

***THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF HANNAH
ARENDT'S CONCEPT OF LOVE AND ITS
IMPLICATIONS FOR ETHICS***

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This paper explores Hannah Arendt's concept of amor mundi (love of the world), as it is informed by her analysis of the theological account of man's relationship to God. Some commentators on Arendt interpret her analysis within the framework of a mythic story designed to illustrate Arendt's phenomenology of the life of the mind; however, the aim of this paper is to suggest that Hannah Arendt is guided by a Hebraic-Christian sensibility – a sensibility which serves as a sine qua non condition if we are to generate a coherent and cogent ethics from her discussion of love.

This paper is also meant as a response to critics of Arendt who perceive her concept of amor mundi as representing a radical turn towards subjectivism. One critic, Charles T. Mathewes, claims that while Arendt's work on totalitarianism and the banality of evil is inspired by an Augustinian account of evil as privation, her work is nevertheless flawed by subjectivism¹. According to Mathewes, the disastrous flaw in Arendt's account is that the self remains the primary actor. Indeed, the key subjectivist assumption is that in the beginning is the self. He argues that the anthropological voluntarism of Arendt's account

¹ For an illuminating and scholarly discussion of the view that Arendt's work represents a radical turn to subjectivism, see Charles T. Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. In this book, Mathewes takes aim at both Hannah Arendt and Reinhold Niebuhr, arguing that while neither consciously endorsed subjectivism, it was part of their common modern inheritance – one that was unreflectively assumed.

cannot explain how it is we are committed to the world. By seeking to secure the primacy of the subject, Arendt's internal fountain of natality – that which determines the agent's action – turns out to be nothing more than a modern form of what Augustine diagnosed as the *libido dominandi*, the lust to dominate that is in itself the dominating lust.² For Mathewes, Arendt's account insists that action is strictly autonomous, independent of any interests or goals; so action is really an *ex nihilo* reality happening within humans, a reality which cannot be understood as a loving response to the *mundus* which sustains our existence. Mathewes' point is that Arendt's "mistake" is based on a misreading of Augustine's thought – a misreading that grasps only part of Augustine's whole vision.

He suggests that Arendt's concern with human freedom made her lose sight of an even more fundamental concern – love. Mathewes states:

Love is crucial because it directly opposes the picture of ourselves that we typically assume – that we are fundamentally autonomous, fundamentally independent, isolated monads. For Augustinians, this is a false image. We are all in our lives fundamentally related with one another, so intimately indeed that this relation is in part constitutive of what and who we are.³

Mathewes argues that we must reject the foundational subjectivist assumptions and replace them with an account of the human being as responding – in an appropriately loving way – to the world. For Mathewes, our beginnings are understandable only as secondary to the absolute beginning of God's action in creation; we neither establish our epistemological framework nor inaugurate our agential projects *ex nihilo*.

Yet, it may be that Mathewes' analysis is based on a misreading of Arendt's concept of *amor mundi*; or at the very least, it does not take into account the possible link between *amor mundi* and religious faith, in which the relationship between man and God provides the ontological ground for man's capacity to act in – and respond to – the world. It is this link that I intend to explore and articulate more deeply, and I would trace this link to her doctoral dissertation on Saint Augustine's concept of love. For some critics such as Mathewes, Arendt's concept of *amor mundi* expresses a form of voluntarism in which human action is an *ex nihilo* reality which cannot be understood as a loving response to the *mundus* which sustains our existence. I would argue, however, that Arendt's concept of *amor mundi* and her emphasis on acting in the world was expressive of, and nurtured by, the theological account of the relationship between Creator

² See Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, p. 8.

³ Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, p. 15.

and creature.

In her doctoral dissertation, *Love and St. Augustine: An Essay in Philosophic Interpretation*, she credits Augustine for his distinction between *caritas* (charity) and *cupiditas* (cupidity). According to Arendt, Augustine's term for the "mundane" love which constitutes the world is *cupiditas*; whereas *caritas* reflects the "right" love, which seeks eternity and an absolute future. "The 'root of all evils is cupidity, the root of all goods is charity,' but both have this in common: man's craving desire, his appetitus. Hence: 'Love, but be careful what you love'."⁴ From this perspective, our love originates in a desire which is either worldly or eternal. For the purposes of amplifying our discussion of human agency, we may inquire as to whether this "right love" is a desire that originates within us. The question of origin is significant, for it touches upon the ontological foundation of man's capacity to act in – and respond to – the world in an appropriately loving way, and it is this capacity that is key to establishing an Arendtian ethics.

In Arendt's analysis of Augustine's concept of love, the emphasis on the return to the Creator as the original structural definition of the creature's being draws out the distinction between *caritas* (charity) and *cupiditas* (cupidity). This positive return to his own reality in his relation to God is achieved in *caritas*; and the missing of the turn – a mistaking of the world that exists before and after man for eternity – is a turn to the wrong "before," and therefore *cupiditas*. For Arendt, Augustine's caveat that one must be careful when it comes to love is understandable given that *caritas* and *cupiditas* – as expressions of craving – are distinguished by their objects, but they are not different kinds of emotion. Arendt states: "Both *caritas* and *cupiditas* depend on man's search for his own being as perpetual being, and each time this perpetual being is conceived as the encompassing of his concrete, temporal existence."⁵ Arendt's attempt to frame this discussion of *caritas* and *cupiditas* in terms of the encompassing of man's concrete, temporal existence reflects her debt to Karl Jaspers.⁶ In Arendt's analysis, man's positive return to his own reality in his relation to God is based on a concept of being which is conceived as transcendent and yet, at the same time, as encompassing life and the world; in short, it encompasses both

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, J.V. Scott and J.C. Stark (ed. and tr.), Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 17 (033139) – referred to in the text as *Love*.

⁵ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 77 (033314).

⁶ Arendt's debt to Karl Jaspers will be discussed in greater detail towards the end of this paper.

transcendent and worldly elements.

The emphasis on man's return to his own reality in his relation to God is itself precipitated by a more fundamental question that Arendt traces back to Augustine's concern with *amor dei* (love of God). Questions concerning why one should belong to God when one is in quest of oneself and the affinity between self and God are summed up as follows: "What do I love when I love *my* God?"⁷ For Arendt, the answer to this question is contained in the italicized emphasis on "my" which she added to the original question. She states: "Augustine's quest here is for the God of the human heart, and if this is also a quest for the Supreme Being, then it is only so in the sense that this Being (God) is the essence of the human heart."⁸ Arendt adds that while God, as the right object of my desire and love, is the essence of my inner self, it does not follow that God is identical with my inner self. Following a Platonic line, she suggests that this relationship is no more identical than beauty – the essence of all beautiful bodies – can be said to be identical to any one body. "Man loves God because God belongs to him as the essence belongs to existence, but precisely for this reason man *is* not. In finding God, he finds what he lacks, the very thing he is not: an eternal essence."⁹ Although *caritas* may signify a positive return to one's true self in relation to God, Arendt suggests that the ongoing presence of craving desire – albeit as expressed in *caritas* – remains an impediment to the full expression of *amor dei*, for the structure of desire is such that it functions solely as a means to an end. How, then, are we to understand the end at which *caritas* aims?

For Arendt, the notion of everlasting desire can only be either a contradiction in terms or a description of Hell. "Hence, when Augustine writes that 'only *caritas* stays forever' (cf., Augustine, *Sermons*, 158, 9) and that 'after this life only *caritas* will remain,' since instead of believing we shall know and instead of hoping we shall possess, he refers necessarily to a different kind of love (cf., Augustine, *Soliloquies* I, 6, 13)."¹⁰ She adds that the fulfillment and end of desire is "enjoyment." Therefore, fulfillment – expressed as enjoyment – and not desire, is the goal toward which love aims and which constitutes happiness. For Arendt, a thing is sought for its own sake if its possession puts desire to rest; in effect, love as desire exists only for the sake of this enjoyment,

⁷ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 25 (033150). Cf., Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 7.

⁸ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*.

⁹ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 26 (033151).

¹⁰ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 32 (033156).

and then it ceases. Arendt refers to this enjoyment as an existential state that stands outside all human-temporal categories and therefore can only be hinted at negatively.¹¹ To speak of an existential state that is outside all human-temporal categories surely raises questions as to what sort of state this might be and what sort of experiences or categories might be appropriate to it.

For Arendt, life on earth remains subject to the fear of not attaining this state of enjoyment, for mortal existence is limited by the structure of craving desire. "Hence, for the present time, human life remains tied to desire and fear."¹² Arendt contends that true fear – unlike the false fear of cupiditas which arises out of misplaced desire – dreads to lose the object of love's striving; for her, it is part and parcel of caritas itself. Yet, Arendt insists that only caritas could possess such true (chaste) fear, for it is not the fear that deters us from an evil that might happen to us (cupiditas) but rather it keeps us in a good which cannot be lost (cf., *The City of God*, XIV, 9). "Thus, the freedom of caritas is a future freedom. Its freedom on earth consists in anticipating a future belonging for which love as desire is the mediator."¹³ This notion of caritas as anticipation of a future freedom is perhaps a reference to Augustine's theological concern for the fourfold state of human nature in which the ultimate state (man in a state of peace) represents the congruence of human freedom and the fulfillment and end of man's desire for God. It is only at this point – where man has been saved and lifted out of mortal existence – that we may properly speak of an existential state of enjoyment as the highest form of love. While it may be held that the goal of caritas is the enjoyment which arises out of the fulfillment and end of desire, it would seem that the existential state of enjoyment is an experience that remains outside the conditions of mortal existence.

According to Arendt, what ultimately helps to still the fear of not attaining this future enjoyment is the role of memory; in other words, anticipation of a future freedom is strengthened by our memory of the desired object, where past knowledge necessarily precedes the urge for possession. "From the viewpoint of the desire, this knowledge points back to the past out of which the very notion of a 'happy life' arises so that man can desire it at all and then project it into the future."¹⁴ On behalf of Augustine, Arendt states that this knowledge of the happy

¹¹ Towards the end of this paper, I will attempt to elucidate the influence of Karl Jaspers on Arendt's existentialist orientation – with a view to evaluating the ontological foundation of Arendt's concept of love.

¹² Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 35 (033159).

¹³ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*.

¹⁴ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 46 (033182).

life is not simply an innate idea, but is specifically stored up in memory as the seat of consciousness. “It is the nature of memory to transcend present experience and guard the past, just as it is the nature of desire to transcend the present and reach toward the future.”¹⁵ For Arendt, the shift in focus from one’s anticipated future to one’s origin highlights the shift from desire to the faculty of remembrance. By locating the Creator as the ground of being, we make the past present to ourselves and transform it into a future possibility.

Arendt’s analysis into the relationship between memory and consciousness is based on a phenomenological stance which borrows heavily from theological models. Yet, her methodology, when situated within a theological-metaphysical context, suggests that basic human desire is rooted in an even more fundamental and, ultimately, transcendent grasp of human happiness. It is because of the faculty of memory that we may assert – with Arendt – that man’s positive turn to his own reality in relation to God is based on a concept of being which is conceived as transcendent and yet, at the same time, as encompassing life and world. Arendt states:

That man in his desire to be happy depends upon a notion of happiness that he could never experience in his earthly life, and that such a notion, moreover, should be the sole determinant of his earthly conduct, can only signify that human existence as such depends on something outside the human condition as we know and experience it. And since the concept of happiness is present in us through a consciousness that is equated with memory, this ‘outside the human condition’ actually means before human existence. Therefore, the Creator is both outside and before man. The Creator is in man only by virtue of man’s memory, which inspires him to desire happiness and with it an existence that would last forever.¹⁶

According to Arendt, desire without due regard to origin leads to a rather unfortunate dependence upon the desired object. She maintains that this dependence arises out of the specific inadequacy of life and is always determined by the future from which we expect good or evil in hope or fear. In other words, the fear of not fulfilling our desire is not likely to be stilled in the absence of memory. For Arendt, man’s dependence rests not on anticipation and does not aim at something, but relies exclusively on remembrance and refers back to the past. By emphasizing the importance of gratitude for life having been given at all, Arendt underscores man’s attachment to the transmundane source of his existence. “Unlike the desire for the ‘highest good,’ this attachment does not depend upon volition, strictly speaking. Rather, it is characteristic of the

¹⁵ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 47 (033183).

¹⁶ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 49 (033185).

human condition as such.”¹⁷ For Arendt, gratitude for life having been given at all is the spring of remembrance; and it is only when man finds the Creator as the ground of his being in his memory that future possibilities for freedom become present.

This link between natality – that is, gratitude for life having been given at all – and memory as the source of human freedom is perhaps more easily addressed in light of Arendt's analysis of Augustine's distinction between principium (the beginning of the world) and initium (the beginning of souls). Arendt states: “Everything that has a beginning, in the sense that a new story begins with it (*initium* and *principium*), must also have an end, and therefore cannot truly be. He who is and truly is...is without beginning and without end (cf. Augustine, Commentaries on the Psalms 134. 6).”¹⁸ She adds that since man can know, be conscious of, and remember his “beginning” or his origin, he is able to act as a beginner and enact the story of mankind. She states: “For the person who turns his back to the absolute past, the Creator who made him, the Whence-he-came reveals itself as identical to the Whither-he-goes.”¹⁹ For Arendt, since our expectations and desires are prompted by a previous knowledge, it is memory and not expectation that gives unity and wholeness to human existence. Yet, some argue that Arendt's understanding of natality must be viewed from the standpoint of *amor mundi*, so that natality is disclosed as an entirely world-oriented phenomenon whose capacity for beginning anew ideally is for the sake of the durability and futurity of the world we hold in common.²⁰ What, then, would be the basis upon which Arendt adapts the transcendent theological model of initium to the entirely world-oriented phenomenon of natality? In order to answer this question, it may be useful to draw out some of the nuances involving the theological account of the relationship between Creator and creature.

Arendt's attempt to establish the concept of natality as a world-oriented phenomenon is guided by a theological model of transcendent memory, in which man knows himself as a creature when he chooses the Creator; man's existence, therefore, wholly depends on the Creator who antedates man's choice. Unlike Augustine, Arendt seems to insist that knowledge of oneself as a Being dependent upon God involves choosing – which therefore implies some sort of

¹⁷ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 52 (033187).

¹⁸ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 55 (033191).

¹⁹ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 56 (033191).

²⁰ See Patricia Bowen-Moore, *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989, p. 2.

“doing” or “acting.” Dependency and choice are then the two key elements in the principle of *caritas*. Arendt states: “If the Creator himself does not make man’s dependent relationship an actuality, man is unable to undertake his part of this process of actualization in *caritas*.”²¹ Following the Augustinian line, Arendt points out that this process of actualization in *caritas* is achieved through the grace of God; and it is through enabling grace that man can make the positive turn to his own being and thus live in accord with God. Arendt states: “By the explicit acceptance of divine grace we accept ourselves as creatures and realize our pre-existing dependence on the Being that has made our own existence what it is. Since this existence is lived in the world, it is still determined by what is wholly outside and before the world.”²² As Arendt suggests, divine grace takes man out of the world, so that man begins to comprehend himself as belonging not to the world but to God. However, it is this notion of belonging to God which enables Arendt to begin to articulate a world-oriented conception of natality.

For Arendt, the choice out of the world through *caritas* has significant implications regarding the status of individual differences in the world. “In taking up *caritas*, the necessary and ontologically based imitation of every man becomes an explicit assimilation to God. At the same time, this ‘being out of the world’ destroys the individualization and isolation of man that are derived from the world.”²³ Arendt contends that this ‘being out of the world,’ like death, makes everyone the same, because the disappearance of the world removes the possibility of boasting, which came from the individual’s worldliness in comparing himself with others (cf., Augustine, *The City of God*, V, 17). “As man advances in *caritas* to Being as such, which at the same time and with the same absolute generality and omnipotence is his own being, he casts off all that belonged to him as a specific individual. And so, Augustine prays ‘that I may reject myself and choose You (cf., Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 2).”²⁴ At this point, *caritas* serves not only to encourage the explicit assimilation of each individual to God but it effectively eliminates the radical individualism and isolation that inevitably result when individuals belong only to themselves – thus negating individual differences.

In her analysis of *caritas* as the ontologically based imitation of every man,

²¹ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 77 (033315).

²² Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 78 (033315).

²³ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, pp. 78-79 (033316).

²⁴ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 79 (033316).

Arendt maintains that man is free, though only for himself and not for God. “As the determinant of all man’s actions and omissions, God cannot even be discovered as long as man leaves imitation objective, that is, as long as he does not expressly take up imitation and thereby once more seal his dependence on something outside him.”²⁵ Arendt notes that this “being discovered” in the Augustinian construction of history is “being prior to the law.” Borrowing from Biblical scripture, Arendt states: “We thus distinguish these four classes of men: prior to law, subject to law, subject to grace, and in peace....Prior to law, therefore, we do not struggle, because we not only covet and sin, but also approve of sin; subject to law, we struggle, but are conquered.”²⁶ We have noted that the fourth state of man in peace represents the congruence of human freedom and the fulfillment and end of man’s desire for God; in other words, it is the existential state of pure enjoyment beyond all desire and all human temporal categories – and thus an experience that remains outside the conditions of mortal existence. As far as what can be experienced within the conditions of mortal existence, however, Arendt suggests that it is only in a state of grace that man can expressly take up imitation and thereby once more seal his dependence on something outside of himself.

What precipitates this need for regenerative grace, however, is contained in the theological account of Adam’s fall from Eden and into a sinful state. Following this account, Arendt maintains that the situation of human beings is not explicitly equal as long as death is a mere fact of nature rather than indication of sinfulness. For Arendt, the equality that unifies all human beings derives from humanity’s common descent and share in original sin. As she asserts, this equality is the predominant fact that wipes out all distinctions. Owing to its shared descent from Adam, humanity is therefore unified in its fallen state by generation. However, it is not the equality of humanity’s common descent that entitles one to be regenerated in grace. “The possibility of imitation, and thereby of freely choosing the grace of God, did not exist until Christ revealed this grace to all people through his historic sojourn on earth.”²⁷ Leaving aside the difficult question as to who may be entitled to regenerative grace, Arendt insists that the equality of all people, once posited, cannot be canceled out. As Arendt suggests, this common situation of sinfulness makes each individual belong to everyone and it is because of this that equality receives

²⁵ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*.

²⁶ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 79n (033317).

²⁷ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 102 (033353).

a new meaning – love of neighbor. Yet it would seem that this “true” love of neighbor – as an expression of social charity – can take place only within the context of regenerative grace.

According to Arendt, the hallmark of a society founded on Adam is that man makes himself independent of the Creator. In this scenario, the human race as such originates in Adam and not in the Creator. “It has come to be by generation and relates to its source only through all its generations.”²⁸ In effect, Adam’s “fall” becomes the fall of the human race, where the sin of Adam is transmitted indirectly to each individual by generation. For Arendt, the first man hands down this indirectness by way of all men through the historically made world; and it is this indirectness alone that first establishes the equality of all people. Arendt states: “Indirectness through descent establishes the fateful kinship, and thus the interdependence of the whole human race on which society rests. Therefore, this society is both a fact of nature and a product of history.”²⁹ Given that we have a society founded on Adam, where indirectness through descent establishes the first fateful kinship, it would seem that we are confronted with an alternative conception of neighborly love which is rooted not in regenerative grace but in the interdependence of all those made equal by their shared descent from Adam. It is this link between equality and interdependence which is intended to provide the foundation for a new concept of neighborly love which manifests itself as *amor mundi*.

Arendt asserts that the question about the being of man among men concerns the being of the human race as such, so that the question points to the utmost limits of the past. She insists, however, that while the individual feels that “all the way back” he was “out of this world,” as a member of human society he feels that even all the way back he has been worldly. For Arendt, man’s origin is at the same time both the beginning of the man-made world in Adam’s original sin and the origin of his separation from God. Arendt suggests that by defining man’s descent in terms of generation, the world is no longer an utterly strange place into which the individual has been created. “Rather, by kinship in generation the world has always been familiar and belongs to him.”³⁰ It is this notion of kinship in generation which provides the bridge between equality and interdependence as a worldly phenomenon. Arendt states: “In this conception of the being of man, we can understand the obligatory function of equality. “Thus

²⁸ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 103 (033355).

²⁹ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 104 (033355).

³⁰ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 104 (033356).

there is not one in the human race to whom love is not due, either as a return of mutual affection or by virtue of his share in our common nature (cf. Augustine, *Letter*, 130, 13).’ This love is simply an expression of interdependence.”³¹ At this point, Arendt has made a case for interdependence but it is not clear whether such interdependence provides the foundation for a new concept of neighborly love which manifests itself as *amor mundi*.

According to Arendt, what actually enables an individual to relate to his source, as the creature to the Creator, is a historical fact: God’s revelation in Christ. She adds that this fact is revealed to human beings living together in a historical world. Following this line, while it is true that love of one’s neighbor derives from the fact that the neighbor is fundamentally one’s equal and shares in the same sinful past, it is also true that the message of salvation through Christ has come to all who live together in this world. Here we see the formulation of neighborly love within the context of regenerative grace. For example, Arendt states: “One should love one’s neighbor not on account of his sin, which indeed was the source of equality, but on account of the grace that has revealed itself in him as well as in oneself.”³² According to Arendt, it is only by being made explicit that equality obtains a new meaning; that is, it becomes an equality of grace. Yet she strongly insists that it is no longer the same kind of equality. “While the kinship of all people prior to Christ was acquired from Adam by generation, all are now made equal by the revealed grace of God that manifests everyone’s equally sinful past.”³³ As we have already observed, the equality of all people, once posited, cannot be canceled out.

In Arendt’s view, although it takes grace to make equality visible, the equality itself rests on the past. While we may obtain a new meaning for equality in the context of regenerative grace, the same sinful past remains, for Arendt, a constitutive factor for the state of grace.

For Arendt, this new social life, which is grounded in Christ, is defined by mutual love, which replaces mutual dependence. As she suggests, faith dissolves the bonds that tied human beings to the world in the original sense of the earthly city; and so faith dissolves our dependence on one another. Yet, what is significant in this dissolution of mutual dependence in favour of mutual love is that a residue of our shared sinful past remains in the explicitation of equality that marks “true” neighborly love. Mutual dependence – or interdependence –

³¹ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*.

³² Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 106 (033359).

³³ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*.

in itself cannot bring about the “true” love of neighbor that is expressed in social charity; however, it is our shared sinful past which ultimately determines *caritas*. Arendt states:

When I attain the explicitness of my own being by faith, the other person’s being becomes explicit as well, in equality. Only then will the other become my brother (neighbor). Out of this explicit tie of brotherliness (neighborliness) grows *caritas*, which is at the same time a necessity. It is a necessity because past sins prevent escape from the pre-existing world even in the isolation of faith.³⁴

For Arendt, what is common to all, as the common past of the human race, is sin; and it is only as sin that the past concerns the believer. “In general, one’s obligation toward another arises from this common past of sin, the concrete impulse of neighborly love arises from the thought of one’s own peril. This thought is constantly awake from the past, from the descent of Adam, in this life which is seen as an enduring trial (cf., Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 32, 48).”³⁵ Even within the context of regenerated grace, then, the purpose of grace – which is to facilitate the return of the creature to the Creator – must necessarily remain unfulfilled as long as the creature remains within the conditions of mortal existence; and so the haunting residue of the “wages of sin” may cast long and unsettling doubts about our ability to live with others in social charity.

Unlike the fourth theological state of man in peace – where we see the congruence of human freedom and the fulfillment and end of man’s desire for God – the state of grace leaves man open to fear and uncertainty about the future. It may be useful to recall Arendt’s claim that what helps to still the fear of not attaining future freedom is the memory of past knowledge of our desired object. It is with the possibility of transcendent memory, then, that man can free himself of this fear and uncertainty. By showing gratitude for life having been given at all, the spring of remembrance is opened; and it is only when man finds the Creator as the ground of his being that past knowledge and the possibility of future freedom become present. In Arendt’s analysis of Augustine’s concept of love, “true” love of neighbor can be achieved in *caritas* because our shared sinful past remains a constitutive factor for the state of grace. Again it is our shared past – not our interdependence – that brings about this “true” love of neighbor. Yet because it is our shared sinful past that brings about this “true” love of neighbor, we are left to puzzle over the possible link – if any – between interdependence and *amor mundi*.

If we wish to claim that the link between equality and interdependence

³⁴ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 108 (033361).

³⁵ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 109 (033362).

provides the foundation for a new concept of love which manifests itself as *amor mundi*, then we ought to pay attention to the notion of a shared sinful past, for this is the bridge which links equality and interdependence as a worldly phenomenon, according to Arendt. It is because of kinship in generation that the world has always been familiar and belongs to man. But in light of the claim that our equality is rooted in a common sinful past, what sense is there in asserting that the world *belongs* to individuals? By drawing attention to interdependence and by framing the notion of our common sinful past in terms of a world that has always been familiar and which has always belonged to us, Arendt suggests that there is not one in the human race to whom love is not due, either as a return of mutual affection or by virtue of his share in our common nature. For Arendt, this love expresses our interdependence. This seems to be the basis for a concept of neighborly love which manifests itself as *amor mundi*; however, this notion of love is limited to the interdependence which arises out of our common past and fails to account for the more fundamental relationship between the creature and the Creator. The link between equality and interdependence as a worldly phenomenon may be bridged by our common sinful past but this kinship in generation hardly constitutes the foundation for a new concept of neighborly love which manifests itself as *amor mundi*.

Let us now return to the question which prompted this investigation into the theological account of the relationship between Creator and creature: What is the basis upon which Arendt adapts the transcendent theological model of initium to the entirely world-oriented phenomenon of natality? For Arendt, it is because of the faculty of memory that man's positive return to his own reality in relation to God is based on a concept of being which is conceived as transcendent and yet, at the same time, as encompassing life and world. The transcendent power of memory, therefore, is what enables the creature to discover the Creator as the ground of his being. By adapting this theological model of initium to the entirely world-oriented phenomenon of natality, the love which is manifest in *amor mundi* is restricted to the interdependence that arises out of our common sinful past. Indeed, without due attention to the principle of regenerative grace as the remedy to our common past, it is not clear how Arendt can avoid the charge that her conception of *amor mundi* is governed by the principle of cupiditas.

It would seem that Arendt's notion of *amor mundi* reflects her desire to establish a foundation for interdependence and love of others as a worldly phenomenon. Elizabeth Meade suggests that when we look back at Arendt's dissertation from the vantage point of her later political and philosophical work, we can see where she took issue with Augustine – although she does not clearly distinguish her views from Augustine in the dissertation. Meade states: “For

Arendt, the human being was defined in large part by the world which he builds and in which he lives. Any quest for the self outside of the world is doomed to failure because the world and the human being are conceptually inseparable.”³⁶ As Meade indicates, Augustine’s concept of the world is marked by this freedom of individuals to use the world to attain their final end and then to leave it, and by *caritas*’ position outside the world. Meade adds that one can love one’s neighbor as oneself because both stand in the same relationship to God and hence can love God equally. Here we see the significance of transcendent memory as the bridge that links all human beings with the ground of being – the Creator. Meade states: “Although Arendt maintained critical distance in her dissertation, she was clearly struck by the fact that in this conceptualization, the neighbor is no longer one to be encountered in the world, no longer one with whom we can have a direct relationship.”³⁷ While we may be made equal by our common sinful past, our ability to live with others in social charity is achieved not through any need for interdependence but through our ability to recover the ground of all created beings.

According to Meade, the search for the source of ground of being is crucial to understanding Arendt’s point of departure from Augustine. She adds that this quest for self, which for Augustine was realized in God, became for Arendt the ontological search for the source of one’s own being. As Meade suggests, this search for one’s own being in Augustine is guided by the Greek conception of being as eternal being. Meade states: “Since man was created *ex nihilo* and hence had an origin, he cannot derive his origin from himself, but must derive it from God as being as such, the *summum esse*. Man came from nothingness and will pass again into nothingness.”³⁸ As Meade asserts, Augustine’s ontological search led him to the view that the source of one’s own being exists not only both before man and the world, but also after him, as that which still lies ahead. Another way to articulate this is to state that it is in our nature to have our being in God. What is created *ex nihilo* is then annihilated but we find the eternal source of our being in God. In her defence of *amor mundi*, however, Arendt’s insistence that the world has always been familiar and belongs to man

³⁶ Elizabeth Meade, *Thinking in the World: The Ethical Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 1993, p. 43 – hereafter referred to as Meade.

³⁷ Meade, pp. 43-44. cf. Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 94 (033341) where Arendt states: “For the lover who loves as God loves, the neighbour ceases to be anything but a creature of God. The lover meets the neighbour defined by God’s love simply as God’s creation. All meet in this love, denying themselves and their mutual ties.”

³⁸ Meade, p. 47.

suggests that the search for the source of one's being need not take one beyond the world; in other words, she seems to have abandoned Augustinian ontology in favour of the Greek conception of the world as eternal.

For the sake of clarity, let us now review the basic steps which lead to *amor mundi* as a world-oriented form of neighborly love. As Meade indicates, the first chapter of Arendt's dissertation ends with two seemingly insurmountable obstacles to neighborly love: first, that the world leads man away from himself and so from his neighbor; and secondly, that man is so isolated that there seems to be no possibility of ever encountering a neighbor. The first obstacle is overcome by the transcendent power of memory, which enables man to discover the Creator as the ground of his being. As Meade suggests, this ontological search for the source of one's own being – which leads out of the world – alerted Arendt to the possibility of overcoming the second obstacle to neighborly love. In Meade's view, the solution to the second obstacle is by no means convincing; however, she notes that the argument invites careful scrutiny, as it lays the ground for the third and final chapter of Arendt's dissertation – *Social Life*.

As we have discussed, Arendt's investigation into Augustine's concept of love leads her to draw a conclusion about the nature of neighbourly love; that is, Arendt concludes from the fact that a common source of being is only to be found outside the world that all are made equal in the world. For Arendt, this "being out of the world" destroys the mundanely given isolation and individualization of man. According to Meade, it is at this point that Arendt undermines her own argument by conceding that a common ground among people may be found in their mutual exclusion from their world. "Heretofore she had implied that any common ground must be in the world, if there is to be any possibility of neighborly love."³⁹ In the context of Augustinian ontology, this "being out of the world" enables man to recognize the world as the desert it is. Yet it is only by transcending the world that man is able to establish a "proper" relationship to the world. Meade states: "Though man's deliverance from being of the world permits him fully to understand the world as a desert again, he is no longer lost in this desert. He can live in it, because in charity he now has the 'whence,' and thus the meaning, of this life (cf., *Love*, 033329)."⁴⁰ In line with this analysis of Augustinian ontology, we may argue that it is only by recovering the source of his being in transcendent memory that man also recovers his place in the world. To claim that man must be delivered from being of the world in order to "live" in the world expresses the love of *caritas*; and this love is guided

³⁹ Meade, p. 51.

⁴⁰ Meade, pp. 51-52.

by a concept of being which is conceived both as transcendent and as encompassing life and world. For Meade, the questions which launch Arendt into the final chapter are as follows: “How do the neighbor and the self-denying creature meet? And how is the neighbor to be conceived? Again, following the line of Augustinian ontology – and consistent with the theological-metaphysical context which underpins Augustine’s concept of love – one can love one’s neighbor because both stand in the same relationship to God, and hence can love God equally.

Meade contends that Arendt tried to articulate her own position on the problem of neighborly love. For Arendt, the view of neighborly love as the commandment of self-denial fails to explain how the absolutely isolated person can have a neighbor at all (cf., *Love*, 033342). Meade suggests that Arendt’s solution to the problem of neighborly love involves a shift in emphasis from the notion of a society bound by common faith to the notion of a society bound by kinship in generation. Meade states: “Instead of beginning with a conception of a person as isolated, estranged from the world, she began with the assumption of a society of people, humankind. This society is not merely bound together by a common faith (which we have seen may lead to isolation), but by their common historical descent from Adam.”⁴¹ Here we see Arendt’s rejection of Augustinian ontology. As Meade indicates, to resolve the problem of neighborly love, Arendt had to present a concept of self which is understood always in a community, not as originally and primarily isolated. Following this line, because we always find ourselves in a world and with other people, then the notion of being in the world necessarily implies being with others.

As Meade suggests, Arendt’s attempt to situate neighborly love within the context of a community of others underscores her conviction that neighborly love can only occur in the world. Meade states: “Arendt was not explicit in her criticism of Augustine’s *Weltbegriff*, but clearly a world which must be denied in a solitary quest for God and self will not allow for neighborly love.”⁴² However, by omitting the fundamental relationship between the creature and the Creator, Arendt’s attempt to fashion a “worldly” conception of neighborly love out of Augustine’s theological model appears to lose its cogency. Arendt relies on the notion of kinship in generation as the link between equality and interdependence but this link is derived from the theological account of original sin. In this account of man’s fall, sin represents a movement away from God and

⁴¹ Meade, pp. 53-54.

⁴² Meade, p. 55.

therefore a change in the relationship between all men and God. In the absence of this theological account, we are left without any coherent link between equality and interdependence; indeed, Arendt's rejection of Augustinian ontology appears to leave little or no foundation for a defence of equality and interdependence in this world. Given this scenario, one may argue that equality and interdependence ought to be subsumed under theological categories or transcendent principles. It would seem that Arendt's conception of *amor mundi* must surely falter without due consideration to either theological categories or transcendent principles. James Bernauer suggests that Arendt's defence of *amor mundi* and rejection of Augustinian ontology must be understood in light of her concern with world-alienation. Bernauer states: "Arendt thought that the deepest sustenance for a continued world-alienation was the unworldliness native to Christianity."⁴³ Indeed, evidence for Arendt's aversion to Christianity's "unworldliness" can be found in her article, "Collective Responsibility". Arendt states: "With the rise of Christianity, the emphasis shifted entirely from care for the world and the duties connected with it to care for the soul and its salvation."⁴⁴ Arendt adds that the epistles in the New Testament are full of recommendations to shun public, political involvement and to mind one's own, strictly private business. In Bernauer's view, Arendt's objection to Christianity was rooted in her conviction that its unworldliness, with its intrinsic hostility to the public domain, derives from Christianity's glorification of the self and its individual destiny. Yet, Bernauer maintains that Arendt's commitment to a love of the world actually mirrors the Biblical faith of a creative God who established and found his creation to be good and who, in the New Testament, "so loved the world that he gave his only Son." (cf., John 3:16). Bernauer states: "Despite her critique of religion in general and of Christianity in particular, her own personal faith led her to transmit religious models and experiences which showed that, like truth, they still have the promise of forming the 'ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us.' (cf., Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 264)."⁴⁵

One of the difficulties in establishing a connection between Arendt's conception of *amor mundi* and religious faith is that Arendt herself neither

⁴³ James Bernauer, "The Faith of Hannah Arendt," in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, James Bernauer (ed.), Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ James Bernauer, "The Faith of Hannah Arendt," p. 17.

explicitly rejects nor explicitly accepts the value of religious belief.⁴⁶ According to William Wanker, Arendt never considered that religion spoke to the worldliness of man. He states: “Because philosophers only regarded such religious discussion as empty talk of an ideology, whose dogmatism was based on an ontological hierarchy they dismissed, Arendt grasped the idea of a structural orientation but failed to understand the nuances which invalidated her theory.”⁴⁷ For Wanker, the discussion of structure in relation to the nuances of a theory points to the legitimacy of a religious doctrine over Arendt’s presentation. In this view, Arendt’s desire to remain “free” resulted in a rejection of belief in religious faith such that Arendt could no longer believe in any ontological or metaphysical hierarchy which posits the existence of another level or type of being different from man. He adds that Arendt was thus forced into an existentialist’s orientation of the world; one which is forced to use empirical or phenomenological foundations. He states: “In short, Arendt ...will have great difficulty in dealing with the issue of evil, which she admits stems from a Judeo-Christian heritage, in a purely Existenz mode of critique.”⁴⁸ In brief, the argument is that Arendt was forced into an existentialist orientation, which made it difficult for her to deal with the issue of evil in a purely Existenz mode of critique, and which also cast doubt on her ability to sustain an ontology. Moreover, this existentialist orientation seems to suggest that the condition of natality refers merely to our biological point of origin in the world.

Bernauer maintains that Arendt’s *amor mundi* and her invitation to worldly action expressed and was nurtured by a religious faith in the intrinsic value of every human being and in love as a fitting response to each person’s appearance; moreover, he contends that Arendt may never have explicitly connected her faith to Jesus of Nazareth, but her mentor – Karl Jaspers – did.⁴⁹ Perhaps a brief contrast between Jaspers’ notion of The Encompassing and Arendt’s discussion in her dissertation of the relationship between the creature and the Creator may

⁴⁶ Cf. Hannah Arendt, “Religion and the Intellectuals,” *Essays in Understanding*, Jerome Kohn (ed.), New York, San Diego, London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994, p. 231.

⁴⁷ William Paul Wanker, *Nous and Logos: Philosophical Foundations of Hannah Arendt’s Political Theory*, New York, London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1991, p. 22.

⁴⁸ Wanker, *Nous and Logos*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁹ In the examination of Jesus by Karl Jaspers, which Arendt edited, he wrote that Jesus reveals the possibility and hope implicit in all those who are despised according to the standards of the world. He reveals the potentialities of man himself under any conditions. He points to a place where a home is open to man in every mode of failure. Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus*, New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1962, p. 79.

strengthen the claim that Arendt's *amor mundi* and her invitation to worldly action is expressed and was nurtured by a religious faith.

According to Joanna Scott and Judith Stark, Arendt's dissertation provides evidence of conceptual similarities between Jaspers' notion of the Encompassing and Arendt's use of the term. They suggest that similarities can be detected in the way Arendt presents Augustine's understanding of the human being's relationship to God (especially in the theological sense) as creature to Creator. "Here the case can be made for a conceptual similarity between the way in which Arendt via Augustine understands man's true being as ultimately grounded in God (creature in Creator) and Jaspers' mode of the Encompassing understood as consciousness in which I understand myself as transcending ordinary, empirical existence."⁵⁰ As Scott and Stark suggest, Jaspers' mode of the Encompassing appears in the dissertation as Augustine's notion of man grounded in God's immutable and eternal Being. Furthermore, they maintain that Jaspers' notion of "failure" – in which man "experiences the fact that he can neither know nor create Being and that thus he is not God"⁵¹ – can be compared to Arendt's interpretation of Augustine in which man discovers his radical dependence as a creature upon the Creator and comes to understand his source, his destiny, and his true nature in this new light.

Moreover, Scott and Stark point to a similarity in the way Arendt discusses Jaspers and Augustine on the relationship between the individual and the community:

She writes that 'Existenz itself is never essentially isolated; it exists only in communication and in knowledge of the Existenz of others.... It can only develop in the togetherness of men in the common given world' (cf., "What is Existenz Philosophy?," 56). Similarly, the dissertation had emphasized Augustine's understanding of the individual in the context of the Christian commandment of neighborly love.⁵²

For Scott and Stark, Arendt's Augustinian approach to grounding the human community and to understanding its constitution as a result of a particular kind of "love of the world" shares with Jaspers neither content nor context but rather a methodological congruity. "In Arendt's view, Jaspers takes up the contemporary challenge to come to terms with human alienation in the face of the loss of our ontological bearings. She in turn thinks she has discovered the

⁵⁰ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 201.

⁵¹ Cf., Hannah Arendt, "What is Existenz Philosophy?," *Partisan Review* XIII. Winter 1946, no. 1: pp. 34-56, and 54.

⁵² Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*, p. 206.

seeds of the analogous philosophical project already at work in Augustine's thinking."⁵³ Yet, this surely moves us beyond a conception of natality which is tied solely to our biological point of origin in the world. Because this appeal to the biological fact of natality appears to be an inadequate ontological foundation for man's radical sense of uniqueness and freedom, we may wish to consider more carefully the implications of a link between *amor mundi* and religious faith.

Let us return to Arendt's analysis of Augustine's concept of love – while bearing in mind the claim that Arendt's commitment to love of the world actually mirrors the Biblical faith of a creative God. Patrick Boyle reminds us that love of neighbor is possible in *caritas* because the message of salvation through Christ has come to all who live together in this world. Boyle states: "For Arendt, the view of Christian faith that emerges in Augustine, based on the redeeming death of Christ, understands redemption as being not only for the individual, but for the whole world, the same world which is simply a 'given' for every person."⁵⁴ In coming to faith, the individual simultaneously affirms that the ultimate origin of being is God and that all human beings have their common origin in Adam. Indeed, as Boyle indicates, it is only through this second affirmation, the common descent of all people from a human ancestor, that the believer can understand the equality of all people before death. Yet, it is this equality, according to Arendt, that makes Christ a historic and effective reality (cf., *Love*, 033351). Boyle states:

Because the world's estrangement from God through sin is the cause of its historic fellowship with death, so too, the believer's choice out of the world through grace is historically dependent on Christ's redemptive action for the whole community. Recognition of origins, therefore, in this last situation, of Arendt's analysis, concerns not simply the individual, but all of humanity.⁵⁵

From this perspective, it would seem that Christ's appearance in this world as a historic and effective reality was precipitated by a sinful act, and it is through kinship in generation that such an act forms the basis of our common sinful past.

Let us review the claim that Arendt's conception of *amor mundi* must surely falter without due consideration to either theological categories or transcendent

⁵³ Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*.

⁵⁴ Patrick Boyle, "Elusive Neighborliness," *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, James Bernauer (ed.), Boston, Dordrecht, Lancaster: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987, p. 92.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

principles. Restricting Arendt's notion of *amor mundi* to secular considerations would mean that the uniqueness of human beings and the freedom they enjoy in the public realm is ontologically rooted in the biological fact of natality; that is, our uniqueness would derive from the fact of our having been born into this world. William Wanker argues that Arendt's desire to remain free resulted in a rejection of belief in religious faith such that Arendt could no longer believe in any ontological or metaphysical hierarchy. He adds that Arendt adopted an existentialist's orientation of the world where she was forced to rely on empirical or phenomenological foundations. Without recourse to a firm ontological foundation, Arendt will have difficulty in dealing with the problem of evil, particularly as it arises in the context of the Eichmann trial. As Wanker indicates, in her struggle to generate an ontology, Arendt must turn to religious myth for a comprehensive enough paradigm to resolve often unresolvable issues.

In Arendt's analysis of Augustine's concept of love, we find that love is the key to human freedom. In her attempt to elucidate the source of human freedom, Arendt emphasizes our unique capacity to initiate action and begin anew by virtue of our birth. Yet this discussion of natality relies heavily on Augustine's theological account of man as a being created in the image of God. It is in his discussion of human nature in *On The Trinity* that Augustine elaborates on his notion of the human person as a mirror in which we can see the image of God. Augustine states:

...We have now advanced to His [God's] image which is man, in that wherein he excels the other animals, i.e. in reason or intelligence, and whatever else can be said of the rational or intellectual soul that pertains to what is called the mind. For by this name some Latin writers, after their own peculiar mode of speech, distinguish that which excels in man, and is not in the beast, from the soul, which is in the beast as well. If, then, we seek anything that is above this nature, and seek truly, it is God - namely a nature not created, but creating.⁵⁶

It is in this discussion of human nature as *imago dei* that we see the source and extent of human freedom; that is, we are free to realize more fully our nature only insofar as we mirror the image of God.

Because an appeal to the biological fact of natality appears to be an inadequate ontological foundation for man's radical sense of uniqueness and freedom, we are not without grounds for investigating the link between *amor mundi* and religious faith. In order to situate Arendt's conception of *amor mundi*

⁵⁶ Saint Augustine, "On The Trinity," *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, tr. P. Holmes, Whitney J. Oates (ed.), 2 vols. New York: Random House, 1948: 2: 830. Cf Book XV, p. 1.

within a more secure ontological foundation, it may be wise to consider seriously the link between *amor mundi* and religious faith. In other words, Augustine's theological account of man's relationship to God may not be simply a mythic story designed to illustrate Arendt's phenomenology of the life of the mind but rather it may help to provide the necessary ontological foundation for man's radical sense of uniqueness and freedom – thereby opening a coherent and cogent ethical dimension based on a true love of the world. Love gives depth and meaning to our actions, and provides us with the motivation to share the world with others, yet it is ultimately the responsibility of each individual to consent to this love. In dealing with the problem of evil, particularly as it arises in the context of the Eichmann trial, perhaps the most appropriate response is to move towards the realization of an Arendtian ethics of social charity rooted in metaphysical-theological principles. Here we see the social dimensions of natality. To freely consent to this love means that we are free to act spontaneously in the world, and every time we act spontaneously, we bring something new into the world. Therefore, there is always the possibility of overcoming self-love and initiating action that is directed to a world inhabited by others. An ethics of social charity opens up when we overcome the subjectivist picture of ourselves as fundamentally independent, isolated monads in favour of the view that our lives are so fundamentally related with one another that this relation is in part constitutive of what and who we are.

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