner” (Arendt 1998, 138). Despite this inevitable decay, as each new person arrives in the world, he can constitute the world anew or he can maintain the human artifice that was built before his arrival; all “things can be constantly replaced with the change of generations which come and inhabit the man-made world and go away” (Arendt 1998, 136-137). Nevertheless, “only *homo faber* conducts himself as lord and master of the whole earth” (Arendt 1998, 139). Indeed, *homo faber* views himself, Arendt writes, “in the image of a Creator-God” (Arendt 1998, 139). The activity and attitude of man as *homo faber* is exactly what Augustine describes as *superbia*. Arendt, however, encourages pride in man’s ability to wrest resources from the earth in order to build a world fit to house human action and speech (Arendt 1998, 173).

We see too in *The Human Condition* that man as fabricator constructs a world that will grant mortal human life permanence: “Work and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life.
and the fleeting character of human time” (Arendt, 1998 8). Indeed, it is man’s desire to build something more permanent than himself that motivates man to build the common world. As we saw in the dissertation, the fabricated world provides a home for human beings, as well as a common world that “outlasts them all” (Arendt 1998, 7). We are born into a world that has already been constituted by others, and that will outlast our own mortal life; it “always grows out of the past and is intended to last for future generations” (Arendt 1998, 68). The world’s “durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible, which existed before any one individual appeared into it and will survive his eventual departure” (Arendt 1998, 97). It is only within the common world that men can appear as individuals, that his life proceeds along a rectilinear course, and not as members of the animal species man who share in the cyclical movement of all biological life (Arendt 1998, 19). As homo faber is with the world of things made by others and to which he adds his own products, “in this way he is with the others who made that world” (Arendt 1998, 209). The world built by homo faber is also, as it is in the dissertation, “the place where things happen” (Copy A, 299). It is a world, Arendt says, “in which the vita activa spends itself” (Arendt 1998, 94). Men build a truly common world when they fabricate the human artifice, as well as establish a political community (Arendt 1998, 22). It is the common world, both in terms of the human artifice and in terms of a body-politic, that provides “stability and solidity” to mortal human being and to human affairs (Arendt 1998, 136).

It is clear that Arendt develops her concept of the world from her dissertation. In The Human Condition, she describes this world, constituted by men, in more detail. The
world is not only the human artifice constructed by men, but it is also human 

communities founded by men. The world in this respect, Arendt argues, is equivalent to 

the public sphere:

The term ‘public’ signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. (Arendt 1998, 52)

It is not only physical spaces that relate and separate men. It is also the constitution and 
laws within a community that give men the opportunity both to act in concert, while 
also affording the space for the expression of each individual’s uniqueness. Arendt 
writes,

the law originally was identified with this boundary line, which in ancient times was still actually a space, a kind of no-man’s land between the private and the public, sheltering and protecting both realms while, at the same time, separating them from each other. (Arendt 1998, 63)

Like a fence, which both unites and separates property, the law unites and separates 
men within the world. The public realm relates men by providing a place for people to 
see and be seen, to act in concert, and to ascribe meaning to collective life. The public 
realm provides a legally and institutionally articulated realm, one in which individuals 
have the opportunity to express their unique perspectives in word and deed. A common
world, or what we may call the public sphere, relates men in equality and separates them in distinctiveness. In *Origins*, we saw that totalitarianism sought to extinguish this “in-between” provided by the common world. Arendt sought to counter totalitarianism’s reach by affirming the significance of the common world in *The Human Condition*.

The common world is significant because without it man cannot experience reality. If men do not appear together in public and are not seen and heard by others, we cannot be sure of the reality of the world (Arendt 1998, 50). When men exist as purely private individuals, each is alone with his own subjectivity. It is only by appearing in public, where others also see what I see and hear what I hear, that I can be sure of the objectivity of the world. For the common world, it is as if a solely private man does not exist (Arendt 1998, 58). What he does is not seen by others, and so can have no significance in the world. What he opines is not heard, and so cannot be made sense of through dialogue with others. For Arendt, this is the “privation” of private life (Arendt 1998, 58).  

Arendt argues that it is only because we can talk and relate to each other that human beings can experience meaningfulness: “Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only

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83 Arendt writes:

To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an “objective” relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself. (Arendt 1998, 58)
because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves” (Arendt 1998, 4). Men can only make sense of the world together, by speaking to each other within a common world. For Arendt, this is the real meaning of common sense:

It is by virtue of common sense that the other sense perceptions are known to disclose reality and are not merely felt as irritations of our nerves or resistance sensations of our bodies. A noticeable decrease in common sense in any given community and a noticeable increase in superstition and gullibility are therefore almost infallible signs of alienation from the world. (Arendt 1998, 209)

In Origins, we saw what may indeed be the terrifying consequences when men no longer share a common world where they can together verify what is real, including what is and is not possible within the limits of the human condition.

Additionally, everyone occupies a different location within the world, and therefore views reality, and the objective world, from a different perspective. Thus, the common world is significant because it provides a meeting place “where things can be seen and heard by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, [only in this way] can worldly reality truly and reliably appear” (Arendt 1998, 57). The common world allows us to exchange different perspectives and to engage with different opinions.84 By viewing worldly phenomena from a variety of perspectives, the full reality

84 For Arendt, “no formation of opinion is even possible where all opinions have become the same” (Arendt 1963, 227, 228). Opinions, by definition, do not belong to groups but rather to individuals. Groups are capable of having interests, and indeed “interests are relevant only as group interests,” but opinions are formed by individuals in open communication with each other (Arendt 1963, 229). For an
of the phenomena is able to appear. Furthermore, by remembering what has been said and done within the common world, we can afford fleeting words and deeds an *enduring* reality. Through reification, we can continue to recall what has been done and said in the past, thus granting the words and deeds of mortals a permanence they would not otherwise have. For Arendt, the common world has great significance for human beings, and indeed is required if we are to experience a truly human life. It is the place where we handle those affairs which are common to us all, while being able to engage different perspectives, verify reality, and bestow meaningfulness on human life. It is the common world, Arendt maintains, and not eternity, that is the measure of what we call Being: “To men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all; ‘for what appears to all, this we call Being’” (Arendt 1998, 199).

Above all else, Arendt argues, the common world’s significance is the earthly immortality it grants to men. In this respect, Arendt’s political theory comes into direct conflict with Augustine’s theology. Arendt argues:

> The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things—works and deeds and words—which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves. (Arendt 1998, 19)

opinion to be formed, there must be a public space where discussion and dialogue takes place and where all views in their “endless variety” can be shared openly (Arendt 1963, 229).

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85 Arendt writes: “The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and, second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things” (Arendt 1998, 95).
Arendt argues that the actions of men within the common world are motivated by “the central human concern with immortality” (Arendt 1998, 55). As in her dissertation, Arendt emphasizes that man’s desire for immortality initially arose in a response to the seeming everlastingness of the universe in its entirety:

Against this background of nature’s ever-recurring life and the gods’ deathless and ageless lives stood mortal men, the only mortals in an immortal but not eternal universe, confronted with the immortal lives of their gods but not under the rule of an eternal God...The Greeks’ concern with immortality grew out of their experience of an immortal nature and immortal gods which together surrounded the individual lives of mortal men. Imbedded in a cosmos where everything was immortal, mortality became the hallmark of human existence. (Arendt 1998, 18)

For Arendt, to seek worldly immortality is to pursue the highest possibility of being human, which she explicitly opposes to Augustine’s own thought. Arendt writes that, for Augustine, the pursuit of worldly immortality precludes the contemplation of the eternal (Arendt 1998, 20). In spite of Augustine, Arendt argues that without the central human concern with immortality, not only would men not be motivated to engage in political activity, but politics itself would not possible (Arendt 1998, 55).

For Arendt, the essence of politics is the pursuit of immortality. In ancient Greece and Rome, “men entered the public realm because they wanted something of their own or something in common with others to be more permanent than their earthly lives” (Arendt 1998, 55). It is only because of the visibility and publicity of the public realm that this “something” can be preserved for the ages (Arendt 1998, 55). The common world affords a public stage where each person can perform his or her uniqueness by speaking and acting with others. It is those truly rare and great deeds,
actions that introduce something new into the common world, that are worthy of remembrance. These events are recorded in history to be preserved for the ages. In this way, these words and deeds become immortal, and long outlast their mortal authors. For Arendt, however, the greatest of these great and rare deeds is the founding of a new body-politic. The founders of a new political community create a constitution, write laws, and build public spaces, all of which are intended to outlast their foundation and to provide stability to human life for generations to come.

Arendt writes in a surprisingly Augustinian way in order to accomplish a dramatically anti-Augustinian purpose. She says that through word and deed in the world we can “transcend” our “brief sojourn” on the earth (Arendt 1998, 55). Individuals become immortalized through the rare great deed. But, more importantly, immortality is a feature of the body-politics itself. “Bodies politic,” Arendt writes, “have always been designed for permanence” (Arendt 1998, 47). “If the world is to contain a public space, it cannot be erected for one generation and planned for the living only; it must transcend the life-span of mortal men” (Arendt 1998, 55). Indeed, not only the body-politic itself, but the initial founding act can be immortalized through reification. Instead

86 Action is the source of all “great and beautiful things” (Arendt 2006, 167).

87 For Arendt, the essential meaning of revolution is the foundation of an altogether new polity. In On Revolution, Arendt speaks of the “birth” of the phenomenon of revolution itself as well as the “birth” of the new body politic through the Constitution (Arendt 1963, 28, 156). And she speaks of the founders as “beginners of something altogether new” (Arendt 1963, 235). Though the tradition, going back to antiquity, was well acquainted with political change, this change was viewed as the natural transformation of one regime into another, destined to repeat itself, as part of the perpetual cycle that was human affairs (Arendt 1963, 13-14). The possibility of founding a government or constitution that was something altogether and entirely new was not recognized until the modern period (Arendt 1963, 14).
of uniting our own “whence” and “whither” in eternity, this worldly “transcendence” unites us with others who have gone before (whence) and those who have come after (whither): “the common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our life-span into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it” (Arendt 1998, 55).

“Without this transcendence into a potential earthly immortality, no politics, strictly speaking, no common world and no public realm, is possible” (Arendt 1998, 55). There is, Arendt laments, “no clearer testimony to the loss of the public realm in the modern age than the almost complete loss of concern with immortality” (Arendt 1998, 55). This is quite different from the transcendence of the world we find in Augustine’s thought, who, in the dissertation, is quoted as saying “that man [in the world] knows himself sojourning in a strange land” (Copy A, 334). In the dissertation, we see that Augustine’s chief worry is the worldliness of man. In The Human Condition, it is not worldliness that troubles Arendt, as it does for Augustine, but rather the worldlessness of contemporary society.

6.3 Christianity and Worldlessness

In The Human Condition, Arendt continues the line of argumentation she began in her dissertation by reaffirming that Christianity is, in its core teachings, a worldless
faith. She affirms that the otherworldliness of the early Christian church have much to do with its eschatological hope for what they believed to be Christ’s imminent return.

The antagonism between the early Church and the res publica in the writings of Tertullian are usually and rightfully understood, she says, as a consequence of these early eschatological expectations (Arendt 1998, 74). However, she argues that even during the Medieval Period, when the Catholic Church was at the height of its political power and influence, Christianity retained its worldlessness: “for no matter how ‘worldly’ the Church became, it was always essentially an otherworldly concern which kept the community of believers together” (Arendt 1998, 34). Indeed, it was Luther and Calvin, she says, who sought “to restore the uncompromising otherworldliness to the Christian faith” (Arendt 1998, 251-2).

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88 Arendt’s argument that Christianity is, at its core, fundamentally a worldless doctrine also appears in On Revolution. She is concerned with dispelling the claim that all modern revolutions are essentially Christian in origin, even if their proponents have claimed to be atheists. This argument points to the values of early Christianity, which contained rebellious elements (the equality of all souls before God, contempt for public powers, and the promise of a Kingdom of Heaven), and claims that these values were transmitted to modernity through the Reformation and became secularized. According to Arendt, this argument is incorrect for two reasons. First, it is historically incorrect insofar as the first stage of secularization was absolutism and not the Reformation. Revolution itself is the founding, or “birth,” of a new secular order, and thus it is secularization which provided both the impulse and the outcome of revolution (Arendt 1963, 18). Furthermore, no revolution was ever made in the name of Christianity prior to the modern age. Since this is the case, if it is true that revolutions have Christian principles at their core, then it would have been modernity which was able “to liberate the revolutionary germs of the Christian faith” (Arendt 1963, 19). Again, then, we find that it is modernity which was the source of revolution and not Christian beliefs (Arendt 1963, 19). The second reason this thesis is incorrect is for theological reasons. The meaning of revolution is the foundation of a novus ordo saeclorum and Christianity, and the theology of the Reformation, had exactly the opposite in mind. Luther had as his primary aim the liberation of “a truly Christian life more radically from the considerations and worries of the secular order” (Arendt 1963, 19). Luther, Arendt writes, can be considered one of “the great founders in history” but it is because he founded a new church (Arendt 1963, 18). Luther, following Augustine, formed his view of secular authority from the perspective of eternity. Secular authority was useful for the believer, but ultimate meaning lay outside of history and the realm of public affairs.
In Arendt’s view, Christians are, first and foremost, concerned with eternal salvation. For this reason, they have no interest in the common world, and view participation in public life as a burden “undertaken exclusively for the sake of the well-being and salvation of those it freed from worry about public affairs” (Arendt 1998, 60). Government is believed to be “a necessary evil because of man’s sinfulness,” not required before the Fall or after the Final Judgment (Arendt 1998, 60).89

Christianity, Arendt argues, is also worldless in its condemnation of demonstrations of excellence in public as “pride” (Arendt 1998, 54). Echoing Parts II and III of her dissertation, Arendt explains that, for Christians, all human beings are equal, either “before God,” or in their “sinfulness” (Arendt 1998, 215). In both respects, Christian equality, she says, amounts to mere “sameness,” and is the “very opposite” of political equality, which “is necessarily an equality of unequals who stand in need of being ‘equalized’ in certain respects and for specific purposes” (Arendt 1998, 215). We

89 Arendt writes:

It is surprising that this attitude should have survived into the secular modern age to such an extent that Karl Marx, who in this as in other respects only summed up, conceptualized, and transformed into a program the underlying assumptions of two hundred years of modernity, could eventually predict and hope for the “withering away” of the whole public realm. The difference between the Christian and socialist viewpoints in this respect, the one viewing government as a necessary evil because of man’s sinfulness and the other hoping to abolish it eventually, is not a difference in estimate of the public sphere itself, but of human nature. What is impossible to perceive from either point of view is that Marx’s “withering away of the state” had been preceded by a withering away of the public realm, or rather by its transformation into a very restricted sphere of government; in Marx’s day, this government had already begun to wither further, that is, to be transformed into a nation-wide “housekeeping,” until in our own day it has begun to disappear altogether into the even more restricted, impersonal sphere of administration. (Arendt 1998, 60)
see in *The Human Condition*, as we did in her dissertation, that, for Arendt, Christianity is essentially a worldless faith because it permits no worldly distinctions, and, thus, requires no political equality.

In *The Human Condition*, however, Arendt ascribes an even more originary cause to the essential worldlessness of Christianity and why its worldlessness survived “the obvious non-fulfillment of its eschatological hopes”—Jesus’ teachings on good works (Arendt 1998, 74). The Christian belief in good works, she explains, is the very opposite of the Greek and Roman view of excellence, which required the shining light of the public. In contrast, Jesus of Nazareth taught that the activity of goodness can neither be seen nor heard, if it is to be genuinely good: “For it is manifest that the moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness’ sake” (Arendt 1998, 74).

The acknowledgement of the performance of a good work by others, or even by one’s own self, immediately removes the selflessness required for a work to be truly good. For this reason, Arendt maintains, the activity of goodness stands in extreme opposition to the visibility of the public realm: “only goodness must go into absolute hiding and flee all appearances if it is not to be destroyed” (Arendt 1998, 75). Good

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90 Arendt writes:

Yet the otherworldliness of Christianity has still another root, perhaps even more intimately related to the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, and at any rate so independent of the belief in the perishability of the world that one is tempted to see in it the true inner reason why Christian alienation from the world could so easily survive the obvious non-fulfillment of its eschatological hopes (Arendt 1998, 74).
works must have no witness and leave no trace. The doer of good deeds does not appear among others, but rather hides from the public, “where everything and everybody are seen and heard by others” (Arendt 1998, 77). Absent from the realm of appearances shared in common with others, it is as if he was not human (Arendt 1998, 76). Arendt describes him as a truly worldless and thus lonely figure. His only company, she says, may be God (Arendt 1998, 76). This being so, Arendt argues that “Goodness as a consistent way of life is impossible within the confines of public life and is even destructive of it” (Arendt 1998, 77). No one was more keenly aware of this fact than Machiavelli, Arendt writes, who knew that if Christianity ruled the secular realm, either the Church would become corrupt by participating in worldly affairs, or the Church would remain uncorrupted and destroy the common world altogether (Arendt 1998, 77).

It was a primary task of early Christian theologians, Arendt explains, to identify “a bond between people strong enough to replace the world” (Arendt 1998, 53). Again, Arendt turns her attention to Augustine:

Historically, we know of only one principle that was ever devised to keep a community of people together who had lost their interest in the common world and felt themselves no longer related and separated by it. To find a bond between people strong enough to replace the world was the main political task of early Christian philosophy, and it was Augustine who proposed to found not only the Christian “brotherhood” but all human relationships on charity. But this charity, though its worldlessness clearly corresponds to the general experience of love, is at the same time clearly distinguished from it in being something which, like the world, is between men: “Even robbers have between them [inter se] what they call charity.” This surprising illustration of the Christian political principle is in fact very well chosen,
because the bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world, a group of saints or a group of criminals, provided only it is understood that the world itself is doomed and that every activity in it is undertaken with the proviso *quamdiu mundus durat* ("as long as the world lasts"). (Arendt 1998, 53)

Here Arendt recalls Part III of her dissertation when she discusses Augustine’s philosophy of social life. It was in this context that she finally discovered a concrete, empirical ground for the relevance of the other in Augustine’s thought—our common historical origin in Adam. It was only in this context that she referred to charity as an “inter se,” as something that could, in fact, provide a grounds for uniting men together within the temporal world. Still, she had concluded there, as she does here, that this love was provisional ("as long as the world lasts"): “however necessary charity may be, it is only necessary in this world” (*in hoc saeculo*) (Copy A, 365). This is because, as she said in her dissertation and as she says here in *The Human Condition*, it is a concern for salvation, and not a common world, that Christians share in common (Arendt 1998, 55).

Arendt remarks that this belief that the historical world will not last is also the presupposition of Aquinas’ political philosophy as well (Arendt 1998, 53).

Interestingly, for Arendt, both Christian community and contemporary society are organized as if they were large families. Christian community

was early defined in the demand that it should form a corpus, a ‘body,’ whose members were to be related to each other like brothers of the same family. The structure of communal life was modeled on the relationships between the members of a family because these were known to be non-political and even anti-political. (Arendt 1998, 54)
In her dissertation, she also described the Christian community as a body, where each individual ceases to be anything else but a member (Copy A, 362). Both being organized as enormous families, both are characterized by wordlessness, though, Arendt writes, “for other reasons and in very different, perhaps even more disconsolate forms” (Arendt 1998, 54). Worldlessness may indeed result in Christian abstention from the goods of this world, but it can very well, Arendt maintains, result in the opposite—something like we see today in our own society, the intensification of the “enjoyment and consumption” of things of the world (Arendt 1998, 55). Not in those worldly goods that are common to all, public goods that are lasting, but rather of private, personal goods that are immediately consumable (Arendt 1998, 55). Worldlessness, Arendt argues, came to dominate Western Civilization after the fall of the Roman Empire, and with Christianity’s elevation of the \textit{vita contemplativa} as a right of all (Arendt 1998, 54).

6.4 The Vita Contemplativa

One of Arendt’s primary concerns in \textit{The Human Condition} is the reversal of the traditional hierarchy, going back to the Greeks, of the \textit{vita contemplativa} over the \textit{vita activa}. Arendt argues that the Greeks originally understood action, specifically a life lived among one’s peers and devoted to public affairs, to be the freest and highest possibility for a human being. It was Plato who first elevated the contemplative life as only truly free life, and who, in his political theory, substituted making for acting. It was Augustine, however, who took what Plato and Aristotle had considered a possibility only for the few to be a requirement for all. Indeed, Augustine made the contemplation of
the eternal necessary for salvation. It is in Arendt’s dissertation that we first see her describing the *vita contemplativa*, as it appears in Augustine’s thought, as the freest way of life. Additionally, we see her engaging with the Platonic tradition’s elevation of the contemplation of eternal by way of an analysis of Plotinus’ influence on Augustine. She writes that Augustine continues in the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus (Copy A, 263). Arendt’s engagement with the influence of Greek philosophy on Augustine appears primarily in the footnotes of her original dissertation, but was integrated into the main body of the text in her revisions. It is in the dissertation that we first see Arendt engaging with the *vita contemplativa* in both the Platonic and Christian traditions. It is there that she first indicated her dissatisfaction with the withdrawing from the world that the demands made upon the believer entailed. In Chapter Two, I indicated that Arendt drew on Augustine for her later considerations on the elevation of the *vita contemplativa* at the expense of the *vita activa*. I am now in a position to demonstrate this more fully.

Recall that in Part I of her dissertation Arendt describes the Augustinian man as a desiring being. He is a being who is separated from his own good, from that which will bring him happiness, and thus desire is a constitutive feature of his character. To be human is to be a desiring (*appetitus*) being. For this concept, Arendt says, Augustine drew upon the works of Plotinus who says in his *Enneads*: “desire pulls outward and implies need” (Arendt 1996, 21). In his *appetitus*, man turns from one worldly good to the next, in the hope of satisfying his cravings. Unfortunately for man, no worldly object can bring happiness. The world is variable, changeable, and unpredictable, and it is not
in the temporal world that the good of life can be found. All worldly goods may be lost, and will all surely be lost in the greatest loss of all—the loss of our own life. The life of man is characterized by desire that no worldly good can satisfy and by the constant fear of loss and of his eventual death: “constantly bound by craving and fear to a future full of uncertainties, we strip each present moment of its calm” (Copy A, 251). Surely, Augustine says, this life is really no life at all, but is better characterized as a living death (*mors vitalis*) (Arendt 2003, 31).

Arendt believes that the incessant anxiety Augustine describes as the human condition can be traced back to a human being’s lack of power in the world—power to have and hold onto the goods he seeks, power to determine events, and, in the end, power over his own life. Augustine’s philosophy, she says, is not actually the original source of this view. Rather, it goes back to the Greek concept of “autarchy” (Arendt 2003, 43, 52). “The enjoyment, the sheer self-sufficiency which is to take us into the absolute future, is Greek in origin” (Copy A, 284). For this reason, she says, Augustinian denial of the earthly, embodied, and mutable self for the sake of eternity is actually pseudo-Christian (Arendt 2003, 41).

This understanding of a life lived in the temporal, historical world is what gives rise to Augustine’s understanding of the freest kind of life. The truly free life is a secure life, one that is free from desire or the fear (*metu carere*) of what the future will bring (Arendt 2003, 31). For Augustine, desire longs to “enjoy” (*frui*) its beloved in the calm security of undisturbed possession (Arendt 2003, 40). This enjoyment lacks any activity or changeability. According to Arendt, Augustine drew upon the ideas of Plotinus for his
understanding of freedom, specifically, as freedom from any activity: “freedom,” he says, “must be referred not to the doing, not to external things done, but to the inner activity, to Intellection, to virtue’s own vision” (Arendt 1996, 21-22). For Augustine, what our desire craves is eternal life, as only this can satisfy our craving. Eternal life is the only good that can be enjoyed, and can only be found in eternity where love no longer strives, but abides in the presence of immutable Being (Arendt 2003, 45). It is in Augustine’s understanding of freedom and in his depiction of eternity that we see the elevation of the vita contemplativa Arendt will later describe in The Human Condition.

For Augustine, enjoyment comes in the completely calm (quies) possession of a life that can no longer be lost. Augustine describes eternity as perfect stillness, as the present without a future which can disturb it: “Only a present without a future is immutable, utterly unmenaced. In it lies the calm of possession” (Copy A, 254). Eternity is the stans aeternitas—the eternal standing still (Arendt 2003, 54). In her notes, Arendt references Augustine’s Confessions book XI: “Who will hold [the heart]...so that it may stand for a little while and catch for a moment the splendor of eternity which stands still forever, and compare this with temporal moments which never stand still, and see that it is incomparable” (Arendt 2003, 54). According to Arendt, Augustine draws on Plotinus for his definition of eternity as the “standing still forever” (stans aeternitas) or the “standing Now” (nunc stans) (Arendt 2003, 54; Arendt 1996, 15). Augustine also relies on Plotinus in his description of the enjoyment of eternity as a kind of seeing (videre) (Arendt 2003, 45). For Augustine, enjoyment is not an activity, but is better compared to the more passive “seeing.” Seeing replaces striving because the object of desire has
been attained once and for all. Enjoyment is described as the calm, undisturbed “being-with” the beloved, in this case the eternal God, the only right object of desire (Arendt 2003, 45). It is from the perspective of contemplation of God as the eternal that everything else in the world is judged. True freedom can only be found in eternity—a state of “peaceful enjoyment far from any action” (Tun) (Copy A, 276; Arendt 2003, 45). No longer may anything in the world be viewed as possessing an inherent value or independent meaning of its own, but must be only be viewed instrumentally as a means to an end.

As long as man yet lives in the world, his desire cannot be satisfied. Nevertheless he can long for eternal life. While eternity is what he ought to desire, it is his temporality that he must transcend. The worldly self, which is consumed by time, is “forgotten” as the soul longs for eternity (Copy A, 272-273). In his straining towards (extensus) the eternal, man becomes oblivious to his own temporal, worldly self: “thus oblivious, he is no longer himself, an individual” (Copy A, 272; Arendt 2003, 39). The desirer, Arendt says, actually ceases to be except in his longing for eternity. By turning his entire present life into a striving for eternity, the desirer is able to participate in a kind of provisional eternity, until the future, which “will be the real present, an eternal today” (Copy A, 272; Arendt 2003, 41). Our temporal, earthly lives lose all meaning when longing for the after-life in eternity becomes the sole goal of the present life (Copy A, 271).

In her dissertation, Arendt demonstrates the implications for a life lived in the world when it is viewed from the perspective this contemplative order (betrachtende
ordnen) (Arendt 2003, 59). From this perspective she says, the world: “loses its meaning and its weight in comparison with that true life which is projected into the absolute future and is the sole goal of earthly life as well” (Copy A, 271). It is only “for the sake of” eternity that “our earthly life and its endeavors have any meaning” (Copy A, 278). This “for the sake of” cancels man’s original relationship to the world, to himself, and to others. The good of life is projected into an absolute future, radically relativizing our present life as it is lived in the world among others: “from eternity, the concept of the good thus achieved, Augustine proceeds to strip the world and all temporal things of their value and make them relative” (Copy A, 256). Even those we supposedly love are to be “used” as a means of striving after eternity and not viewed as a good in it of themselves. In Arendt’s view:

The quest of [the eternal] self, derived from the Greek ideal of autarchy, absolutely isolates the individual by striving for independence, for complete freedom from everything outside himself. The result is precisely the elimination of any original relationship with his neighbor and the world. (Copy A, 284)

In longing for eternity, the desirer finds himself in “absolute isolation in the divine presence” (Copy A, 342). Man no longer belongs to the world, but to eternity.

In Part II of Arendt’s dissertation, she again describes the vita contemplativa as the highest aim of human life for Augustine, but in the context of the return to Being. The true source of one’s being in the world is discovered by way of an internal process. This discovery is prompted by a reflection on the being of the self. It is through his memory (memoria) that man’s past is re-presented to the mind’s eye: “in this recollection, man is shown, first, the way beyond himself—i.e., beyond the realm of
mundane experience” (Copy A, 288); “the creature’s inquiry into its own being lets it ask itself out of the world” (electio ex mundo) (Copy A, 296). Through memory, man discovers the eternal God as the source of his being in the world, and also as his ultimate destiny. This recollection is described by Augustine in his Confessions as an ascent to the eternal: “so I shall also pass above the power of my nature, ascending by degrees toward Him who made me, and I come into the fields and broad palaces of memory” (Copy A, 289). It is conscience (conscientia), the voice of God commanding from within, which draws man’s attention to his dependence on God. Conscience takes man into the presence of God (coram Deo) from which there is no escape (Copy A, 323; Arendt 2003, 91). In the turn to God, the individual, is alone before God as the source of his being (Copy A, 322; Arendt 2003, 90). In contemplation of man’s own “whence” and “whether” he inquires after the source of his being. Memory then makes possible the return to eternal being in the future, as well as an experience of the divine in the here and now (coram Deo).

In memory, the questioner recalls God as the source of his being, and it is this discovery that becomes determinative for his present life as it is lived in the world. As the meaning of his being in the world is to return to God who is immutable Being, the “end” towards which life is headed is eternity, “the point of a radically positive cessation, and a bid for lingering contemplation and reflective calm” (Copy A, 309). Coming from Being and destined to return to Being, the unique, irreversible course of an individual human life is regarded as a mere distance to be traversed, while the quality or the length of life are insignificant in the light of the eternal. Insofar as the believer
endeavors the return to Being, he must cast off (abicere me) all that makes him a worldly being (Arendt 2003, 85). In other words, he has to transcend his becoming in order to ascend to pure Being. Even though I still live in the temporal world, I am able to participate in a kind of eternity through memory and expectation, which coincide in the now of the present.

God demands man’s estrangement from all worldly things in the command “thou shalt not covet,” and calls upon His creature to withdraw from his entanglement in the world founded by men and return to the true source of his being in God (Copy A, 322; Arendt 2003, 90). The decision to return to God and to forgo love of the world is so strong that Augustine actually describes it as a death: “love itself is our death unto the world” (Copy A, 316). Furthermore, the neighbor ceases to be anything to me, but one who can also return to Being. All previous ties to the other must be cut, as well as, “any originally established relationship with the world” (Copy A, 342). I love my neighbor in caritas, by admonishing him to follow my example and to also return to the origin of his being in God. This is why Arendt argues that in caritas, each remains in “absolute isolation” (Copy A 331; Arendt 2003, 100). Again, in Part II Arendt demonstrates the priority the vita contemplativa is given over activity in the world. It is in only in striving for the eternal that man’s life on earth can have meaning, and it is eternity with God that is the ultimate meaning of the being of man: “such is the specifically confined character which life assumes if seen from the perspective of the being that envelops it” (Copy A, 312). Contemplation of the eternal determines and regulates what we do, who we are, and how we love in the world.
We have seen in Arendt’s dissertation, that, for Augustine, it is the life of contemplation of the eternal that orders and regulates our relation to the world. In the context of love as desire, I learn that I must only “use” and not love the world. In desiring only God, I am free from the anxiety caused by loving the world. In the context of love as return, I recognize God and not the world as the source of my being. The meaning of my being is to cast off my “becoming” so that I may approach pure Being. I regard others in the world also as created beings, and love them only as such. In Part III, in the context of a shared past we see that, for Augustine, our common origin in Adam means we all share in original sin. This is the context, Arendt argues, where we are finally able to understand why loving the neighbor is obligatory (verpflichtende) for one who has cut his ties to the world and strains towards eternity (Arendt 2003, 117). Though the believer has cut his ties to the world and its desires, he yet lives in the world. To withdraw from the world entirely, for Augustine, would be sinful because it would deprive the other of the believer’s example. Being with others in the world is a necessity because of the recognition of a common danger—the possibility of a “second death,” eternal estrangement from God (Arendt 2003, 121). I am obligated to love my fellow believer because he remains subject to the temptations of the world, and I must aid him in his struggle against the world. I am obligated to love the non-believer so that he too may recognize his own worldly past as sinful, return to God who is the source of his being, and cut his ties to the world. As Arendt describes it, for Augustine, loving the other in the world is an obligation, which is only binding as long as the world lasts (Copy A, 361, 362). If loving the other means endeavoring his salvation, it will no longer be
necessary after the final judgment. Simply put, according to Augustine in Book XIX of *City of God*, while the contemplative life may be pleasant (*suavitas*), love is a necessity (*necessitas*) (Arendt 2003, 120).

It was in her dissertation that Arendt first engaged the *vita contemplativa* within both the Platonic and Christian traditions. Her dissertation was her first study of the life of contemplation as the only free way of life within the Western philosophic tradition. There she discovered some key commonalities between both Plotinus’ view of eternity, inherited from Plato, and Augustine’s view. For both, eternity is the “standing now,” which knows neither a past nor a future. Eternity is immutable and, in the thought of both, is opposed to the variability of the world. To gaze upon the eternal and to ascend to pure Being is, for both thinkers, the *summum bonum*. Authentic freedom is not to be found in the multiplicity and variability of the world, but in the perfect stillness of eternity. For Augustine, Christian love does not permit of a complete withdraw from the world. Nevertheless, love is a necessity that is required only as long as the world lasts: “In enjoyment, in the calm ‘being-with,’ love ceases and finds fulfillment” (Copy A, 276). In *The Human Condition*, Arendt engages this tradition again, but this time squarely lays the blame upon this Platonic and Christian tradition as elevating the *vita contemplativa* above the *vita activa*, thereby blurring the distinctions between the human activities of labor, work, and action. She argues that, with the rise of the *vita contemplativa*, the life action was counted, like labor and work, “among the necessities of earthly life” (Arendt 1998, 14). In contrast, Arendt opposes the contemplative life as the only free way of life and argues that its elevation has led to the loss of an authentic experience of freedom in
the realm of the public. Her intention is to rearticulate the distinctions within the *vita activa*, so that we can reclaim this lost experience.

As Arendt explains in *The Human Condition*, for the Greeks the only authentically free way of life was an active life devoted to public affairs, as opposed to a life spent laboring for the necessities required by the body or the life of the craftsman, devoted to the fabrication of useful objects and the exchange of goods in the marketplace. In the Greek perspective, laborers, craftsmen, and merchants all lacked freedom of movement and of activity, and were thus not truly free (Arendt 1998, 12). It was the life of the citizen, the *bios politicos*, independent of human needs and wants, that was the only life that could be chosen in freedom (Arendt 1998, 13). For Arendt, it was the Greeks who knew the real meaning freedom through acting and speaking with their peers in the public realm. Despite this fact, it was the Socratic school that discovered “contemplation (*theōria*) as a human faculty, distinctly different from thought and reasoning” (Arendt 1998, 16). This “discovery” arose out of the belief that no work of human hands could rival the truth and beauty of eternal Being. While human life was mortal and mutable, Being was eternal and immutable. For Plato, and later for Augustine, one could ascend to and experience the Eternal only in the absolute stillness and quiet of contemplation: “Truth, be it the ancient truth of Being or the Christian truth of the living God, can reveal itself only in complete human stillness” (Arendt 1998, 15). For the Platonists, and later for the Christians who inherited the *vita contemplativa* from them via Augustine, it was the life devoted to contemplation of the Eternal that was the only truly free way of life.
From that point forward, Arendt argues, the *vita contemplativa* “has ruled metaphysical and political thought throughout our tradition” (Arendt 1998, 16).

In her description of the *vita contemplativa*, we can see the influence of the dissertation on Arendt’s considerations of this way of life in *The Human Condition*. She writes that for Plato and for Augustine the eternal was understood as the eternal present or the “*nunc stans*” (Arendt 1998, 20). Contemplation of Being, for these philosophers, is better compared to seeing than it is to thought or thinking. Contemplation requires absolute stillness; even the internal activity of thought disturbs the beholding of the Eternal. For this reason, the experience of the eternal is ineffable; one can not use words to describe it. This is why, Arendt explains, Socrates “never cared to write down his thoughts” (Arendt 1998, 20). The recording of his thoughts would have interrupted his experience of contemplating the Ideas. For Plato the life of Socrates demonstrated the necessary “conflict between the philosopher and the polis,” and the contradiction between a life devoted to the contemplation of the eternal and the way of life of the citizen (Arendt 1998, 12, 20). Because of the absolute quiet and calm that is needed in order to ascend to Being, a life lived in the world and among others is disruptive of this experience. The *vita contemplativa* “can occur only outside the realm of human affairs and outside the plurality of men” (Arendt 1998, 20).

Thus, as we learned in both Part I and Part II of Arendt’s dissertation, Arendt reaffirms that the transcendence of the world for the sake of the Eternal means living in isolation. Not only because the activity of others disturbs this experience, but also because contemplation of Being is an internal, individual experience. We see this,
Arendt says, in Plato’s Cave parable, “where the philosopher, having liberated himself from the fetters that bound him to his fellow men, leaves the cave in perfect ‘singularity,’ as it were, neither accompanied nor followed by others” (Arendt 1998, 20). We see this in Part II of Arendt’s dissertation when she writes, “In the turn to God, the individual is isolated (im isolierten) before God as the source of his being” (Arendt 2003, 90). In Part II she quotes from Augustine’s Tractates on the Gospel of John: “Love itself is our death unto the world, and our life with God. For if it be death when the soul goes forth from the body, how is it not a death when our love goes forth from the world? Strong therefore as death is love” (Copy A, 316). Arendt returns to this idea in The Human Condition: “Politically speaking, if to die is the same as ‘to cease to be among men,’ experience of the eternal is a kind of death” (Arendt 1998, 20).

The discovery of the vita contemplativa by the Socratic school gave rise to the absolute superiority of contemplation over all human activities. All activities were viewed from the perspective of the truth and beauty of the eternal and the absolute quiet required in order to gaze upon it. It did not matter whether it was labor, work, or action. All three activities disturbed the repose required in order to ascend to the eternal truth (Arendt 1998, 15-16). “With the rise of political theory, the philosophers overruled even these distinctions, which had at least distinguished between activities, by opposing contemplation to all kinds of activity alike” (Arendt 1998, 85). Even Aristotle, Arendt writes, who described man as zóon politikón, “is guided by the ideal of contemplation” (Arendt 1998, 14). He opposed the “un-quiet” of human activity of any
kind to the “almost breathless abstention from external physical movement” (Arendt 1998, 15).

Because the vita contemplativa was given priority over all activity, a life devoted to public-political matters came to be seen, like labor, as a necessity (Arendt 1998, 14). Labor and work did not rise in the hierarchy, but rather the political life was now counted among the things necessary: “Even political activity was leveled to the rank of necessity, which henceforth became the common denominator of all articulations within the vita activa” (Arendt 1998, 85). Plato and Aristotle both argued that political life was tied to the necessities of life, at least insofar as it originated in the family, and therefore was not truly free (Arendt 1998, 37). The vita activa was afforded a limited dignity only because it procured the needs of the body required by the vita contemplativa (Arendt 1998, 16).

Plato’s political philosophy, Arendt argues, “has no aim other than to make possible the philosopher’s way of life” (Arendt 2008, 14). Plato’s political philosophy tried to eliminate the contingencies of political life through the reign of philosopher-kings who, in their wisdom, alone would rule the city (Arendt 1998, 221). Although the philosopher’s wish is the contemplation of the eternal Ideas, he nevertheless must spend his life among men “and cannot dwell forever under the sky of ideas” (Arendt 1998, 266). It is for this reason, that he returns to the darkness of human affairs within the cave. For the philosophers, rulership is a burdensome necessity. It is burdensome because ruling the city interrupts the philosopher’s beholding of eternal Truth and Beauty. It is necessary because the philosophers alone possess knowledge of the Ideas
after which the city must be modeled, and the wisdom required to make the city
conform to the Idea (Arendt 1998, 226). Since Plato, Western political philosophy can be
interpreted, Arendt says, as various attempts to substitute rulership for political activity

For Plato, contemplation of the Ideas, the way of life of the philosopher, was
available only to the few. With the advent of Christianity, the *vita contemplativa*
became not only possible but required for all. Christian political philosophy “accepted
the philosophers’ distinction, refined it, and, religion being for the many and philosophy
only for the few, gave it general validity, binding for all men” (Arendt 1998, 85).
Furthermore, she says, because of the Christian priority on eternity, in which we can
participate even now through contemplation, “a religious sanction” was bestowed upon
“the abasement of the *vita activa* to its derivative, secondary position” (Arendt 1998,
16). The elevation of the *vita contemplativa*, Arendt maintains, cannot be found in the
teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, but must be traced back to Augustine who inherited “the
philosophic *apolitia* of late antiquity” and incorporated the originally Platonic idea into

In the Augustinian perspective, government is counted among those things
necessary, and political life is considered a burden. The purpose of government for

91 Although, because Augustine was a Roman citizen, he may have been the last philosopher to
know the true meaning of the life of action “as a life devoted to public-political matters” (*vita negotiosa*
or *actuosa*) (she footnotes *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapters 2 and 19) (Arendt 1998, 12).
Augustine, was to protect the quiet life of the good from the disturbances caused by the bad (Arendt 1998, 229). She refers to a passage from The City of God Book XIX also found in her dissertation: “Augustine speaks of the ‘burden’ (sarcina) of active life imposed by the duty of charity, which would be unbearable without the ‘sweetness’ (suavitas) and the ‘delight of truth’ given in contemplation” (Arendt 1998, 16).

According to Augustine, worldly activity is viewed as a disruption to the quiet contemplation and stillness required in order to gaze upon the eternal: “Augustine (De civitate Dei xix.19) sees in the duty of caritas toward the utilitas proximi (‘the interest of one’s neighbor’) the limitation of otium and contemplation” (Arendt 1998, 60). Arendt further argues that this basic Christian attitude towards politics did not change with Thomas Aquinas. He too, affirms the active life as the “necessitas vitae praesentis,” and the city as intended to procure the necessities for life (Arendt 1998, 14). At the same time, however, Aquinas insists “on the absolute superiority of the vita contemplativa,” as well as the “stillness of the soul” it requires (Arendt 1998, 318, 15).

With the fall of the Roman Empire, which taught that nothing built by men is immortal, and the domination of Europe by Christianity, which taught the pursuit of eternal life after the world, the vita contemplativa was given priority of place within the Western Tradition (Arendt 1998, 21). As we saw in her dissertation, Arendt argues that with the discovery and elevation of the vita contemplativa, all activities in the world were now viewed from the perspective of the eternal and, therefore, were radically relativized and instrumentalized (Arendt 1998, 16). Although labor, work, and action are distinct activities, each belonging properly to the private or public realm, Arendt argues
that the philosophers’ emphasis on the vita contemplativa as the only truly free way of life, resulted in a confounding of these activities and a blurring of their separate domains. According to Arendt, the obfuscation of these activities also meant that we lost our understanding of action as the only activity that is performed in freedom, and of the public sphere as the location where human freedom is exercised. Faith in politics came to an end when the first political philosophies were formulated (Arendt 1998, 205). In various ways, politics has come to be seen not as the realm of freedom, but as either as a necessity performed for the benefit of others or as a means to secure what is viewed to be a preferable way of life: “a society of the faithful, as in the Middle Ages, or a society of property-owners as in Locke, or a society relentlessly engaged in a process of acquisition, as in Hobbes, or a society of producers, as in Marx, or a society of jobholders, as in our own society” (Arendt 1998, 31). Arendt argues that the modern age’s reversal of the order of activities within the vita activa has regrettably not resulted in a rearticulation and correct understanding of the proper meaning and place of labor, work, and action (Arendt 1998, 17). Although it is the life of labor that is now glorified, and not the life of contemplation, politics is still counted among those things necessary or useful, but not as the realm of freedom. Arendt argues that the Christian view of public life as a burden survived into modernity. We see it, she says, in Marx’s belief in and hope for the “withering away of the state” (Arendt 1998, 60).

For Arendt, in contrast to Augustine, it is the active life, a life devoted to the public realm where new and unique words and deeds can be spoken and performed freely among and with one’s peers, that is the truly free life. In this way, men can
perform great deeds, build a human world, and together found a body-politic that will endure for generations. Indeed, Arendt shares what she says is the original Greek view of action as the only “authentically human way of life” (Arendt 1998, 13). A life devoted to action, for Arendt, is a life concerned for the world and with earthly immortality. It is the pursuit of a deathless life in the world. In contrast, the contemplative life, is devoted to “Truth, be it the ancient truth of Being or the Christian truth of the living God” (Arendt 1998, 15). The concern for truth, revealed in complete stillness, is the concern with eternity, either beyond (for the Greeks) or (for Christians) after the world. For both Arendt and Augustine these two concerns, the pursuit of immortality in the world or eternal life after the world, come into direct conflict with each other, and the pursuit of one necessarily comes at the expense of the other.

6.5 Natality

In an additional final chapter Arendt included as part of the revised edition of The Origins of Totalitarianism in 1958, she ends a discussion of totalitarianism as “a novel form of government” in this way:

But there remains also the truth that every end in history necessarily contains a new beginning; this beginning is the promise, the only “message” which the end can ever produce. Beginning, before it becomes a historical event, is the supreme capacity of man; politically, it is identical with man’s freedom. Initium ut esset homo creatus est—“that a beginning be made man was created” said Augustine. This beginning is guaranteed by each new birth; it is indeed every man. (Arendt 2004, 616)
At the end of a book that has shown us the most radical evil perpetrated by man against his fellows, Arendt leaves us with hope in new possibilities. Because every human being is born into the world as an altogether new and unique person, he or she is capable of introducing something new into the world. At the same time, human beings are capable of creating public spaces where each individual has the room to demonstrate and perform this novelty within the stability of a body-politic that respects equal rights. Because human beings are capable of the new, men were able to invent totalitarianism, the newest and most terrible form of government yet known to man.

Nevertheless, it is precisely this same capacity that gives us a reason to have faith (Arendt 1998, 247). This capacity to introduce something new into the world, something unexpected and previously unknown to man, a uniquely human capacity, is what Arendt describes in *The Human Condition* as “natality.” Although an element of natality is inherent in all three of the activities within the *vita activa*, action has the closest connection to natality; “action is the political activity par excellence” (Arendt 1998, 9). Therefore, Arendt affirms, it is natality and not mortality that is “the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought” (Arendt 1998, 9).

What I will demonstrate below is that, while Arendt clearly relies upon Augustine for her understanding of natality as the human condition that allows human beings to be reborn and to attain the greatest possibility of their humanity, she uses this understanding in a very anti-Augustinian way. For Augustine, our own beginning means we can transcend the world and be reborn into eternal life, which is the true meaning of our being. For Arendt, natality means that, through the performance of new words and
deeds, we can experience a kind of second birth in the world; we can pursue earthly immortality, and in so doing, create our own meaning in the here and now.

As Arendt explicitly indicates in several places, she draws on Augustine for the development of her idea of natality, which, besides plurality, is the most important aspect of her political theory.\(^{92}\) Arendt’s theory of action depends on her understanding of human beings as beginnings. In *The Human Condition*’s discussion of action, Arendt references Augustine’s *City of God*, Book XII as a source for understanding human beings as beginners:

> Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action. [*Initium*] _ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit* (‘that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody’), said Augustine in his political philosophy. This beginning is not the same as the beginning of the world; it is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself. 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. (Arendt 1998, 177)

Arendt writes that Augustine uses the word “*initium*” when he describes the creation of man in order to emphasize the beginning of someone entirely new who is himself a new beginning, while he uses the word “*principium*” to describe the creation of the world, which before its creation there existed the angels. Interestingly, this oft cited reference does not appear in Arendt’s original dissertation, although she added it to her discussion

of Augustine’s ontology of man as a created being in Part II of her revised dissertation (Arendt 1996, 55). Furthermore, I have already indicated in Chapter One that Arendt takes this quote from Augustine out of context.\footnote{When Augustine writes “and so to provide that beginning, a man was created, before whom no man ever existed” his intention is to counter the pagan belief in the eternity of souls, not to indicate the creative capacity of man as a beginner. Indeed his purpose is to focus attention on God as the Creator (Augustine, City of God 12.21).} Still, it is clearly evident from a careful reading of the text that Arendt’s interest in the meaning and significance of man as a \textit{initium} originated in her first study of Augustine.

To understand the source and development of Arendt’s concept of natality and to be able to understand how she reappropriates it, we must return again to the dissertation. We can see from the revisions Arendt made to her dissertation in the 1960s that Arendt saw the concept of natality in its nascent form in her dissertation. She added the term to Part I of her dissertation in her revisions: “the decisive fact, determining man as a conscious remembering being is birth or ‘natality,’ that is, the fact that we have entered the world though birth” (Arendt 1996, 51). The term “natality” was not an altogether new addition to her dissertation, but rather identified a specific aspect of the human condition she discovered in the thought of Augustine, and which she later had come to describe as natality. In 1965 she wrote to Mary McCarthy: “I am re-writing the whole darned business, \textit{trying not to do anything new}, but only to explain in English (and not in Latin) what I thought when I was twenty” (my emphasis; Scott 1996, 119).
The concept of man as a beginner appears in the context of Arendt’s analysis of Augustine’s ontology. Arendt compares God as the Supreme Being to man who is a created being. In contrast to a created being who has a beginning and is mutable, God always was, is, and will be. God is immutable, eternal Being, while the structure of the being of man is “becoming,” as opposed to Being as such. Arendt considers the function memory serves in Augustine’s ontology as the faculty that allows us to recall our origin (Ursprung) in the Creator as the Supreme Being (Arendt 2003, 57). In two respects we find the theoretical foundation in Arendt’s dissertation that she later draws upon for the development of her concept of “natality” as it appears in her more mature political theory: Arendt’s analysis of the possibility of memoria and man as creatum esse.

In her dissertation, Arendt explains that, for Augustine, in order for man to desire happiness as a possibility for his future, he must have had some experience of it in the past. Thus, if man desires eternal life as the happy life, he must have had some experience of eternity. For Augustine, it is because of memory (memoria) that man is able to long for a future eternity; memory points man back “beyond the past in this world, since it remembers a happy life which could not be achieved in the unbroken misery of this life” (Copy A, 287). Through the faculty of memory, man discovers his origin in God as the eternal.

In remembering the past, memory “re-presents it.” In other words, memory makes the past a present reality now existing within the mind (Arendt 1996, 46-47). Memory draws the past into the present in such a way that it can be expected as a future possibility. That the past is not lost forever, but can become a future possibility,
Arendt writes, “is what gives memory its great power” (Copy A, 294). In recalling his origin in God as the eternal, man can long to return to eternity in the future. Furthermore, unlike the actualization of the return, remembering the origin does not depend upon the will, but rather, as Arendt writes in her revisions, is “characteristic of the human condition as such” (Arendt 1996, 52). Because they have a beginning, human beings are remembering beings.

For Augustine, memory not only points us back to our source in God, but also is also a “re-collection” of my self from the world (Arendt 1996, 48). When I discover and acknowledge God and not the world as the source of my being, and then actualize the return to this source by God’s grace, the self which has been dispersed within the world is re-collected. In discovering God as the source of my being, I also discover who I am. I now know that the essence of my being is “createdness” (kreatürlichkeit) (Arendt 2003, 45). In memory, I discover my origin, as well as the meaning of my being. Life has an end (finis vitae) because it has a beginning (Arendt 2003, 78). It is the beginning of life, Arendt says, and not the end of life that determines man’s being (Copy A, 307).

In her dissertation, Arendt carefully explains the structure of the being of man as a created being. For Augustine, God is the Supreme Being (summe esse) who has no beginning and no end (Arendt 2003, 61). He is eternal and immutable. In Him there is no change. Out of all of the beings in the world created by God, it is only human beings,

94 “His search for memory is at the same time a flight from dispersion. His search is guided by the love of God’s love, because it is the proper confession, which consists in recalling (recordari)” (Copy A, 289).
who, because of “natality” (as Arendt added), can consciously return to the origin of
being through memory (Arendt 1996, 51). In contrast to God who is the Supreme Being,
the structure of the being of man is not Being as such, but rather becoming: “its being is
determined by its origin (fieri)—it becomes, it has a beginning” (Copy A, 293). Man was
created by God, he has not always existed, and so he has a discrete beginning. Thus,
man has the structure of coming from and heading towards. One paragraph from Part II
of Arendt’s dissertation, which references Book XI of the Confessions, sums up nicely her
interpretation of Augustine’s ontology of man:

Whatever the creature is it had first to become. The structure of
its being is genesis and change (fieri and mutari). The Creator is
Being as such, and thus, on principle, prior to everything (ante
omnia). “But what has not been made, and yet is, has in it nothing
that was not there before; for this is the quality of change and
variation.” The mutability of the creature is its specific mode of
being—a mode that is neither being nor non-being, but something
in between. (Copy A, 291)

Because they have a beginning, human beings are in a continual mode of “becoming.”
As individual human beings are always in a constant state of change, each person is
always something one day that he was not the day before. In other words, “in the full
concreteness of human life,” men do something new today that was not expected
yesterday. Arendt writes that men are “always createdness acting (verhalten) in some
way or the other” (Copy A, 292).95 In the dissertation, we see Arendt describing men as
being capable of initiating something new precisely because they have a beginning (ein

95 E.B. Ashton translated verhalten as “acting” (Copy A, 292; Arendt 2003, 63).
Anfang), and because the structure of their being is “becoming” (Copy A, 291; Arendt 2003, 64). In The Human Conditions she says that because of natality, men “never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow” (Arendt 1998, 244).

Nevertheless, and in sharp contrast to Arendt’s later appropriation of the concept, we see in the dissertation that for Augustine natality means that human beings, because they have their origin in God, are meant to cast off (abicere me) all uniqueness so that they may ascend to God who is immutable Being (Arendt 2003, 45). In the choice for God and against the world, it is now God and not myself who is “the determinant of all actions” (Copy A, 317). Indeed, the more we grow in our love for God, the more we will shed anything we are or do that makes us a unique individual: “self-rejection is the same as being more like God” (Copy A, 318). In the return, we transcend our becoming—our mutability—in order to approach the immutability of Being as such. For Augustine, “every creature is only in so far as it is thus re-connected with its source” (my emphasis; Copy A, 291). In order to lay hold of my true being, I must return the author of my being. What we find then, is that in the return to Being, the lovers of God assume a radical equality with one another as each increasingly casts off his own “createdness.” The possibility for pride in oneself, in one’s unique talents or accomplishments, is removed as all individual distinctions disappear in the ascent to pure Being (Copy A, 316).

As Arendt explains in her dissertation, the origin of man in God is determinative for our being, because it is what makes possible two new beginnings. The first is the return to God in caritas. This power to return to God is granted to us by grace. Through
grace, we are actually re-born, even while we are yet in the world; we can become a *nova creatura*—a new creation (Arendt 2003, 97). In his “newly felt dependence” upon the Creator, the creature experiences the Creator “anew” (Copy A, 327). The acceptance of God’s grace “is tantamount to a new creation...in it the creature is re-created, by being delivered from its sinfulness and thus from being of the world” (Copy A, 329).

The second birth is experienced as the death of our bodies and the end of our life in the world. In the final return to Being, and in the laying hold of eternal life, we experience a new birth. Indeed, “continued life after death corresponds to birth ‘after the world’” (Copy A, 305). It is our own “not yet” which assures us “of the eternity of its ‘whence’” (Copy A, 306). Our origin in God makes the return to our Creator possible. Thus, Arendt writes, it is our origin, our beginning before the world and not our mortality in the world, that determines the meaning of our being: “The ‘not yet’ of life, therefore, is not nothing, but the very source which determines life in the positiveness of its being” (Copy A, 307). For one who has accepted God’s grace, death, as our own “no more” in the world is no longer to be feared: “death becomes the beginning of eternity” (Copy A, 312). The greatest peril for man is to remain tied to the world in habit. Such a one who is not reborn in this world as a *nova creatura* will not know birth after the world in eternal life. Instead, he will experience a “second death,” a fate much worse than earthly mortality because it means eternal separation from God (*alienatio a Deo*) (Arendt 2003, 77, 121).

In the dissertation, however, we saw that Arendt was troubled by the transcendence of individuality that is required both in the contexts of love as desire and
love as return. In each case: “It is not in our variable, changeable earthly life governed by death that we find the good of life” (Copy A, 271). In the context of love as desire, for Augustine, there are only two possibilities for the who of who I am. If I long for the world, I am a resident of the world. If I long for the eternal, I become a future resident of eternity. In desiring my eternal, immutable self, I must reject my unique self as it appears in the world. Everything I am or have made of myself in the world must be regarded as “for the sake of”: “man’s own ‘I’ is like everything else: a mere ‘thing’ to be used for the true life he seeks in the absolute future” (Copy A, 282; Arendt 2003, 49-50). Furthermore, I no longer love the other as he appears in his concrete worldly existence, but only as someone who, like me, can desire eternity.

This problem also holds true, Arendt argues, in the context of love as return. The return to Being makes the beginning and end of life interchangeable and meaningless:

life’s factual course ceases to be the singular, invariable, and irreversible one of being toward non-being. It now runs from being to being, from eternity to eternity…the concrete course of life is no longer important. If death only brings us new being, which is indeed our original being, existence has been leveled off, and it does not matter to its being whether it is long or short…the interchangeability of life’s beginning and end lets life itself appear as no more than a mere distance stripped of any qualitative import. Existence itself loses its autonomous meaning. (Copy A, 313)

Finally, in her analysis of social life in Augustine’s thought, Arendt demonstrates that we do not love ourselves or the neighbor for who he or she is, but only for the sake of divine grace. Overall, in her dissertation, Arendt finds it problematic that, for Augustine, while we are created into the world as unique individuals, to love my self in its
createdness—as a unique, mutable being—is, in fact, sinful. God created each of us as a unique person, and yet, if I am to return to God and receive eternal life, I must transcend this very same uniqueness.

For Augustine, Arendt writes, “the possibilities of human experience are limited to the good or evil that can be expected and will be met in the future” (Copy A, 287). Natality in the thought of Augustine does not mean that man has “all possibilities open to him, but is subject to the alternative outlined in createdness and being of the world” (Copy A, 326). Man can either remain tied to the world in habit and destined for a second death, or he can choose to return to the source of Being, be reborn even while yet in the world, and destined for eternal life. The time between the “no more” and the “not yet” has no existential meaning. Either one is a slave to sin, or he transcends his becoming in the world to arrive at immutable Being.

It is not only in her repeated reference to “Initium ut esset homo creatus est” that Arendt acknowledges her indebtedness to Augustine for her concept of natality and man as beginner by virtue of birth. In her first chapter on the vita activa, she writes that there are two creation stories in Genesis. One emphasizes plurality, “Male and female created He them,” while the other stresses singularity and thus natality (emphasis in original; Arendt 1998, 8). Augustine, she says, chooses to focuses on the second creation story in Genesis where God first creates Adam. His purpose, she says, is to contrast the species character of animals: “all animals were ordered ‘to come into being several at once,’” with the individuality of human life, who is created into the world one by one, “whereas man was created unum ac singulum” (Arendt 1998, 8).
The discussion of Augustine’s ontology in Part II of her dissertation is echoed in a discussion of Christian immortality near the end of *The Human Condition*. There she writes that the ancient pagans understood immortality as the immortality of the world. Christianity, however, introduced the idea of the eternity of human life. Even though his life on earth might be believed to be “the most miserable stage,” nevertheless it was understood to have a definite beginning on earth. Each person “in his uniqueness begins life by birth on earth...and without this life that will be terminated in death, there cannot be eternal life” (Arendt 1998, 316). In her dissertation, Arendt wrote: “The ‘not yet’ of life is not nothing, but the very source which determines life in the positiveness of its being...what it conveys is independent of the absolute ‘no more’ of death” (Copy A, 307). We find the same thought reflected in *The Human Condition*: “men, though they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin” (Arendt 1998, 246). For Arendt, it is the beginning of life which determines life in the very positiveness of its being.

For Arendt, both in her dissertation and in *The Human Condition*, because human beings have a beginning, they are necessarily set into motion. In the dissertation, Arendt describe man as coming from and moving towards. In *The Human Condition* she recalls the Greek meaning of the verb “archein,” which means “to begin,” as also meaning “to set something into motion” (Arendt 1998, 177). Interestingly, in the revisions of her dissertation, Arendt keeps the original translation’s way of describing this human mode of existence in motion as “acting” in some way or another (Arendt 1996, 53). For Arendt, because they have a beginning human beings are set into motion,
that is, they are able to act. That human beings are capable of action means that they are capable of the unexpected and the improbable (1998, 178).

Arendt speaks in startlingly religious language: “the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle” (Arendt 1998, 178). Indeed, she says that no one understood this better than Jesus of Nazareth:

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. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope, those two essential characteristics of human existence which Greek antiquity ignored altogether, discounting the keeping of faith as a very uncommon and not too important virtue and counting hope among the evils of illusion in Pandora’s box. It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their “glad tidings”: “A child has been born unto us.” (Arendt 1998, 246-247)

For Arendt, action, the introduction of something new into human affairs, is the “one miracle-working faculty of man” (Arendt 1998, 246).

Arendt relies on Augustine for her concept of men as beginners by virtue of birth, but what she means by the possibility of new beginnings is entirely different and actually opposed to Augustine’s thought. For Arendt, as it is for Augustine, natality is closely related to the human condition of plurality.96 Men are all the same in the fact

96 “God started the human race from one man to show to mankind how pleasing to him is unity in plurality” (Augustine, City of God 12.23).
that they are all born as completely new and unique human beings. It is because we are all equal, but yet distinctive that we need speech in order to communicate to each other our different perspectives and our unique identities, and for Arendt, “speech is what makes man a political being” (Arendt 1998, 3). Because all human beings are distinct and unique individuals, they are capable of “action,” doing or saying something new in the presence of others. If human beings were all identical beings who all behaved in the same way, action would be impossible and unnecessary (Arendt 1998, 8).

While labor and work are both related to natality, providing and preparing for newcomers, it is action that has the closest connection to natality: “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting” (Arendt 1998, 9). Of the three activities, action, Arendt explains, is the only distinctly political activity because it is the only activity that requires the presence of others, and is “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter” (Arendt 1998, 7).

In her dissertation, Arendt wrote that, for Augustine, it is our origin, not our death, that determines life in the positiveness of its being. She echoes the same idea in *The Human Condition*, but her intention is not to direct us to return to Being, but to engage in politics. She writes. “since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical thought” (Arendt 1998, 9). For Augustine, of all created beings, it is only human beings who are able to return to their origin and, in this way, attain eternal
life. For Arendt, because human beings are unique individuals, only they, of all animal species, are able to act and thus attain an earthly immortality (Arendt 1998, 23).

Arendt explains that most political action is conducted through speech, as opposed to command or sheer violence, which, for Arendt, are pre-political (Arendt 1998, 26-27). Political speech addresses some worldly, objective reality, which varies depending on the political community. This objective reality is an “inter-est, which lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (Arendt 1998, 182). This objective reality will appear differently to each person because each occupies a different location within the common world, and because he or she is a distinctive individual. For this reason, reaching a collective decision requires persuasive speech (Arendt 1998, 26). This is the specifically political art of rhetoric, an art, it is worth noting, that Augustine relinquished after his conversion. We know from reading Origins, that politics is extinguished and the common world no longer be discerned when people are not only not permitted to express different opinions, but even to hold their own beliefs. Totalitarianism attempted to divest human beings of all opinions, even support for the ideology itself.

Speech is also necessary because it is revelatory. Actions require interpretation. Because everyone is unique and distinct, their activity within the public realm provides the opportunity to express “who” a person is: “Speech corresponds to the fact of distinctness and is the actualization of the human condition of plurality, that is, of living as a distinct and unique being among equals” (Arendt 1998, 178). Without speech accompanying the activity, the revelatory possibility of action is lost. The meaning of
actions are revealed when the actor identifies and explains himself. Through appearance in the world in word and deed, men are able to disclose who they are, their unique personal identities (Arendt 1998, 179).97 “In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world” (Arendt 1998, 179). This requires the willingness and courage to risk disclosure, something, Arendt says, which neither the doer of good works nor the criminal is prepared to do (Arendt 1998, 180).98 It is only because of speech, by talking with and making sense of human affairs, that human beings can create and experience meaningfulness (Arendt 1998, 4).

Action is the activity that engages in founding and preserving political bodies (Arendt 1998, 8-9). Unlike animals who are also social, men are capable of the political. Politics arises out of men acting and speaking together. The public sphere is the location

97 Speaking on the occasion when the German Book Trade awarded Karl Jaspers their Peace Prize in 1958, the same year The Human Condition was published, Arendt tells her audience that our modern biases prevent us from appreciating, as the Romans once did, that it is only in the light of the public realm that a person can achieve “full reality” (Arendt 1968, 72). Though we as moderns are accustomed to associating the personal with the subjective and the impersonal with the factual and objective, and viewing the former as belonging to the private sphere and the latter as belonging to the public sphere, in truth, “personality is anything but a private affair” (Arendt 1968, 72). “Personality”, for Arendt, or the “who” of the person and not the “what,” is more easily recognized by others than by one’s own self. It therefore requires a public space to appear and be known. “To the extent that this public space is also a spiritual realm, there is manifest in it what the Romans called humanitas” (Arendt 1968, 73). The personality is “the very height of humanness because it is valid without being objective” (Arendt 1968, 73). The valid personality cannot be acquired in solitude and is only gained by those who risk revealing themselves in the public world. In this projecting of one’s life into the public, one is actually gifting oneself to humankind (Arendt 1968, 74).

98 “Political passions” such as courage, ambition, the drive for excellence and the pursuit of public freedom and happiness are “out of the ordinary,” but they are not as rare as we have been taught or brought up to think they are in a society that “has perverted all virtues into social values” (Arendt 1963, 280).
of these activities, and founding political institutions designed to outlast several
generations affords stability to human affairs. As speaking and acting is uniquely human,
so also creating political communities is a distinctly human capacity (Arendt 1998, 24). It
is our political body that we share in common with others, with those who have gone
before and with those who will come after.

Acting with others, both in speaking with each other and in acting in concert, is a
specifically political form of being with others (Arendt 1998, 162). For Arendt, this is also
the meaning of power. Thus power corresponds to the human condition of plurality.
Power exists potentially whenever people come together as equals, and it is actualized
when men act in concert. Power is realized “where words are not empty and deeds not
brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds
are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities”
(Arendt 1998, 200). Power occurs when we are with others and neither for nor against
them.99 It is something distinctly different from force or violence.100 Power is not rule,

99 For Arendt, power is not the classic political science definition of “A being able to get B to do
something that B would not otherwise do” (Dahl 1957, 2: 201-15).

100 Arendt writes:

Under the conditions of human life, the only alternative to power is not strength—
which is helpless against power—but force, which indeed one man alone can exert
against his fellow men and of which one or a few can possess a monopoly by acquiring
the means of violence. But while violence can destroy power, it can never become a
substitute for it. From this results the by no means infrequent political combination of
force and powerlessness, an array of impotent forces that spend themselves, often
spectacularly and vehemently but in utter futility, leaving behind neither monuments
nor stories, hardly enough memory to enter into history at all. In historical experience
and traditional theory, this combination, even if it is not recognized as such, is known as
tyranny, and the time-honored fear of this form of government is not exclusively
dominion, or power over others. Neither is it identified with material capabilities.

History, Arendt maintains, is full of examples of men who possessed great material power, but who were impotent because they did not know how to recruit their fellow men for collective action (Arendt 1998, 188-189):

Popular revolt against materially strong rulers, on the other hand, may engender an almost irresistible power even if it forgoes the use of violence in the face of materially vastly superior forces. To call this ‘passive resistance’ is certainly an ironic idea; it is one of the most active and efficient ways of action ever devised, because it cannot be countered by fighting, where there may be defeat or victory, but only by mass slaughter in which even the victor is defeated, cheated of his prize, since nobody can rule over dead men. (Arendt 1998, 201)

Power is what makes possible the founding and the preserving of political communities. It is also within the political body, where people come together in public, that power always remains a potentiality (Arendt 1998, 201). Laws, for Arendt, even checks and balances, need not limit power, but rather provide a space for it (Arendt 1998, 201). Just as power exists potentially wherever men come together, impotence is characteristic of isolation. As we saw in Origins, the prerequisite of totalitarian domination was the isolation and atomization of millions of people—the breaking up of all social relationships and the destruction of mutual trust and interdependence. Furthermore,

inspired by its cruelty, which—as the long series of benevolent tyrants and enlightened despots attests—is not among its inevitable features, but by the impotence and futility to which it condemns the rulers as well as the ruled. (Arendt 1998, 202; see also, Arendt 1963, 9-11)

101 The most recent demonstration of power in this respect is what has now come to be known as the Arab Spring. Although, as with all human actions, the outcome is still uncertain.
because power always involves the interplay of varying wills and intentions, the aspiration to omnipotence requires (as totalitarians well knew) the elimination of human plurality (Arendt 1998, 202).

Action also creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history (Arendt 1998, 9). As each individual person, coming from birth to death, is entirely unique, his or her life can be told in the form of a story. These collective stories are what constitutes human history (Arendt 1998, 184). For Arendt, human beings have the capability for great deeds and words, actions that are worthy of being remembered. Though truly great deeds are rare, they appear often enough in history that history itself cannot be characterized as either cyclical or progressive. Indeed, one new word or one new deed, Arendt says, could change the entire course of history (Arendt 1998, 190). In On Revolution, Arendt explains that it is only because of a “Christian concept of history, as it was formulated by Augustine” that one is able to view anything new at all breaking into the course of history (Arendt 1963, 20). That new beginnings which interrupt normal processes in the realm of human affairs can be conceived of at all is due to the development of a rectilinear understanding of time (Arendt 1963, 19). This concept of time was generated by belief in the new beginning of Christ entering human history and through this “unique, unrepeatable event” starting something completely new and previously unknown to humankind (Arendt 1963, 20). But Augustine, Arendt argues, could only conceive of the new entering human history in two ways: first, in the birth of Christ, the newness of which was to never again to be seen in the course of human history, and, second, in accepting the life of faith through which the believer could start
their lives over as a new beginning having gained a new perspective on the world—the perspective of eternity. The only new beginnings Augustine could imagine were “transmundane” events and only one—the birth of Christ—interrupted “the normal course of secular history” (Arendt 1963, 20). Otherwise, in Augustine’s philosophy of history, regimes rise and fall in the cycles envisioned by antiquity.

For her concept of history, Arendt relies on Augustine’s concept of *memoria* to explain the possibility for earthly immortality. Through what Arendt calls “the gift of recollection,” men can achieve a kind of earthly immortality by doing or saying something that is recorded by history, reified in monuments, or institutionalized in political bodies (Arendt 1998, 170). “Deeds and facts and events and patterns of thought or ideas,” performed in public where they are seen, heard, and then remembered by others, can only be preserved through reification (Arendt 1998, 95):

> Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfillment and which makes it, indeed, as the Greeks held, the mother of all arts, the living activities of action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they never had been. (Arendt 1998, 95)

Through a variety of art forms and the written word, these activities can be granted an earthly immortality of their own. Indeed, Arendt says that a political community, its physical and legal institutions, act as a kind of “organized remembrance” (Arendt 1998, 197). For Arendt, the introduction of something new into the world, something deserving of preservation in our collective memory, is the highest possibility of being human.
For Arendt, natality provides the possibility for a second birth, but not in Augustine’s sense:

With word and deed we insert ourselves into 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...its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative. (Arendt 1998, 176)

It is in the public sphere that human beings should be free to express his or her individuality. The public offers the opportunity for what the ancients called virtue, or what we know of as excellence. The public realm affords a stage where we can act out our distinctiveness and perform excellent words and deeds (Arendt 1998, 49). But the performance of excellence is only possible in the presence of others, Arendt argues, in “the shining brightness we once called glory” (Arendt 1998, 180). Distinguishing oneself from others also requires a guarantee of equality, the “formality of the public, constituted by one’s peers” (Arendt 1998, 49). Natality is significant for Arendt specifically because it is makes politics, and therefore the experiences of freedom and meaningfulness, possible for human beings:

Without action to bring into the play of the world the new beginning of which each man is capable by virtue of being born, “there is no new thing under the sun”; without speech to materialize and memorialize, however tentatively, the “new things” that appear and shine forth, “there is no remembrance”; without the enduring permanence of a human artifact, there cannot “be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.” And without power, the space of appearance brought forth through action and speech in public will fade away as rapidly as the living deed and the living word. Perhaps nothing in our history has been so short-lived as trust in
power, nothing more lasting than the Platonic and Christian distrust of the splendor attending its space of appearance, nothing—finally in the modern age—more common than the conviction that “power corrupts.” (Arendt 1998, 204-205)

For Arendt, is it the doing of new deeds and the speaking of new words that constitutes human freedom, and it is the public realm, where these actions are performed among and with one’s peers that is the space where freedom is exercised. For Arendt, freedom is not found in eternity or in the freedom of the will, but rather it is an “objective state of human existence” (Arendt 1998, 71).

6.6 Freedom

In Arendt’s dissertation she describes the forms freedom takes for Augustine. In Part I, she describes the Augustinian man as one who is fundamentally a desiring being. Love, in this context, is understood as desire. Man is a desiring being because God has made him to be happy, and because man himself cannot be the source of his own happiness. Instead, his happiness lies in spending eternity with God. Having and holding onto life with God for all of eternity is what Augustine means by “enjoyment.” No other good can be enjoyed in this way, and every worldly good is only to be used (not enjoyed) for the sake of eternal life spent with God.

However, because men are born into a world already built by and shared with others, it is natural for man to love this world first and to habitually desire the world’s goods. The problem is that the goods of the world can never be held for eternity, they can be lost against our will, and, in fact, all worldly goods we possess will certainly and
inevitably be lost once and for all in death. This engenders a constant feeling of anxiety. We are either anxious in striving for the good we desire, or, once we have it, we are anxious over losing it. When we love the goods of the world (what Augustine refers to as *cupiditas*), never being able to free ourselves from this constant anxiety, we actually become enslaved to the world. A life lived in love for the world can never be a happy life; rather, Augustine describes this life as one characterized by unbroken misery and not happiness.

This is how we arrive at Augustine’s understanding of the nature of freedom in the context of love as desire. While we desire the world’s goods, we become enslaved to the world and its desires. As long as death looms ahead of us, we can never be free from fear. Freedom only comes with the calm possession of eternal life in God. This is the good that can never be lost against our will and which will bring us absolute fearlessness. For Augustine, when love is understood as desire, freedom becomes freedom from fear (*Freiheit ist die Freiheit von der Furcht*) (Arendt 2003, 39). Augustine, Arendt argues, only offers us a negative conception of freedom (*negative Bedeutung*) in terms of security (Arendt 2003, 30). Freedom is not a capability (freedom to), but rather freedom *from* fear.

Furthermore, it is not a freedom that can be found in this life or in this world. While believers can be free from the fearful striving that characterizes love of the world by regarding objects in the world as merely “useful,” even those who are saved live in “chaste fear,” a fear that salvation could be lost. Augustine describes this as being a slave to love (*servi caritatis*) (Arendt 2003, 48). Only in eternity is authentic freedom to
be found, characterized by the absolute calm of having and holding eternal life in the presence of God. Freedom, Arendt says, has been projected into an absolute future by Augustine. We know that Arendt is profoundly dissatisfied with Augustine’s understanding of freedom in the context of love as desire. What he has done, she concludes, is strip the world of any qualitative value (Arendt 2003, 35).

There is another concept of freedom, the freedom of the will, that Arendt identifies in Augustine’s thought. This freedom appears in the context of love as the return to the Creator (Part II), and also in the context of love as shared past (Part III). It is the human faculty of the freedom of the will, Arendt writes, that is what enables man to build the man-made world. Out of free will man turns the given world—the divine fabric—into a home for man and makes himself at home in this world. “What ‘happens by our will’ turns heaven and earth into the world” (Copy A, 330; Arendt 2003, 70). Out of free will men founds and freely constitutes what Augustine calls the saeculum. Each new man born into the world as an act of free will, acts into this world, and thereby constitutes the world anew (neu konstituiert) (Arendt 2003, 87). For Augustine, our constitution of the world, and our activities within the world are enabled by free will and guided by our love for the world (dilectio mundi). In this love men belong to the world and become “worldly.”

But, as Arendt demonstrates, there is a paradox in Augustine’s theory of the freedom of the will. For Augustine, it is by our will that we have founded the saeculum (“free will enables it to give its being to the world”); however, at the same time, he argues that loving the world is not a choice because the world is already there, and it is
natural for us to love it (Copy A, 314, 331). *Cupiditas* is actually the lack of decision that keeps us tied to the world. For Augustine, although man has free will, what he does out of love for the world is not performed in freedom, but rather by habit (*consuetudo*): “habit is what time and again puts sin in control of life” (Copy A, 320). Augustine explains this as the result of Adam’s original sin, which we have all inherited: “habit demonstrates the original sinfulness of man’s will” (Copy A, 322).

It is because of sin that man has a second nature (*secunda natura*) that has already delivered him over to the world. Original sin is what covers up the true source of being in the Creator. As we saw in Chapter Two, it is conscience that demands man’s estrangement from the world and his return to God. However, although man may know what God demands of him, having already yielded to the world, he finds himself unable to accomplish the return to God on his own, even despite his willing that it to be so: “Even in a conscious acknowledgement of the law the creature gains nothing but a knowledge of sin; its sin as such remains in the discrepancy of will and power” (Copy A, 327). This discrepancy is not due to a lack of will, but due to a lack of power. It is the difference between “I will” (*velle*) and “I can” (*posse*) (Arendt 2003, 94). To further complicate matters, Arendt notes that for Augustine man has a divided will; that is, he wills to return and, at the same time, not to return to God. This too is the result of sin. It is only God’s grace which enables man to be reconciled to his Creator: “the grant of power to do so—which is divine grace—comes from without” (Copy A, 327). It is grace that helps make the leap from the “I will” to the “I can.”
In the reconciliation, Augustine says, man is no longer free for himself, but subjects himself to be “as God” (sicut Deus) (Arendt 2003, 84). Quoting from the City of God, Book XIX, Arendt writes, “man has been so constituted in truth that he was meant to live not according to himself but to Him who made him—that is, he was meant to do the will of God rather than his own” (Copy A, 331). In Part III of Arendt’s dissertation, we see that because the believer shares the same sinful past, he is obligated—is compelled—to seek the other’s salvation. Arendt describes this, in contradictory terms, as having freely chosen the obligation to love the other (Copy A, 353).

What we discover in Arendt’s dissertation is that freedom is both a state of being and a human faculty. According to Arendt, freedom for Augustine is a negative state. It is freedom from the anxiety and fear that comes with loving the world. True freedom will be found not in this world, but in the calm stillness of eternal life with God. As a human faculty, man’s will is not truly free insofar as he is born into a world that he already loves. Because of sin, man finds himself enslaved to the world and its desires by habit, not by choice. For this reason, grace is required in order to provide man the necessary power he needs to choose to return to God. However, once he has returned to God, he is no longer a slave to the world, but is now a slave to God. God “has a claim upon His creature against all the existential possibilities offered to it by its own will” (Copy A, 325; Arendt 2003, 92). Man has only two choices—to belong to the world or to eternity: “This negative definition means nothing else than that in the search for his own being man does not have all possibilities open to him, but is subject to the alternatives outlined in createdness and being of the world” (Copy A, 326). He is obligated to be as
God and to love his neighbor as God does. Arendt concludes that, for Augustine, freedom is never a state of being that can be found within the world, but only in eternity.

Arendt’s criticism of Augustine’s concept of freedom remained with her from 1929 until she wrote *The Human Condition* in the late 1950s. Of course, freedom was one of the most significant themes of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as she demonstrated that totalitarianism’s ultimate intention is to completely eradicate human freedom from the earth. However, it wasn’t until a decade after she wrote *Origins* that she confronted Augustine’s philosophy of freedom head-on.

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt tells us what freedom is not, and, in her discussion of the *vita activa* and the rise of the social, explains how moderns have come to have a mistaken understanding of freedom’s meaning. For Arendt, all human beings, like every other living species, are animals with biological needs to eat, drink, and reproduce. Human beings, inasmuch as they are compelled to meet these necessities, are what Arendt calls “*animal laborans.*” All those activities that are performed chiefly for the sake of keeping oneself alive or reproducing the species are performed by necessity and not in freedom (Arendt 1998, 12). Furthermore, all those activities that are performed for the sake of the accumulation of wealth alone are not free. All these activities are devoted to human needs and wants, since they produce what is merely
necessary or useful (Arendt 1998, 13). Only the life of action, initiating something entirely new through word and deeds is autonomous, and therefore free.\textsuperscript{102}

In her essay “What is Freedom?” (1961), Arendt argues that the philosophical tradition—which has associated freedom with an inner dialogue—with the freedom of the will, has obscured the true meaning of freedom, which above all else is political. She points directly to Augustine as the source of the idea of the freedom of the will, previously unknown in antiquity, and to the experience of conversion that Arendt described in her dissertation, as giving rise to this idea. It was Augustine who articulated a fight within oneself not between reason and passion, but within the will itself. Recalling the same passages she interpreted in her dissertation, she writes that for Augustine, the will can will to do and not to do at the same time (in sharp contrast to Plato, of course, for whom to know the good is to do the good) (Arendt 2006, 157).

Because of the association of the freedom of the will with the inability to carry out what the will would have us do, and which wills at the same time for us not to do, Arendt argues that the will, thus understood, became not a source of freedom but a source of oppression (Arendt 2006, 160). From Augustine’s understanding of the divided will came the ideal of freedom as within oneself, and independence from the temptations of the world and from others (Arendt 2006, 162). This is an idea she first

\textsuperscript{102} Freedom, today, is often equated with negative liberty (Arendt 1963, 24-25). But civil rights and liberties, which are the result of liberation from governments overstepping their powers, do not themselves constitute freedom. Though the guarantee of these rights and liberties are a \textit{condition} of freedom, freedom as Arendt defines it “is participation in public affairs, or admission to the public realm” (Arendt 1963, 25).
developed in her dissertation: “Here free will is deduced from the ideal of self-sufficiency, which renders the ‘outside’ unimportant. If I belong to what is ‘outside myself’ I am enslaved” (Copy A, 267). And also: “Used [the outside world] ceases to be independent, and thus to threaten to enslave man” (Copy A, 277). For Arendt, the equating of freedom with self-sufficiency and sovereignty has had disastrous consequences: “Where men wish to be sovereign, as individuals or as organized groups, they must submit to the oppression of the will, be this the individual will with which I force myself, or the ‘general will’ of an organized group” (Arendt 2006, 163). For Arendt, this ideal of freedom is absurd precisely because we are not and never will be independent from the world. Whenever we act, or simply by living in a world made by men acting within it, we act into a web of relationships and are affected by others actions within this web. The consequences of our own or the actions of others can never be controlled. This is the very nature of freedom, and this is why Arendt argues that action always requires some degree of courage (Arendt 2006, 154).

Arendt argues that the whole problem of freedom was framed by the early Christian tradition (Arendt 2006, 163). From then on, the philosophical tradition distorted instead of clarifying “the very idea of freedom such as it is given in human experience by transposing it from its original field, the realm of politics and human affairs in general, to an inward domain, the will, where it would be open to

103 Rousseau is “the most consistent representative of the theory of sovereignty, which he derived directly from the will, so that he could conceive of political power in the strict image of individual will-power” (Arendt 2006, 162).
introspection” (Arendt 2006, 144). In response to Augustine, Arendt writes that if freedom was equivalent to the freedom of the will, then we would have to acknowledge that the ancients did not know freedom, which, of course, is absurd (Arendt 2006, 156). For Arendt, the Greeks and Romans knew better than any people that came after them the true meaning of political freedom (Arendt 2006, 156):

Only when the early Christians, and especially Paul, discovered a kind of freedom which had no relation to politics, could the concept of freedom enter the history of philosophy. Freedom became on of the chief problems of philosophy when it was experienced as something occurring between me and myself, and outside of the intercourse between men. (Arendt 2006, 156)

For Arendt is was Augustine, “the great Christian thinker who in fact introduced Paul’s free will, along with its perplexities into the history of philosophy” (Arendt 2006, 165). From that point onward, freedom and freedom of the will became synonymous (Arendt 2006, 156).

It is primarily because of Augustine that, even today, we think of freedom as an attribute of the will and thought and not of action (Arendt 2006, 153). Augustine’s philosophy of the freedom of the will, Arendt explains, was actually proceeded by the philosophy of late-antiquity, which asserted that true freedom could only be found within, Epictetus being the preeminent example. This concern with inner freedom, as she describes in her dissertation in regards to Augustine, had to do with a deep dissatisfaction with everything the world could offer (Arendt 2006, 145). Epictetus believed that “the inward space where man struggles and subdues himself is more entirely his own, namely, more securely shielded from outside interference, than any
worldly home could ever be” (Arendt 2006, 146). And before Epictetus, as we already know, Plato and Aristotle had elevated the vita contemplativa to “the highest and freest way of life” (Arendt 2006, 149). This inner freedom articulated in its various forms by Plato, Epictetus, and then Augustine, became the primary understanding of freedom within the Western Tradition. In sharp contrast, Arendt argues that freedom is actually the opposite of an inner freedom, where people feel themselves to be free, which is politically irrelevant (Arendt 2006, 145).

Following her discussion of the animal laborans in The Human Condition, Arendt argues that in order for man to experience freedom, in order for him to be at liberty to act, he must first be liberated from the day after day struggle to procure the necessities of life (Arendt 2006, 147). Furthermore, she reiterates the idea that the private sphere, the home and the hearth, is not the realm of freedom, but the realm of hierarchy and command over others within the home (Arendt 2006, 147). Of course, we already know that under tyrannical regimes, there lacks a public space where men can appear and act in freedom, and that under totalitarian regimes men are dominated in every aspect of their life. It is precisely because of the rise of totalitarianism, Arendt argues, that we cannot take freedom for granted (Arendt 2006, 148).

Unfortunately, we moderns have learned that politics is a threat to freedom, and that the ultimate purpose of politics is to provide security so that we can be free in our private lives—free to practice our religion or to compete economically, among others (Arendt 2006, 148). “We are inclined to believe that freedom begins where politics ends” (Arendt 2006, 148). Liberalism, Arendt argues, “has done more than its share to
banish the notion of liberty from the political realm,” primarily because of its claim that government is responsible for providing a space, not for freedom, but for “the maintenance of life and the safeguarding of its interests” (Arendt 2006, 154).

As we saw above, Arendt believes the realm of necessity has taken over and now determines public administration, eclipsing the realm of freedom. Augustine too saw freedom as freedom-from—in this case freedom from the fear that involvement in the human world necessarily entails. For him, political activity and responsibility is a burden of love, and true freedom is “freedom from politics” (Arendt 2006, 148). Arendt writes, “The Christian concept of political freedom, moreover, arose out of the early Christians’ suspicion and hostility against the public realm as such, from whose concerns they demanded to be absolved in order to be free” (Arendt 2006, 149). Freedom from politics was demanded “for the sake of salvation” (Arendt 2006, 149).

As I wrote in my own interpretation of Augustine’s political theory in Chapter One, freedom for Augustine also meant the government provided protection for the free exercise of the Christian faith—this being Augustine’s primary measure of a good regime. As we saw in her dissertation, Arendt is also troubled here by these negative conceptions of freedom because she believes they have deprived us of a fundamental human experience.

Against Augustine, Arendt argues that freedom “is not a phenomenon of the will. We deal here not with the *liberum arbitrium*, a freedom of choice that arbitrates and decides between two given things one good and one evil” (Arendt 2006, 150). To determine right from wrong, Arendt says, is not a faculty of the will, but of judgment. It
is judgment that determines the aim of action and precedes it, while the will is the power to command which initiates action (Arendt 2006, 150-151). The will is not a matter of freedom, but of strength (Arendt 2006, 150). Freedom is not the faculty of the will, but “springs” from what Arendt calls “a principle” (Arendt 2006, 150). Principles inspire from without and not from within, and the “inspiring principle” only becomes apparent in the performance of the action itself (Arendt 2006, 151). When Arendt discusses “inspiring principles,” she has in mind broad aims such as “honor or glory, love of equality,” and “distinction or excellence” (Arendt 2006, 151). But, they need not be positive; fear, distrust, and hatred, she says, can also be inspiring principles (Arendt 2005, 151). For Arendt, men are free whenever they act, whenever they actualize such principles in the world: “to be free and to act are the same” (Arendt 2006, 151). Because freedom is experienced in the activity itself, the best metaphor for action, Arendt says, has always been the performing arts, where the virtuosity is demonstrated in the performance itself (Arendt 2006, 152).

For Arendt, the realm of freedom is the realm of politics. Freedom is possible for man because of the “gift of action” (Arendt 2006, 144). That is, because of natality man is able to do something new and unexpected. It is “the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known” (Arendt 2006, 150). Arendt notes that in both ancient Greek (αρχειν) and Latin (agere & genere), the term “to act” also means to begin, to set something in motion (Arendt 2006, 164). They both indicate that to act—to set something new in motion—and to be

The sphere where actions take place is in the public sphere—the sphere of politics. Indeed politics would not even be possible were it not for human freedom, which is equivalent to man’s capacity for action. Within the political space, men are able to meet together as free and as equal. Within this sphere, they can act together and therein lies power. Arendt argues that not only does freedom make politics possible, but politics exists for the sake of human freedom (“the raison d’être of politics is freedom”) (Arendt 2006, 149). Freedom “is actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all. Without it, political life as such would be meaningless” (Arendt 2006, 145). Freedom needs both the company of one’s peers and also a public space to meet them (Arendt 2006, 147). This is not only because one’s words and deed would have no meaning if not performed in the light of the public, but also because, as Arendt notes, the actor—the beginner—needs the help of others in order to “carry through whatever he had started to do” (Arendt 2006, 164). This public space “is the realm where freedom is a worldly reality, tangible in words which can be heard, in deeds which can be seen, and in events which are talked about, remembered, and turned into stories before they are finally incorporated into the great storybook of human history” (Arendt 2006, 153). The political institutions that provide the space for freedom also rely upon action, not only for their initial foundation but also for their preservation and continual renewal.
(Arendt 2006, 152). As Arendt writes in her dissertation, every man born into the world constitutes this man-made world anew.

Arendt’s attitude towards Augustine is never without its ambiguities. At the same time that she charges him with the fault of misleading Western Civilization by promoting a mistaken notion of freedom by associating it with the will—a will that, in fact, seems to offer nothing but oppression—she also attributes to Augustine the origin of the authentic understanding of freedom—that of beginning something new:

In the City of God Augustine, as is only natural, speaks more from the background of specifically Roman experiences than in any of his other writings, and freedom is conceived there not as an inner human disposition but as a character of human existence in the world. Man does not possess freedom so much as he, or better his coming into the world, is equated with the appearance of freedom in the universe; man is free because he is a beginning and was so created after the universe had already come into existence: \[\text{Initium ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nemo fuit}.\] In the birth of each man this initial beginning is reaffirmed, because in each instance something new comes into an already existing world which will continue to exist after each individual’s death. Because he is a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom. (Arendt 2006, 164)

Remarkably, Arendt says, of all thinkers, it was the Christian saint Augustine, the philosopher responsible for introducing the freedom of the will into the Western philosophical tradition, who nevertheless was the first to articulate the true meaning of freedom experienced by the Greeks in the polis and by the Romans in their republic. Arendt then turns to Jesus of Nazareth (as the originator of the Christian faith and not of Christian doctrine) who had, as Arendt describes it, “an extraordinary understanding of
freedom” (Arendt 2006, 166). It is Jesus’ emphasis on “faith” and not on the will—“faith
that can move mountains”—that gives rise to the belief in the human ability to perform
miracles—miracles not, Arendt notes, of the supernatural kind, but what, for Arendt,
miracles always are, the ability of men to interrupt events with the wholly unexpected
(Arendt 2006, 166). For Arendt, Jesus’ great political teaching (besides the possibility of
forgiveness) is that men are capable of performing miracles, of doing and saying the
unexpected, and thereby changing the whole course of human events. It is regrettable
to Arendt that the philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth—his emphasis on faith and miracles
as opposed to the Pauline and Augustinian doctrine of the freedom of the will—has not
been taken more seriously in this respect (Arendt 2006, 166).

6.7 The Process Character of Action

As we have seen, for Arendt to act is to experience freedom, and freedom is
exercised in the public realm. However, although we are free to do and say something
new, we are not omnipotent, and we are not able to accomplish every end we set out to
achieve. We learned in Origins that the belief that “everything is possible” requires
terror to attempt to eliminate the freedom of others in the attempt to make reality fit
the ideological fiction.

Although we are capable of introducing something new into the world, for
Arendt we cannot determine the outcome of our actions. First of all, what we are
capable of doing is limited by the human condition, in terms of both the naturally given
earth and the human artifice. We are also limited by plurality, by the fact that whenever
we do or say something new we are acting within the realm of human affairs. This is why Arendt says to act means to begin, though not to complete, a process. When we insert ourselves into the public realm through word and deed, we are acting into a “web of human relationships” (Arendt 1998, 183). This web consists of all the actions human beings have performed with one another and all the words human beings have spoken to each other. It is the crisscrossing and intersecting of all of these relationships between men, existing wherever men live together, that constitutes the realm of human affairs. This “in-between,” despite its intangibility, Arendt argues, is no less real than the human artifice that we also have in common (Arendt 1998, 183). We cannot entirely determine the outcome of our actions because whenever we act or speak we act in the realm of human affairs made up of “innumerable conflicting wills and intentions” (Arendt 1998, 184). It is because we are never able to completely determine human events that philosophers have been tempted to attribute the directing of the whole of human history along a particular course to some kind of master author (God, World Spirit, class interest). Furthermore, there are always new human beings born into the world that interrupt and act into human affairs. Our actions are affected by the actions

104 Arendt writes:

It is noteworthy that Plato, who had no inkling of the modern concept of history, should have been the first to invent the metaphor of an actor behind the scenes who, behind the backs of acting men, pulls the strings and is responsible for the story. The Platonic god is but a symbol for the fact that real stories, in distinction from those we invent, have no author; as such, he is the true forerunner of Providence, the “invisible hand,” Nature, the “world spirit,” class interest, and the like, with which Christian and modern philosophers of history tried to solve the perplexing problem that although history owes its existence to men, it is still obviously not “made” by them. (Arendt 1998, 185)
of others in the same way that their actions affect us. For Arendt, the human condition is not only the tangible given world that surrounds us; we are also conditioned by the individual and collective actions of others within the common world of human affairs. She writes:

> Although everybody started his life by inserting himself into the human world through action and speech, nobody is the author or producer of his own life story. In other words, the stories, the results of action and speech, reveal an agent, but this agent is not an author or producer. Somebody began it and is its subject in the twofold sense of the word, namely, its actor and sufferer, but nobody is its author. (Arendt 1998, 184)

It is for this reason, Arendt explains, that there are two parts to action: the person who begins the action, and the people who join him in seeing the action through. A true political leader understands that he is only *primus inter pares*, and that he needs the help of others to carry the action through (Arendt 1998, 189). There is, however, no end to what action has already begun. Every “ending” is always also a beginning. This is what Arendt calls the process character of action: “every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes” (Arendt 1998, 190). Because of the process character of action, the consequences of action are endless, which means they are both unpredictable and irreversible (Arendt 1998, 191-192).

It is the human capability to act and to begin a new process within a pre-existing web of relationships, Arendt says, and not as it is for Augustine human fallibility, that accounts for the essential frailty of human affairs (Arendt 1998, 191). There are,
however, two possible “solutions” that can provide an element of stability to human affairs. The first is our ability to make promises to and with each other.\textsuperscript{105} The need for promises arises out of our not knowing what might be done tomorrow or the consequences of an action: “The remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future, is contained in the faculty to make and keep promises” (Arendt 1998, 237). In her dissertation Arendt writes that, for Augustine, social life requires belief in the other precisely because of cannot know the will of another. Interpreting a passage from Augustine’s \textit{De fide rerum}, she writes:

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\textit{De fide rerum,} she writes:
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\textsuperscript{105} In the American colonies, while secularization and the rise of the modern era were stripping away the authority of religious sanction and tradition, there was developing “an entirely new concept of power and authority, an entirely novel idea of what was of prime importance in the political realm” (Arendt 1963, 165). The “new American experience” led to the development of a “new American concept of power” (Arendt 1963, 165). This power concept, as experienced in the American colonies, goes as far back as the landing of the Mayflower when those who had arrived in a new world had mutually promised to “combine themselves together” (Arendt 1963, 166). This combining together into a civic body politic created the legitimate power source for the creation of laws that were binding on all. The compacters had an “obvious confidence...in their own power, granted and confirmed by no one and as yet unsupported by any means of violence” (Arendt 1963, 166). The difference, in Arendt’s view, between the mutual promises the new Americans made to each other to form political bodies and social contract theory, as found in the work of Hobbes or even Locke, is great (Arendt 1963, 169-171). The social contract theories which developed in the 17th century viewed the contract “as a surrender of rights and power to either the government or the community, that is, not at all as a ‘mutual’ contract but as an agreement in which an individual person resigns his power to some higher authority and consents to be ruled in exchanged for a reasonable protection of his life and property” (Arendt 1963, 168). In the American colonies, the kind of compact made was vastly different in kind. Its form was a \textit{societas} in the Roman usage of the term, meaning an alliance. It presupposes both equality and reciprocity and brings together the isolated strength of each individual in their originary natality and binds them together by mutual promise thereby allowing for the creation of a new power structure. In the former kind of social contract where persons surrender their power to a government, each individual retains the right to be isolated from each other and gains protection from the government for this very isolation (Arendt 1963, 169-170). “Whereas the act of consent, accomplished by each individual person in his isolation, stands indeed only ‘in the presence of God,’ the act of mutual promise is by definition enacted ‘in the presence of one another’; it is in principle independent of religious sanction” (Arendt 1963, 170). In contrast to social contract theory where each individual gives up their power so that the government can maintain a monopoly of power and where the only power individuals retain is the potential to reclaim their original consent and change their rulers, a political body that is the outcome of mutual promise is the source of power for each individual who remains impotent outside the \textit{societas} (Arendt 1963, 170).
The attitude of individuals toward each other is here characterized by belief (credere), as against all real or potential knowledge. We comprehend all history, all human and temporal acts, by way of believing—which means, at the same time, by trusting—but never by way of understanding (intelligere). This kind of belief in the other is a belief that he will prove himself in our common future. Upon this proof each earthly community depends; yet the belief, arising from our mutual interdependence, precedes any possible proof. The continued existence of humankind does not rest on the proof; it rests on the necessary belief in it, without which social life would become impossible. (Copy A, 351-2; Arendt 2003, 110-111)

Her affirmation of the power of promise in *The Human Condition* reflects the “belief” in other described in her dissertation. Through promising, we can together found political bodies that provide institutional stability for human affairs. We can agree and contract together to design and build a political community that will unite us together for a particular purpose, for which alone the promise is binding (Arendt 1998, 245). Agreed upon laws and public policies also perform the same purpose. What keeps a community together is not an identical will, but rather mutual promise (Arendt 1998, 244). Through these institutions, we can create “islands of predictability,” which still permits freedom of action (Arendt 1998, 244). The unpredictability inherent to human affairs can be, at least, ameliorated by the predictability of common political and legal institutions. The power of stabilization inherent in the faculty of promise-making, Arendt says, can be

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106 Quoting Augustine she writes: “But surely, to prove your friend you would not submit yourself to your dangers if you did not believe. And since you thus submit yourself that you may prove him, you believe before you prove” (Copy A, 368). And also: “If this faith in human affairs is removed, who will not mark how great will be their disorder and what dreadful confusion will follow? –Therefore, when we do not believe what we cannot see, concord will perish and human society will not stand firm” (Copy A, 369).
traced back to the Roman legal system (Arendt 1998, 244). It is not surprising then that we find this idea in Augustine’s thought, given that he was a Roman citizen—indeed, Arendt believes he was one of the last Romans to know the meaning of citizenship (Arendt 1998, 12).

While promise-making addresses the unpredictability of human action, creating “islands of stability” where men are indeed able to trust and depend upon one another in a political community, the other “solution” addresses the irreversibility of human action. Once a person has acted in word or deed those actions cannot be undone, neither can the process he or she has unleashed through the initiative be reversed: “The possible redemption from the predicament of irreversibility—of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing—is the faculty of forgiving” (Arendt 1998, 237). Again, we see Arendt using religious language to describe what she intends to be a secular, political phenomenon. She says that the role of forgiveness in human affairs was discovered by Jesus of Nazareth, who taught that men have the power to forgive one another and that they must forgive other men if they hope to be forgiven by God. Forgiveness is an obligation men owe to one another, Jesus taught his disciples, because “they do not know what they do” (Arendt 1998, 240).

In her dissertation, Arendt writes that because we sin by habit we do not know what we do. However, men have been “saved” from sin and its consequences (a second death) by the “grace of God” (Copy A, 369). It was the appearance of Christ that made possible the redemption of all generations of men from original sin. The possibility “of
freely choosing divine grace, did not exist until Christ revealed this grace to men” (Copy A, 353). Quoting from Contra Secundam Juliani, she writes, “The Apostle did not set imitation against imitation, but regeneration against generation” (Copy A, 369). Finally, we love the other in order “to pay homage to grace” and out of recognition that we are all equally blameworthy (Copy A, 358). Christ’s appearance granted us the possibility of forgiveness from what we did not yet know was sin, and He came to redeem and save all generations of men. Because Christ granted us grace, we love even our “enemy” in the hope that grace may too work in him. It is grace, or forgiveness, that enable us to be reborn and begin again in new life.

Similarly, in The Human Condition, Arendt tells us “forgiving, serves to undo the deeds of the past, whose “sins” hang like Damocles’ sword over every new generation” (Arendt 1998, 237). Forgiving, she says, releases us “from the consequences of what we have done” and frees us to act again. It is only through “constant mutual release,” which releases men from what they have done unknowingly, that men can remain in their essential freedom, capable of starting over and beginning something anew (Arendt 1998, 240). It is because of our ability to make promises to one another, as we saw in Arendt’s dissertation, that we are capable of building “islands of predictability” and granting a modicum of stability to human affairs. It is because of our ability to know and experience grace, as we saw in Arendt’s dissertation, that each new generation need not be tied to the sins of the past. Unlike original sin, which, for Augustine, we all inherit, forgiveness for Arendt means each new generation need not inherit the sins of their progenitors, but can instead create new realities and new possibilities.
6.8 The Relevance of the Other

In the introduction to her dissertation Arendt poses her overarching research question: what is the relevance of the other (Relevanz des Anderen)? (Arendt 2003, 23). Although Arendt did not yet consider herself a political theorist, from the outset of her intellectual career she was concerned with the primary question which must be answered by any theory of politics: what is the significance of the fact “that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt 1998, 7)? What she discovers is that Augustine answers this question by values life lived among others only from the perspective of eternity. In this way, the meaning of being with others has the character of estrangement as the individuality and particularity of both the self and the other are denied. The public sphere, as the location of appearances where man comes together to be seen and heard by others and where the experiences of others constitutes reality, is not required by those who are not interested in particularities and whose love is directed towards eternity.

From the publication of her dissertation in 1929 to the writing of The Human Condition thirty years later, Arendt’s preoccupation with the question of the relevance of the other did not wane. In her dissertation she investigates how Augustine would answer this question. In her theory of politics she develops her own answer: “While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition—not only the conditio sine qua non, but the conditio per quam—of all political life” (Arendt 1998, 7). For Arendt, the other is relevant primarily because being with others is what makes politics possible, and it is only in politics that
human beings can experience the highest possibility of being a human being. It is within the public realm, a space that both unites and separates, that each person can express who he or she is by doing or saying something new. He can reveal his or her own “who” to his peers by expressing his uniqueness and individuality. In doing or saying something new, among and with others, men can know freedom. There is great power in acting and speaking in concert, and power requires that others are there with me. Because of the process character of action, I can never act and accomplish my goals in isolation. Furthermore, as each individual has his own unique story that intersects with others, through memory and the telling and re-telling of our own individual and collective stories, we can create and experience meaning. As Arendt said in her dissertation: “The individual is not alone in the world; he has companions of his fate not merely in this situation or that, but for a lifetime” (Copy A, 351).
CONCLUSION:

FOR LOVE OF THE WORLD

“It is absolutely right for you to love your wives, to love your friends, to love your fellow citizens with human charity. All these names, you see, imply a bond of relationship, and the glue, so to say, of charity” (Augustine’s Sermon 349)

“I’ve begun too late, really only in recent years, to truly love the world, that I shall be able to do that now. Out of gratitude, I want to call my book [The Human Condition] on political theories ‘Amor Mundi’” (Hannah Arendt, Letter to Karl Jaspers 1955)

In a 1964 interview for German television, Günter Gaus asked Hannah Arendt about a statement she had recently made to Gershom Scholem in their debate over Arendt’s coverage of the Eichmann trial. In this statement, Arendt had maintained that she had never in her life loved “a people,” including the Jews, the Germans, Americans, the working class or any other collective group. Reacting to this statement, Gaus asked Arendt, “As a politically active being, doesn’t man need commitment to a group, a commitment that can then to a certain extent be called love? Are you not afraid that your attitude could be politically sterile?” (Arendt 1994, 16). Arendt replied that it is not
love that unites a people, but rather common interest. One can speak of love, she said, only in the context of a “directly personal relationship,” such as a romantic relationship or a close friendship. She went on:

Thus, people of the most divergent organizations can still be personal friends. But if you confuse these things, if you bring love to the negotiating table, to put it bluntly, I find that fatal...I find it [love] apolitical. I find it worldless. And I really find it to be a great disaster. (Arendt 1994, 17)

As I have shown, Arendt’s view regarding the relationship between love and politics originated in her early study of Augustine’s philosophy of love. Indeed, it is only in the dissertation that we ever see Arendt investigating the nature of love in such a systematic fashion. For this reason, reading the dissertation helps us better understand how she reached the conclusion about love she put forth in her interview. In her dissertation, we find a thorough explanation as to why love is necessarily worldless, as well as limitless, in its aims. We also find a defense of her view that Christian love is only concerned with a singular aspect of the other (e.g. his salvation), which will later reappear in her critique of compassion as a political principle. It is for these reasons that Arendt believes love is necessarily apolitical, but that it may also be anti-political and destructive of the body politic. Now that we have thoroughly investigated the relationship of Arendt’s dissertation to her later political theory, we can turn to Arendt’s considerations on the nature of love and the relationship of love to politics. For Arendt, “the absolute,” whether absolute Truth, goodness, love, or compassion, “spells doom to everyone when it is introduced into the political realm” (Arendt 1963, 79).
In her dissertation, Arendt clearly demonstrates her dissatisfaction with an Augustinian ethic of love as a ground for being with others in the world. Her guiding question is how the other, in his concrete, worldly existence can be relevant to one who is estranged from the world and its desires. How does the believer relate to others in the world while attached to an eternal God? In the context of love as desire, she concludes that if it is only eternal life in the presence of God that is to be desired, then everything else in the world, including other human beings, assume a relative meaning. Like all other worldly goods, a relationship with another person cannot ultimately satisfy, and in belonging to the world or to another person, I forget my true good lies in eternal life. I love my own self as well as my neighbor for the sake of eternity. I do not love the other as he appears in his concrete, worldly existence, but rather as one who, like myself, has the possibility of enjoying eternal life with God. What is loved in the other is not the unique “who,” but rather “that part of the inner man which consumes no time” (Copy A, 270). As this is the highest good for all human beings, then I must love all human beings equally. All worldly distinctions and all worldly relationships are forgotten in the longing for eternity.

In the context of love as the return to the source of Being, Arendt similarly concludes that the other is not relevant, nor can he be loved as he appears in the world. In the discovery of eternity as the source of my being in the world, I come to understand the meaning of my being is to return to God. In actualizing the return, I transcend my own worldly becoming in order to ascend to pure Being. This requires the casting off of everything that I uniquely am in the world. Furthermore, as the beginning of life and the
end of life are now understood as interchangeable, “the singular, invariable, and irreversible” concrete course of life is no longer of any import (Copy A, 313). The return to Being also determines how I understand the meaning of being with others in the world. As all human beings are meant to return to God as the Supreme Being, again I must love all persons equally. I now love each person not for who they distinctively are in the world, but rather as a created being. I love him by directing him to the source of his being, so that he too may cast off all that he uniquely is in the world and return to God as the source of his being. Even my neighbor’s death in the world becomes insignificant insofar as it is regarded as a return to Being, something I had hoped for him anyway. Arendt argues that this leaves both myself and the other in isolation in the presence of God. Again, when viewed from the perspective of eternity, all worldly distinctions vanish, and all worldly relationships are renounced. This understanding of love, Arendt argues, is distinctly differently from any kind of understanding of carnal love (dilectio carnalis) (Copy A, 341; Arendt 2003, 101).

It is only in the context of Augustine’s theory of “social life” that Arendt finds an empirical ground for the relevance of the other. Believers love all persons because we share the same historical past. We have all descended from Adam and thus have inherited his sin. In my love for God, I cannot withdraw completely from the world. Rather, we are called to “overcome the world” (Copy A, 359). In the recognition of our shared sinful past, I love the other for the sake of divine grace. I love my fellow believer because of what grace has already done in him, and struggle alongside him in the fight against the relentless temptations of the world. Arendt writes that in the community of
believers mutual love replaces the mutual interdependence of the world. I love the nonbeliever because of the recognition of what I too would be, but for the grace of God, and in the hopes of witnessing to the promise of eternal salvation. Again, I love all persons equally because all have fallen short of the grace of God. Because we cannot choose our beloved, Augustinian love, Arendt writes, never means love in “our sense” (Arendt 2003, 122). Loving for the sake of divine grace has the result, Arendt concludes, of making all relationships in the world provisional. In eternity our desire will cease, and our fight against the world will end in the uninterrupted enjoyment of God.

For Arendt, it is only through acting and speaking in the light of the public realm that human beings are able to “show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and make their appearance in the human world” (Arendt 1998, 179). Action and speech, as political activities, are necessarily disclosive activities. In contrast, Christian love, or charity, is not concerned with the particularity of a person, but only with the possibility of salvation, a quality held in common by all. Charity, by nature and in its expression, is completely worldless in its lack of disclosiveness. It is evident from her dissertation that Arendt finds each of Augustine’s varying definitions of love insufficient for affording a foundation for an authentic being with others in the world. It is also clear that she has another idea of love in mind, “carnal love” or love in “our sense.” We see what she means by this kind of love in The Human Condition.

In The Human Condition, Arendt articulates two types of love. One love is the Christian form of love, the kind of love she described in her dissertation as caritas. Another love is romantic love, the kind of love she alluded to her in dissertation, but did
not develop. In the case of the latter, we are able to more fully understand this kind of love and its proper place by looking at what Arendt says in The Human Condition and elsewhere. For Arendt, romantic love, the love between two people, is not to be equated with popular views of “romance” (Arendt 1998, 242). Authentic love between two people, she says, is rare and can bring the lovers an unparalleled happiness. This kind of love, Arendt tells us, has the greatest power of self-revelation because it is only concerned with the unique, individual person he or she has fallen in love with. For this reason, lovers are able to see more clearly who the other person is, precisely because this kind of love is not dependent on what the person has or has not achieved. I love him or her for who they are, not for any kinds of accomplishments or failings the public world might count as important. This is the kind of love Arendt says that Rahel Varnhagen was searching for all her life. It is also this kind of love which she describes in Origins as “Volo ut sis,” which, although it comes from Augustine, is not what Augustine meant by this phrase (Arendt 2004, 382). Arendt uses it to describe the type of love that desires my lover to be as he is, accepts him completely and unreservedly, regardless of his faults or mistakes. This, she says, is “the great and incalculable grace of love” (Arendt 2004, 382).107 Love, in its passion, also unites the lovers so closely together that “the in-

107 This is the kind of love that Elisabeth Young-Bruehl believes Arendt shared with Heinrich Blücher: “Arendt and Blücher provided each other with the safe ‘four walls’ of their home and their conversation, where each could depend upon the other’s loyalty and deep honesty about their strengths and weaknesses” (Young-Bruehl 2006, 18).
between that relates us to and separates us from others” within the world “goes up in flames” (Arendt 1998, 242; Arendt 2005, 202).

It is for these reasons, Arendt says, that this kind of love is essentially worldless and properly belongs in the private sphere, which affords love safety and security. In this way, love in the private sphere is an “oasis,” which can renew us and enable us to reenter the insecurity of the public world. The love between two persons is “extinguished” Arendt says, the moment it is brought into public view and made a public affair (Arendt 1998, 51). Alternatively, because this kind of love can only be directed towards a particular person and destroys the in-between space between lovers, it will become “false and perverted” when turned into a general political principle (1998, 52).

As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl believes, it is the former kind of love Arendt had with Heinrich Blücher. It is a love she knows can bring the lovers both a sense of security and safety, as well as a feeling of complete acceptance, which can bring great happiness. Nevertheless, it is important for Arendt to emphasize that this form of love belongs in the private sphere, and that the lovers themselves will lose their love the moment its made a public and not a private affair. Furthermore, if made into a political principle, it will result in tyranny and even terror.

The other kind of love Arendt discusses in The Human Condition is the Augustinian love she explored so thoroughly in her dissertation. Although in its worldlessness charity “clearly corresponds to the general human experience of love, it is at the same time clearly distinguished from it in being something which, like the world is between men” (Arendt 1998, 53). What unites lovers together in the private sphere is
not intended to replace the world, but rather, like an oasis, replenishes each lover so that he or she can return to the world refreshed and renewed and ready, yet again, to participate in the common world we share with others. In contrast, Augustinian love aims to replace with Christian charity the space that unites and separates all men within a common world. Recall that in Part III of her dissertation, Arendt explains that, for Augustine, charity demands that Christians “overcome the world” (Copy A, 359). In The Human Condition, she writes: “To find a bond between people strong enough to replace the world was the main political task of early Christian philosophy, and it was Augustine who proposed to found not only the Christian ‘brotherhood’ but all human relationships on charity” (Arendt 1998, 53). Arendt goes on to explain that this kind of love arises out of the Christian belief that “the world itself is doomed” (Arendt 1998, 53). In her dissertation, Arendt affirmed that caritas is “provisional” (Copy A, 364). She reaffirms in The Human Condition that this love is necessary only as long as the world lasts “quamdiu mundas durat” (Arendt 1998, 53). Charity, Arendt says, cannot found a public realm, nor was it intended to. It was meant rather to replace worldliness with worldlessness: “The bond of charity between people, while it is incapable of founding a public realm of its own, is quite adequate to the main Christian principle of worldlessness and is admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world” (Arendt 1998, 53). This is why, she explains, the Christian community was modeled after a family, “because these were known to be non-political and even antipolitical” (Arendt 1998, 54).

Again, as we see in her dissertation, Arendt here reiterates the common good as Augustine sees it is not the common world, but “the salvation of one’s soul as a concern
common to all” (Arendt 1998, 55). From this perspective, political responsibility is assumed as a burden undertaken for the “salvation of those it freed from worry about public affairs” (Arendt 1998, 60). Politics is necessary only because of man’s sinfulness, in order to provide safety for Christians to freely practice their faith (Arendt 1998, 60). As we saw in the last chapter, Arendt explains that Machiavelli was one of the few men who knew the true consequences of Christian values becoming political principles. Either the faith itself will be corrupted and will no longer be authentic Christian belief and practice, or the public sphere is destroyed entirely by Christian worldlessness. In the case of romantic love and Christian charity, “love can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes such as the change or salvation of the world” (Arendt 1998, 52).

Arendt continues this line of thought in On Revolution, but instead of examining love, she looks at the role of compassion in the French Revolution. Arendt calls compassion “the most powerful and perhaps the most devastating passion motivating revolutionaries” (Arendt 1963, 66). Within Arendt’s consideration of the French revolution, compassion serves as a secular reincarnation of the Christian ethic of charity. In On Revolution, she discusses the shift from the dominance of Christian political philosophy to modern political theory. For an enlightenment thinker, religion was no longer a reliable resource for affirming the dignity of man. In the place of charity, Jean-Jacques Rousseau affirmed the naturalness of human compassion “as the very foundation of all authentic ‘natural’ human intercourse” (Arendt 1963, 74-75). For Robespierre, it was compassion which could unite the those who did not suffer with
those who did. It was compassion that could unite the nation (Arendt 1963, 74). Like charity’s concern for salvation, compassion’s concern is also limitless. While charity aims at the salvation of all, compassion aims at the elimination of all human suffering.

Arendt’s critique of compassion, closely related to her critique of charity, is an integral component of her assessment of the French Revolution. For Arendt, by understanding the role of compassion it becomes clearer how, from the very beginning, the revolutionaries had embarked on a “tragic and self-defeating enterprise” (Arendt 2006, 77).

In her discussion of Dostoevsky’s “The Grand Inquisitor,” she describes how Christ’s reaction to the Grand Inquisitor demonstrates that compassion is “to be stricken with the suffering of someone else as though it were contagious” (Arendt 1963, 80). For Arendt, compassion is concerned with the singular suffering of a unique person and is only possible through close proximity and personal knowledge of the particular situation of the person to whom our compassion is directed: “compassion, in this respect not unlike love, abolishes the distance, the in-between which always exists in human intercourse” (Arendt 1963, 81). As compassion abolishes the worldly space between men, it is incapable of dialogic speech:

for all kinds of predicative or argumentative speech, in which someone talks to somebody about something that is of interest to both because it interest, it is between them. Such talkative and argumentative interest in the world is entirely alien to compassion, which is directed solely, and with passionate intensity, toward suffering man himself. (emphasis in original; Arendt 1963, 81-81)
Because compassion may only be directed toward a particular person, for Dostoevsky it was a sign of Christ’s divinity that he could share in the singular suffering of each individual “without lumping them together into some such entity as one suffering mankind” (Arendt 1963, 80). It was also a sign of the Inquisitor’s sin that he “depersonalized the sufferers,” aggregating them together in a single suffering mass (Arendt 1963, 81).

In addition to being directed toward a particular person, for Arendt compassion is only concerned with a single aspect of that person. Just as charity is concerned solely with a person’s salvation, compassion is only concerned with a person’s suffering. Compassion is silent for Arendt because language is not required in order to communicate suffering. As compassion can only be directed towards a person we know and towards a single aspect of that person, and because suffering does not need speech to be communicated. Compassion, for Arendt, is a private emotion, and, like love, will become perverted and destructive if made into a political principle. Compassion does not rely upon “persuasion, negotiation, or compromise which are the processes of law and politics,” for the need itself demands an immediate response and compromise is never a possibility (Arendt 2006, 82). With the impossibility of compromise, violence as a method to achieve an absolute end becomes a real and likely possibility (Arendt 2006, 82).

Like love, when compassion is brought into the open, into the light of the public, it can no longer be directed toward a particular person (Arendt 1963, 80). In the face of boundless suffering, compassion loses the very possibility of achieving its end, and
instead becomes pity directed towards “the suffering masses” (Arendt 1963, 80). When seen *en masse*, suffering turns into “the spectacle of misery” (Arendt 1963, 65). The Jacobins’ goal was a limitless one: the eradication of human suffering. Those who refuse to accept limits on their ends, Arendt argues, also refuse to accept limits on the means to achieve these ends. The Jacobins’ reliance on terror in order to achieve their goal originated in the compassion of the heart, the boundlessness of which “helped in the unleashing of a stream of boundless violence” (Arendt 1963, 87). For Arendt, the great tragedy of the French Revolution was that, unlike the American Revolution, which focused on established the foundation of a space for political freedom, the French revolutionaries became caught up in the immensity of the people’s misery and the pity this misery inspired (Arendt 1963, 87). The Americans had asserted their rights against “tyranny and oppression, not against exploitation and poverty” (Arendt 2005, 68). Robespierre falsely believed that a limitless “terror of virtue” could eradicate limitless suffering (Arendt 1963, 74). In the end, the French Revolution failed because it focused on suffering at the expense of establishing stable political institutions designed to outlast the several generations, and which could guarantee political equality for citizens:

“of all ideas and sentiments which prepared the Revolution, the notion and the taste of public liberty, strictly speaking, have been the first ones to disappear” (Tocqueville), because they could not withstand the onslaught of wretchedness which the Revolution brought into the open and, psychologically speaking, died away under the impact of compassion with human misery. (Arendt 2005, 249)

In Arendt’s view, fellow citizens cannot love each other. Love is only possible between those who are intimately known to one another and, in loving, unconditionally accept
each other. Love is apolitical, and if made into a political principle becomes destructive of politics itself. Instead, of viewing love as a possible in-between that can both relate and separate fellow citizens, Arendt argues that the relationship between citizens is better described as “friendship,” and the manner in which friends comport themselves towards one another is a dispassionate “respect,” and not love: “what love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs.

Respect, not unlike the Aristotelian *philia politikē*, is a kind of ‘friendship’ without intimacy and without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us” (Arendt 1998, 243). Arendt argues that respect is due to every person, and it is a misunderstanding of respect, she says, to see it due only to those we “admire or esteem” (Arendt 1998, 243). Thus, she says “the modern loss of respect...constitutes a clear symptom of the increasing depersonalization of public and social life” (Arendt 1994, 243). We are not able to respect our fellow citizens if we do not have a space of appearances. In other words, if we do not have a shared public life where the equality of all is regarded and distinctiveness displayed and appreciated.

Arendt offers us only these brief considerations in *The Human Condition*, but in a lecture on Socrates we are able to see more of what she means by civic friendship. In this lecture, Arendt describes Socrates engaging his fellow citizens in dialogue. Arendt argues that the intention of the dialogue was not to replace opinion with Truth, but to improve the truthfulness of each individual person’s opinion (Arendt 2005, 15). Every person has his own opinion (*doxa*) because he occupies a particular position within the world. Everything that appears will be viewed from this unique and distinct position. All
Opinion then is “it-appears-to-me” (Arendt 2005, 15). Opinion is how the common world we all share, but view from different perspectives, appears to each individual. The kind of dialogue that aims to improve the truthfulness of opinion, Arendt argues, is a political activity: “To Socrates, maieutic was a political activity, a give-and-take, fundamentally on a basis of strict equality, the fruits of which could not be measured by the result of arriving at this or that general truth” (Arendt 2005, 15). This is why, Arendt explains, many of Plato’s dialogues end inconclusively, because to have talked through something with one’s fellow citizens, to have examined one’s own opinion by engaging the opinion of another, is itself meaningful (Arendt 2005, 15-16). It is “obvious,” Arendt says, that this is exactly the kind of dialogue that goes on between friends:

friendship to a large extent, indeed, consists of this kind of talking about something that the friends have in common. By talking about what is between them, it becomes ever more common to them. It gains not only its specific articulateness, but develops and expands and finally, in the course of time and life, begins to constitute a little world of its own which is shared in friendship. In other words, politically speaking, Socrates tried to make friends out of Athens’ citizenry. (Arendt 2005, 16)

Arendt argues that this was “a very understandable purpose,” considering that within the polis the “agonal spirit,” an intense contest “of all against all” spurned by envy, was ruining the Greek city-states (Arendt 2005, 16). Arendt says that friendship should replace this kind of agonal spirit. Political friendship is the exchange of opinions, the dialogue that goes on between citizens and through which each person can express his perspective on the common world. Citizens are not equal in every sense, nor should they be; rather it is through respectful dialogue, the active acknowledgement that each
person has his own unique perspective, that citizens are equalized (Arendt 2005, 16-17).

It is out of this exchange between equals that a community arises:

The equalization in friendship does not of course mean that the friends become the same or equal to each other, but rather that they become equal partners in a common world—that they together constitute a community. Community is what friendship achieves, and it is obvious that this equalization has as its polemical point the ever-increasing differentiation of citizens. (Arendt 2005, 17)

It is through dialogue that we can begin to understand how our fellow citizens view our shared world. To see the world “from the other fellow’s point of view—is the political kind of insight par excellence” (Arendt 2005, 18). The virtue of a citizen is to be able to articulate his own opinion, and to listen to and regard respectfully the opinions of others. Only through dialogue can opinions be tested, enabling us to arrive at an opinion that is closer to reality than it was before, and preparing us to act in concert (Arendt 2005, 18). According to Arendt, Socrates believed that it was the role of the philosopher to help his fellow citizens establish this kind of friendship (Arendt 2005, 18).

For Arendt, love cannot be political because it is private passion shared between lovers, or—as in the case of Christian charity—it is meant to replace the public world with a community modeled after the family. Instead, political friendship is the relationship citizens can and should have with one another; and the attitude of friends towards each other is respect, not love. Later, in On Revolution, Arendt explains what should replace the private co-suffering of compassion, which, as she argues, can only turn into pity when made to be a political principle. Just as political friendship, and not the passion of love, is the proper relationship between citizens, solidarity, and not
compassion, can “dispassionately” establish “a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited” (Arendt 1963, 84). In this case there would be a common interest in the “dignity of man” (Arendt 1963, 84). It is committed to an idea, the dignity of man, rather than to an emotion (Arendt 1963, 84). It may be prompted by suffering, but its actions are instead guided by a principle. Solidarity, because it is rational and dispassionate, is able to conceive of generalities and “comprehend a multitude conceptually” (Arendt 1963, 84). It also views everyone as equals. It does not give preference to the sufferings of the poor, but looks upon the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, with “an equal eye” (Arendt 1963, 84). Ultimately, for Arendt, the passions of love and compassion are private emotions that can only be shared between individuals who are known to each other in their singularity. They cannot be political principles because their aims are limitless and uncompromising. When they are brought to bear to guide a body politic or a revolution, it will result in a “tyranny of goodness,” which, for Arendt, can be just as dangerous and just as violent as a tyranny of evil (Arendt 1963, 79).

Towards a Political Ethic of Love

Now that we have explained Arendt’s conclusion about the relationship between love or compassion and politics, two further questions remain. Is Arendt correct that Christian love is necessarily worldless, and that it is dangerous to turn an ethic of love or compassion into a political principle? Second is Arendt’s overall conclusion that love’s proper place in the private sphere correct or are there possibilities for a civic ethic of
love? These are hard questions, and many have who have gone before me, who are much wiser than I, have had difficulty answering them in satisfactory or conclusive way. Nevertheless, I will attempt a tentative response to both questions, while at the same time holding to my belief that to questions of this kind there are no final answers.¹⁰⁸

Is Arendt correct that Christian love is necessarily worldless? Is it, as she describes in her dissertation and in The Human Condition, primarily concerned with eternal salvation? In regards to the latter question, for Augustine, we would have to say yes. Although Arendt’s interpretation is impaired by disregarding the context and the development of Augustine’s considerations on love, she nevertheless arrives at similar conclusions about Augustine’s considerations on love of neighbor as those of two prominent theologians. In his definitive two-volume history of Christian love, Agape and Eros (1930-1936), the Swedish theologian Anders Nygren reaches a very similar conclusion to Arendt when he says that for, Augustine:

The emphasis falls decidedly on love to God, as is even more clearly shown by the relation between love to God and love to neighbor. When he speaks of love to God, Augustine often adds, in accordance with Christian tradition, the commandment of love to neighbor; but this has no independent place and meaning for him. It is really included already in the commandment of love to God, and this determines its limits. Augustine regards love to

¹⁰⁸ It was because I love “the questions themselves” that I first fell in love with political theory:

I would like to beg you...to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don’t search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer. (Rilke 1986, 34-35)
neighbor as fully legitimate only in so far as it can be referred ultimately not to the neighbor, but to God Himself. (Nygren 1953, 453)

In contrast to Arendt, Oliver O’Donovan finds it necessary to read Augustine’s writings in context and he sees a clear development in Augustine’s thoughts concerning love. He argues that Augustine abandons his *uti/frui* distinction to define what and how we ought to love in favor of the “order of loves” (O’Donovan 1980, 32). Nevertheless, O’Donovan argues that, for Augustine, loving the neighbor always means bringing him to the true meaning of his existence. He writes: “It is not that he rejects other goals which may be adopted from time to time but that this one [to bring him to God] is fundamental” (O’Donovan 1980, 35). More recently, in Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning (2008), Stephan Kampowski, in responding to the question of whether or not Arendt interpreted Augustine correctly on love, sidesteps the question entirely, apparently finding few resources in Augustine, and instead points to the Epistle of James and to Thomas Aquinas as examples of a Christian love that wills the worldly good of the other.

In The Human Condition, Arendt recognizes the contradictions present in any great thinker’s philosophy: “such fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate writers; in the work of the great authors they lead into the very center of their work” (Arendt 1998, 104-105). As one of the greatest thinkers within the tradition, Augustine is no less plagued by contradictions than Marx, of whom Arendt was speaking. This is probably more true of his many discussions of love than on any other topic. For the sake of systematizing Augustine, Arendt overlooked potentially fruitful
resources in Augustine that demonstrate that, while salvation is prioritized in love of neighbor, he acknowledges the neighbor’s other needs, and he also allows for loving particular persons. Augustine does admonish us to love those who are closest to us first. When considering who we ought to care for, we care first for those in our immediate family and circle of friends. This love of family and friends then serves as an exercise to expand what should be an ever-growing circle of love and inclusion (Augustine, Sermon 385). Furthermore, he does permit that we love our friends for their own sake: “a friend is to be loved freely, for his own sake, not for the sake of something else” (Augustine, Sermon 385). In addition, when discussing the active life in comparison to the contemplative life, he says that Christians may engage in each “without detriment to his faith,” and that one who lives an active life must not neglect the contemplation of truth, while one who lives a contemplative life must not forget the interest of his neighbor (Augustine, City of God 19.19). However, from a thorough examination of Augustine’s writings on politics and on love of neighbor, it is fair to say that we can learn more from Augustine about the limits of political community than we can about the possibilities of political community.

\[\text{109} \text{ In } \text{Plato and Augustine (1962), Karl Jaspers notes this as well. He acknowledges Augustine’s explicit modification of his original sharp distinction between enjoyment of the eternal Good and use of temporal goods. God does give us earthly goods such as wisdom and friendship, which are desirable for their own sake. When these are present, they necessarily bring joy with them (Jaspers 1962, 97).}\]
Nevertheless, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt takes Augustine’s considerations on love of neighbor to be the definitive Christian interpretation.\(^{110}\) This is unfortunate, as there are many resources within the Christian tradition from which a political account of love of neighbor can be derived. Both Catholic and Protestant theologies of love, while not disregarding the importance of eternity, have argued that Christian love requires specific actions taken on behalf of the physical well-being, as well as the political equality of the neighbor. Arendt’s neglect of these other thinkers and theologies is disappointing. Moreover, in more recent times an “ethic of love” has inspired important social and political activists and writers. It would have been an interesting and probably fruitful exercise, for example, for Arendt to have engaged directly her contemporary Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said that power is “love implementing the demands of justice.”\(^{111}\) Dr. King believed that Christian love is the power of acting in concert to demand not only economic justice, but equal civil and political rights for all Americans.

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\(^{110}\) Arendt is not alone in this regard. Anders Nygren reminds us:

Augustine’s view of love has exercised by far the greatest influence in the whole history of the Christian idea of love. It even puts the New Testament view of love the shade. New Testament texts continue to form the basis of discussion, but they are *interpreted* in accordance with Augustine. Ever since his time the meaning of Christian love has generally been expressed in the categories he created, and even the emotional quality which it bears is largely due to him. Not even the Reformation succeeded in making any serious alteration. In Evangelical Christendom to the present day, Augustine’s view has done far more than Luther’s to determine what is meant by Christian love. (Nygren 1953, 450)

Even more recently, in his papal encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (2005), Pope Benedict writes that “charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice.”

In regards to the question of whether Christian love is necessarily worldless, my response to Arendt would have to be no. In my view, any ethic of Christian love must take into account four things: first, that God appeared as a human being in the world; second, that God created human beings to be in a social relationship with one another; third, the Christian eschatological vision of perfect justice and peace; fourth, that God created each human being as a distinct and unique individual.

The incarnation means that God took on human form in order to accompany human beings as they appear in the world. God appeared in human form to bear the full weight of human suffering, and to share in all of the joys and sorrows that go along with the human condition. For this reason, we love our neighbor rightly when we follow the example of Christ and love our neighbor as an embodied self. Christ demonstrated this time and again by healing the sick and feeding the hungry. The fact that Christians believe that human beings were created for community (as Arendt quotes: “male and female created He them”) means we recognize that loving the other entails much more than loving him or her in a purely private or “worldless” way. We love the other when we pursue the common good reflected in a political community. This understanding of the common good is derived from the ultimate standard of eternity. Our political activity is motivated by a vision of perfect justice and perfect peace. However, at the same time, we acknowledge that this is an eschatological vision. In other words, it is a
reality that can only be achieved in eternity. This acknowledgement means that we do
not strive to create a heaven here on earth, but recognize that the possibilities are
limited. They are limited because of human sin, but also because we acknowledge the
limits of human life and the earth as it has been given to us by God. Any Christian
political theory must recognize that we are always “on the way,” never quite reaching
that for which we strive. Because Christians are keenly aware of the limits of politics, of
which Augustine is especially good at reminding us, a Christian ethic of love should serve
to prompt and guide Christian political action. A political ethic of love only becomes
dangerous when Christians forget these limitations and attempt to bring heaven into
the here and now.

Finally, although we love our neighbor by pursuing the common good, because
we appreciate and value him or her as a distinct, unique individual created by God. We
never apply a utilitarian calculus that would subvert the good of the one to the good of
the many. Our goal is to build a society where each individual has the opportunity to
express who God created him or her to be. We love our neighbor rightly when we build
and preserve the political and legal institutions that allow him or her the space to
exercise fully the full range of human capabilities. As Augustine says, while there can be
no perfectly just regime on earth, there are certainly regimes that are “better” than
others (Augustine, City of God 4.28). Indeed, a political community that embraces rather
than limits our God-given plurality is far better than one that does not.

I will now turn to the second question: is Arendt correct that love’s proper place
in the private sphere correct or are there possibilities for a civic ethic of love? I do not
share with Arendt her sharp distinction between reason and passion, nor do I share the sharp distinction she draws between the private and the public. Something of great importance we learn from Augustine is that to be a human being is to be a loving being. For Augustine, it is not a question of whether or not we love, it is a question of what we love. It is not possible, as Arendt imagines, to be only a loving being in the private sphere and only a rational being in the public sphere. Furthermore, friendship and solidarity, devoid of passion, are not enough to hold a political community together. As we well know from history, living in a political community requires sacrifice, even the giving of one’s own life. Political communities will also inevitably encounter struggles and challenges that will test the bonds that unite a people together. Reason alone is not enough to motivate sacrifice, nor is it enough to carry a people through the darkest of times. Commitment to a political community requires what I believe to be the emotion of love. This love is a strong, emotional attachment and commitment to the good of the community and its individual citizens, as well as its founding ideals.

Arendt argues that love is only possible between two people who intimately know each other. I admit that it will be difficult for someone who does not share in the public life of the community to love this community. Nevertheless, a society that builds institutions where individuals are regularly able to come together, to share in collective decision-making and collectively work towards the betterment of their communities will
foster love of this community. This loving citizen can then use her reason and imagination to generalize the emotion of love she feels for her own neighbors and for her local community to the larger political body as a whole. Arendt also argues that love is uncompromising and limitless. I would argue, and I believe Arendt would agree, that a political body is founded when individuals come together and agree on a set of principles that not only determine limits but inspire action. In order for that community to long endure, its citizens must love these founding principles. In the case of the United States, these founding principles are freedom and equality. Over the course of our history, it is the love of these principles and the actions they have inspired, which has enabled the American people to survive a civil war, persevere through a Great Depression, defeat totalitarianism, and expand civil rights. Our love of freedom and equality is uncompromising, but the manner in which we secure freedom and guarantee equality is, in the Arendtian sense, a matter of opinion. We can and should continually be in dialogue about how to further advance the founding principles we so love.

112 What I have in mind is similar to what Arendt describes as the “council system” in On Revolution. The council system allows small groups of people to directly participate, on a regular basis, in public life at the local level.

113 Consider the following as examples: Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Speech: “With malice toward none, with charity for all” (1865); Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s presidential nomination acceptance speech: “That is why the recovery we seek, the recovery we are winning, is more than economic. In it are included justice and love and humility, not for ourselves as individuals alone, but for our Nation” (1936); Martin Luther King Jr.’s sermon on Loving Your Enemies: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence, and toughness multiplies toughness in a descending spiral of destruction” (1957).
Love of freedom and equality and of the American people is also limitless. We recognize that we do not live in a political society that has achieved perfect freedom or equality. We return again and again to our founding principles, as I believe Arendt would have us do, in order to recall them lovingly, so that we can carry on the hard work that remains to be done, as well as inspire newcomers to do the same. This hard work will never be completed, and so our love and passion for these principles must also persist. In this way, our love should have no limit. Love should be limitless in another respect. Our love for those who are close to us serves to educate us in love, it helps us understand what it means to see the world from another person’s point of view.

As Augustine explains, love for our family teaches us how to love our friends, while love for our friends teaches us how to love our fellow citizens (Augustine, *Sermon 385*). Our love should continually be growing, he says, to include more and more persons. I find Augustine instructive in this regard. Citizens learn how to love one another by first loving those who are closest to them, but then this circle of love can and should be expanded to include more persons.

As it is not a question of whether or not we love, but rather what we love, we would do well as a political community to foster rightly ordered love. By this I mean a love that is directed towards founding principles. For any political community, these principles should provide for what Arendt describes as the two-fold character of plurality, both a guarantee of human equality and regard for human distinctiveness. How these principles are worked out, however, is a matter of “opinion,” and will vary from one particular community to the next. It is only in a strong, emotional attachment
to these principles and to one’s fellow citizens that a political community can, as Arendt believes it should, last for more than one generation. Finally, for the Christian citizen, loving human plurality means loving each and every person as God made him or her to be: equal in the eyes of God and unique as God’s creation.


