

ARENDR, AUGUSTINE, AND THE POLITICS OF CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS

THE POLITICS OF CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS: AN AUGUSTINIAN ASSESSMENT OF  
HANNAH ARENDT

By CHRISTOPHER F. KOOP, B.A., M.A.

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AUTHOR: Christopher F. Koop, B.A. (Brock University), M.A.  
(Brock University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor P. Travis Kroeker

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## Abstract

This thesis argues that Augustine's account of Christian neighbour love properly characterizes and illuminates the political relevance of forgiveness within Christian community. The Christian commitment to love the neighbour is offensive to Hannah Arendt's conceptualization of political freedom and political action, yet Augustine challenges Arendt's notion of Christian 'otherworldliness' by locating the source of authentic forgiveness and political identity within the divine kenotic love of Christ. For Arendt, political forgiveness has the capacity to release us from the unforeseen and potentially devastating consequences of action as it safeguards our political interrelatedness and distinct human individuality. Arendt's central objection to Augustinian forgiveness concerns its rootedness in Christ's divine love, which, Arendt argues, destroys the public realm in which human political freedom rests. However, an Augustinian theological imagination responds to Arendt's critical account of love by showing how the Incarnation is the exemplar of human political interaction. For Augustine, Christ as neighbour – in his divinity and humanity – makes forgiveness comprehensible as a politically relevant enactment of restorative love, and the worldly life of Christian community witnesses to this enactment as it points to coming fullness of God's kingdom.

Augustine offers us a way of thinking about a politic of forgiveness that tempers our expectations of political life as it broadens our understanding of love's capacity to restore.

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## **Introduction**

### **A. Augustine, political forgiveness, and the order of love**

At the end of Book XIX of *The City of God*, Augustine concludes chapter 27 with a brief commentary concerning the peace that belongs to those whose love is ordered in accordance with the divine love of God. Augustine writes that though God has made this peace available to his people in the midst of their earthly pilgrimage, they must patiently endure the temporality of the world until this imperfect peace will be made perfect within God's eternal presence. The familiar thematic contrast between worldly sinfulness and heavenly perfection found throughout Augustine's work is highlighted here once again in his description of the dynamic reality of God's peace. While on earth, the human experience of divine peace is tempered by a worldly sinful conditionality, and Augustine reminds us that the right time for rejoicing in the blessedness of God's peace has not yet arrived. The peace God makes available within this earthy reality is solace to those who have confessed their sinfulness in light of God's love for them. What Augustine is describing here is not two different species of peace that are competitively related, but is, instead, an image of the continuity of God's peace that is already at work within the world and the eschatological fulfilment of this peace that is yet to come. For Augustine, being mindful of our sinfulness shapes the direction of our interactions with the world and with one another. Those who are righteous must acknowledge that the temptations and vices they will inevitably confront in their



mortal state are beyond their capacity to control by reason alone, and Augustine's point here is that the full sense of God's peace cannot be experienced so long as these vices must be governed in this way. Justice is present when we obey God and order our minds and bodies in accordance with His divine love, Augustine writes, but it is also present when we offer our praise to God and seek forgiveness for our offences. This is why the posture of the City of God in Book XIX is one of prayer, and it is through a unified cry that the people of God repeat the words Christ taken from Matthew 6: 12 – 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.' Referring to Job 1:7, Augustine sums up the human condition on earth as one of continuous temptation, and when we resist offering and receiving forgiveness, it is our sinful pride that causes us to negate the reality of our need. Put simply, the prayer of God's people during their pilgrimage on earth bespeaks the necessity of forgiveness not only to maintain a right relationship with God, but also with one another. Augustine's commentary on God's divine forgiveness, which is central to his account of the Christ event, can be appropriated in order to explore the role of active Christian neighbour love and forgiveness within the context of a modern political life. Several contemporary interpretations of Augustine's text have worked to establish an important link between righteousness and justice with an understanding of authentic political life that is born out of Augustine's own articulation of proper love of God and neighbour (such as Oliver O' Donovan, Eric Gregory, and Thomas Breidenthal).<sup>1</sup> By appealing to Augustine's account of

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<sup>1</sup> See O'Donovan, *The Desire of Nations*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and *The*

neighbour love and forgiveness, contemporary conversations with these Augustinian themes help make conceptual room in which we can consider how the authentic political nature of forgiveness grounds Christian community within this present reality. In this way, Augustine's theological imagination helpfully contributes to the development of a modern understanding of a Christian worldly politic of love and forgiveness that already participates in the fullness of God's kingdom that is yet to come.

The task for this project is twofold: our first objective is to examine the constitutive elements of political forgiveness by drawing from Hannah Arendt's unique account of authentic political life and her critical reading of Augustinian neighbour love. Arendt's central objection to Augustinian forgiveness concerns its rootedness in Christ's divine love, which, Arendt argues, destroys the public realm in which human political freedom rests. By highlighting the important contributions Arendt makes towards an understanding of political interrelatedness that stresses the distinctiveness of human individuality, we see how forgiveness, when framed as political action, is necessarily linked with our capacity to meet other individuals in their sheer distinctiveness. The second related objective is to respond to Arendt's critical reading of forgiveness as an expression of Christian neighbour love by turning to the Augustinian themes of incarnation and the divine abundance of Christ.

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*Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008); Breidenthal, (1991) *The Concept of Freedom in Hannah Arendt: A Christian Assessment*. PhD. dissertation. Christ Church, Oxford and "Jesus is my neighbor: Arendt, Augustine, and the politics of Incarnation" in *Modern Theology*, 14:4 October, 1998.

The intention of this second objective is to make clear how Christ's appearance as neighbour, in both the fullness of his divinity and humanity, becomes the exemplar and guarantor of forgiveness as well as the basis of authentic Christian political life without negating the sheer individuality of the neighbour Arendt so rigorously seeks to protect. We will see that the movement of Christ's neighbour love within the present world establishes continuity with the abundance and fullness of God's kingdom yet to come, and so the enactment of forgiveness within Christian community witnesses to and participates in the restorative work that has already begun in Christ. While O'Donovan, Gregory, and Breidenthal, have each made significant contributions to contemporary discussions on political Augustinianism, few have addressed how an Augustinian assessment of political forgiveness figures into this conceptual framework. This project offers a distinctive understanding of Augustinianism that challenges Arendt's notion of Christian 'otherworldliness' as it points to the relevance of political forgiveness within Christian community.

### **B. The contested origins of forgiveness: situating Arendt and Augustine amongst contemporary theories of political forgiveness**

There is no shortage of theological commentaries that discuss the various dimensions and scriptural images of forgiveness, yet it is only recently that contemporary Western political philosophy has begun to explore the potential for forgiveness to effectively address political conflict in our own time. This is, perhaps, best exemplified through the various reconciliation commissions occurring within

the past 20 years that have explicitly adopted the language of forgiveness as an alternative approach to traditional juridical methods - South Africa's 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a good example of this approach.<sup>2</sup> With an increased amount of attention now being directed toward philosophic and political interpretations of the idea of forgiveness within the Western political tradition, it is not surprising that the variances amongst these discussions are significant, as are the debates concerning the suitability of the term 'political forgiveness' itself.<sup>3</sup> To be sure, we cannot presume to know what Augustine would say about our current political structures and practices, or how forgiveness might be suited to play a significant role within modern political life. Even so, many of the central aspects that shape modern discussions of political forgiveness continue and resonate with Augustinian themes (as in the relationship between forgiveness and love, humility, and confession), and, in this way, these Augustinian themes can help shape contemporary questions and discussions about forgiveness and politics without historical anachronism. That is, we need not attempt to definitively assert precisely what Augustine would have thought of modern enactments and expressions of forgiveness within political life, but, conversely, we can turn to interpretations of Augustine's theological imagination as a way of encouraging more robust modern

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<sup>2</sup> See Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Double Day, 1999). While the South

<sup>3</sup> While these discussions deserve our attention, a comparative analysis of these many interpretations, including a critical evaluation of the modern political initiatives that have explored/utilized various aspects of the language of forgiveness, is beyond the scope of this project. See Michael Henderson, *No Enemy to Conquer* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), and Alice MacLachlan, "The Philosophical Controversy over Political Forgiveness," in *Public Forgiveness in Post-Conflict Contexts*, ed. B. A. M. Stokkom et al. (Intersentia Press, 2012).

conceptualizations of political forgiveness. In order to situate both Arendt and an Augustinian account of forgiveness within the context of these contemporary debates, we shall consider the work of Charles Griswold, Alice MacLachlan, and David Konstan as a way of broadly sketching some parameters. This is not an attempt to settle the historic question of the precise origins of forgiveness as a fully formed idea, but a way of establishing the major themes of the debate in order to open the possibility of allowing the conversation between Arendt and Augustine to inform how we can think in new ways about the authenticity of Christian community and how forgiveness works to ground it.

In the opening chapter of his book, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, Griswold explores the historical conceptual limits of forgiveness by examining its place within ancient Greek thought. Griswold argues that though the ancients did not treat forgiveness as a virtue, there are enough ambiguities in their language and thinking to suggest that something like the idea of forgiveness was already 'hovering in the air'.<sup>4</sup> According to Griswold, the reason why both Plato and Aristotle did not consider forgiveness to be a virtue concerns their understanding of the qualities pertaining to a beautiful soul – what Griswold refers to as a 'perfectionist ethic'. Both Plato and Aristotle, amongst others from Greek antiquity, utilize variations of the terms 'excuse' or 'pardon', Griswold claims, yet these terms, like forgiveness, are

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<sup>4</sup> Griswold, *Forgiveness: A Philosophical Exploration*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 6.

not treated as virtues within either a Platonic or Aristotelian ethical framework.

Griswold writes:

We may conclude that forgiveness (as distinct from pardon, mercy, lenience, compassion, and excuse) is not a virtue within these perfectionist ethical schemes. The perfected person is nearly or totally immune from mistakes in judgement; there is nothing of the past for him or her to undo, reframe, or accommodate, at least so far as the past is connected with perfect agency. The character type on whom such theories are focused, and which they hold up as the moral exemplar, is perfect or like-the-perfect, and thereby rises quite distinctly above the merely human.<sup>5</sup>

Magnanimous individuals need not forgive in order to overcome a harmful act committed against them because they do not experience resentment as an individual with poorer ethical judgement might. In a sense, forgiveness applies most appropriately to situations in which the interaction between individuals is not governed absolutely by perfect wisdom, and this is the reason the magnanimous individual shares little connection to the world in which forgiveness is a normative experience. For forgiveness to be considered virtuous, then, Griswold argues that we need to understand ourselves within a shared conditionality as people who inhabit a fractured and imperfect world. For us, forgiveness is a virtue because the pervasive suffering within our reality points to the moral obligation we have toward one another, and by coming to terms with our imperfection, we must then foster commensurate virtues. This is not a total departure from a perfectionist ethic, Griswold suggests, but a way of thinking about forgiveness as a virtue that helpfully opens our ethical imaginations toward “an ideal of human life as a whole – to a

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

‘picture’ of what a good life would be.”<sup>6</sup> If we are to imagine the virtuous within our own modern context, Griswold suggests that, “a picture of the world as we have it, including ourselves as embodied, affective, and vulnerable creatures, plays into the judgement as to what will count as a virtue. Virtues express praiseworthy or excellent ways of being responsive to the world, given the sorts of creatures we are”.<sup>7</sup> In sum, Griswold’s appeal to the ancients is an attempt to elevate forgiveness to a position where we can regard it as an essential component of a praiseworthy life within our present reality.

Griswold’s aim is, in many ways, analogous to the work of both Hannah Arendt and many liberal readings of Augustinianism. There is conceptual space available in which we can consider forgiveness in light of the serious contextual differences that separate modernity from antiquity – even as we draw upon these sources for our inspiration. By looking to the language employed by the ancients, we need not be bound too tightly by difference as we search out points of connection. This is not a negation of proper historicity, but is, alternatively, a carrying forth of common themes that can be made comprehensible within our own context. Put differently, Griswold’s point is that we can think about what it means to forgive within our own modern context because we have inherited a vocabulary of forgiveness from the Greeks – even when there are variations. So although forgiveness may not have featured as a virtue within the ‘ethical perfectionist’

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

framework of the Greeks, in another sense, the Greeks were entirely familiar with several cognates of forgiveness that can be linked to the development of our contemporary understanding of the term. After considering the work of Lucretius and Epicurus, Griswold states that, “forgiveness ends up being understood as a kind of pardon, and in particular as the clemency or mercy that may be offered once all considerations of justice are in”.<sup>8</sup> Griswold’s reading of Plato and Aristotle is similar. In each of these cases, the term *sungnômê* is used to express a range of meanings that can be related to a ‘vocabulary of forgiveness’.<sup>9</sup> The connection with contemporary ideas of forgiveness relies on the ambiguity of this vocabulary, that is, if we follow Griswold’s sketch of the ancient Greek conceptual landscape, we see how our contemporary notions of forgiveness respond to an intuition or sense of forgiveness that fits amongst the Greek notions of excuse, pity, pardon, and debt. The rare appearance of forgiveness amongst Greek philosophers, then, was not due to the unavailability of the term, but rather because the term itself was not required to meet any serious ethical demand. Even so, and in spite of Aristotle’s unwillingness to count forgiveness as a virtue, Griswold locates the complex origins of our contemporary notions of forgiveness within this context in order to determine how the moral weight of the idea should be appropriately applied within our own social and political realities.<sup>10</sup> In effect, by locating the origin of forgiveness within the

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that Griswold argues that the development of his own understanding of forgiveness includes references to both the Greek verb *sungnômê* (to excuse or to pardon) and the



heritage of Greek philosophic thought, Griswold seeks to highlight the moral legitimacy and importance of the term within our own contemporary context. Yet there are limitations, Griswold notes, to the scope and appropriateness of forgiveness. This is, perhaps, made most evident throughout Griswold's delineation of interpersonal forgiveness and political apology. What is of interest here is how Griswold describes the political as a 'depersonalized' space in which forgiveness is 'out of place'. Genuine interpersonal forgiveness requires the expression of specific sentiments, as in the kind of remorse that accompanies the moral transformation of the offender, and so Griswold draws a distinction between the interpersonal and the political based not only on the obvious variances in proximity, but also by the content of these sentiments.

The basis of Griswold's assessment of forgiveness and the political concerns the differences between the publicity of political society and the intimacy of the interpersonal. For readers of Arendt, we see how Griswold's separation of the personal from the political stands in disagreement with Arendt's articulation of authentic political action and identity. The broad impersonal space in which political collectives move cannot accommodate the type of interpersonal exchange that is required for forgiveness, and so Griswold chooses to use the term 'political apology' rather than 'political forgiveness' as a way of acknowledging the moral community to which a political apology is addressed. "Because political apology,

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Greek verb *aphiêmi* (to acquit, release, or cancel a debt) taken from Matthew 6: 12 (Griswold, *Forgiveness*, p. 3).

unlike forgiveness, does not claim to articulate the sentiments and motivations of individuals,” Griswold writes, “its morality does not depend on the true motives of the abstract agent in question. It does depend on the implicit or explicit reaffirmation of the moral spectators norms, as well as the appropriate actions that demonstrate publicly the reliability of that reaffirmation.”<sup>11</sup> For Griswold, both apology and forgiveness carry moral weight, yet while forgiveness restores the moral relationship between individuals, apology reaffirms the moral norms of a depersonalized political collective. For Arendt, on the other hand, the idea of an abstract political actor is precisely what her account of political forgiveness challenges. Griswold makes the claim that political entities, as collectives, require no sense of individuality except in the “metaphorical sense that a social or political body is an individual”, yet, for Arendt, political life must correspond with the appearance of distinct human individuals within a plurality.<sup>12</sup> The relationship between political institutions and forgiveness becomes problematic for Griswold because the forswearing of resentment, which he claims is the central hallmark of interpersonal forgiveness, cannot be replicated on a broader civic level. Put briefly, Griswold’s notion of political apology is equipped to function on the institutional level because “apology, unlike forgiveness, is conceptually suited to the impersonality of [political forgiveness]”.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, while interpersonal forgiveness considers the particular sentiments of individuals in order to overcome

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<sup>11</sup> Griswold, *Forgiveness*, p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

resentment, political apology reflects the broader moral commitments that can be expected from any reasonable person who is a part of the community. The task of political apology, then, is to publically symbolize these moral norms.<sup>14</sup> Griswold's articulation of the distinction between interpersonal forgiveness and political apology presents a clear departure from Arendt's account of authentic political life in a number of ways. Most notably, we will see that Arendt's account of political forgiveness resists the influence of any broader moral framework. As an expression of sheer political action, Arendt challenges Griswold's appeal to a particular moral model of forgiveness that separates the political from the interpersonal.

Forgiveness, for Arendt, represents the only way of responding to the problem of the irreversibility of political action, and so authentic political life depends on the capacity of forgiveness to maintain the freedom to appear before one another in our unique individuality. Arendt's account of political forgiveness does not share the same moral concern we find in Griswold, and this is because Arendt's intentions are to establish an idea of political freedom that has not been shaped by any specific moral ideal. Political forgiveness, as Arendt sees it, depends entirely upon an understanding of human individuality as it appears within plurality. In this way, while Griswold helpfully demonstrates the increasing interest and need to understand the dimensions of political forgiveness, especially in light of uncritical applications of forgiveness which risk distorting its moral value, the separation of the political from the interpersonal risks conflating the social with the political – a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

modern movement Arendt is especially critical of. Put differently, if we begin to think of political forgiveness in terms of our political arrangements and institutions, or what Griswold understands as ‘collectivities’ and societies, we overlook the constitutive elements of what is authentically political and to which these institutions refer. As we shall see in the following chapters, the conversation between Arendt and the Augustinian tradition sheds a different light on the relationship between the political and sheer individuality, that is, an Augustinian consideration of Arendt’s understanding of political forgiveness concerns the interaction of recognizable persons in their distinct individuality in a way that supports a political understanding of forgiveness.

As a contemporary alternative to Griswold’s formulation of interpersonal forgiveness and political apology, MacLachlan, in her article entitled, ‘The Philosophical Controversy Over Political Forgiveness,’ offers a multidimensional understanding of forgiveness that re-examines the landscape of contemporary theoretical/philosophical accounts of the relationship between political life and forgiveness. For MacLachlan, forgiveness makes most sense when our understanding of the term can be situated across a multiplicity of contexts, that is, workable political forgiveness must be made comprehensible in both larger political contexts as well as in every day life. According to MacLachlan, the importance of Arendt’s account of political forgiveness rests on her understanding of natality, which is to say that the motivation driving political forgiveness is based on a

willingness to reengage other political actors without relying upon violence or vengeance. Forgiveness allows political actors the chance to begin again, to continue to freely appear before one another publically because they are released from the unforeseen consequences of their actions. MacLachlan's reading of Arendt follows the relationships Arendt establishes between authentic political action, the appearance of individuality, and public action, yet MacLachlan, albeit reluctantly, illuminates Arendt's articulation of political life in an overly agonistic light.

MacLachlan states:

Political citizens live with one another, but not necessarily for one another and will, in fact, strive to distinguish themselves against others (in both word and deed). Therefore forgiveness cannot represent political closure; total harmony would mean the end of politics, and the on going commitment to politics is what grounds and motivates political forgiveness in the first place. In other words, the political sphere cannot, and perhaps ought not, achieve the same kind of close reconciliation that some acts of interpersonal forgiveness may – though they certainly need not – initiate. Acts of political forgiveness release us just enough to be able to move forward, together. The *meaning* of the wrong is fixed in the past, so that it no longer continues to determine and dominate the present in cycles of violence.<sup>15</sup>

MacLachlan rightly notes that Arendt never intended political forgiveness to establish 'total harmony' which, as we will see, closely resembles Arendt's critical characterization of the perfection of Augustine's eschatological Christian community. Yet Arendt's interest in the public glorification of speech and deed is something other than the promotion of rivalry or an occasion to competitively assert

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<sup>15</sup> MacLachlan, "The Philosophical Controversy Over Political Forgiveness" Forthcoming in *Public Forgiveness in Post-Conflict Contexts* ed. B.A.M. Stokkom et. al. (Intersentia Press), p. 22.

one's individual identity over and against the identities of those around us. Nor does Arendt seem to indicate that the purpose of political forgiveness functions to preserve a kind of agonistic spirit that serves to push political actors against one another. This idea appears to stand in contrast with Arendt's formulation of political action where the public realm is meant to inspire us to 'dare the extraordinary', rather than be driven to act by a competitive will to 'distinguish oneself against others'. "Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed," Arendt writes, "can lie only in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement."<sup>16</sup> What Arendt and MacLachlan both agree on is that true political freedom requires a mechanism that releases individuals from what cannot be anticipated when they act before one another. This sense of political forgiveness can be differentiated from understanding forgiveness as total closure, but this does not mean that forgiveness, as action, only grants the minimum amount of space to move forward in order to preserve an agonistic political spirit. As action, forgiveness itself is a constitutive part of human political identity – this is why Arendt argues that only as an aspect of authentic action can forgiveness remedy its potentially problematic corollaries. To be sure, Arendt differentiates the plurality of political actors inhabiting the public realm from the sameness of a society of *animal laborans* by turning to the revelation of sheer uniqueness and individuality that occurs when we appear before one another in speech and deed, so, although MacLachlan's notion of a politically competitive spirit may be saying too much about Arendt's articulation of

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<sup>16</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 206.

the public realm, the appearance of distinct individuals is certainly central to Arendt's formulation. For our purposes, the interesting issue MacLachlan raises concerns the reasons why Arendt might argue that the political realm ought not to foster 'total harmony', or the kind of closure that is most appropriately located within interpersonal relationships. MacLachlan may be right to suggest that Arendt does not intend acts of political forgiveness to draw individuals closer together than what is required to simply release individuals from transgressions, yet this is not primarily because proximity of this kind prevents the human capacity to 'strive to distinguish' oneself. Rather, it is because forgiveness that binds individuals too closely destroys the world that relates and separates individuals; it destroys the space specifically suited for political life. This is the reason Arendt is critical of Christian forgiveness that is based on neighbour love. Arendt's central concern is not 'closeness' or 'total harmony' that ultimately restricts an agonistic political spirit; her concern rests on love's negation of political freedom and the public realm. This is the challenge Arendt presents to an Augustinian account of neighbour love and forgiveness, and why she can never accommodate any notion of political forgiveness that sets about overcoming the human world that separates them.

The real value of Arendt's formulation of forgiveness, MacLachlan argues, is found in her articulation of respect. Respect, understood here as the, "willingness, however grudgingly, to continue to share an intersubjective political world together,

can legitimately ground political acts of forgiveness.”<sup>17</sup> Following Arendt, love in the private sphere, MacLachlan writes, is analogous to respect in the public realm, and so the force that compels individuals to forgive relies, in part, upon a common commitment to both the sustainability of the political arena and those who enter this space. According to Arendt, respect, “is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem.”<sup>18</sup> We are dependent upon others, Arendt writes, because forgiveness cannot occur in isolation. Like action, forgiveness requires a plurality of observers who perceive our distinctness, which we ourselves cannot perceive on our own. The relationship between respect and forgiveness, unlike Augustine’s relationship between love and forgiveness, maintains an important distance that is ‘without intimacy and without closeness’. Respect, like neighbour love, is unconditional in the sense that we do not respect another person because of his or her specific accomplishments or character, and whereas Christian neighbour love, in Arendt’s estimation, directs our attention away from the world, respect draws our attention to the wholeness of the other’s distinct being because it is informed by the political space in which we appear. Put differently, Christian love resonates with Arendt’s idea of respect insofar as both occur independently of individual preference, but while love collapses the in-

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<sup>17</sup> MacLachlan, “The Philosophic Controversy over Political Forgiveness”, p. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 243.



between that separates us from the neighbour, respect maintains our focus on the political space and nature of our interrelatedness.

MacLachlan concludes her article by arguing that although we cannot ignore the variations amongst actual implementations of political forgiveness that may compromise these initiatives, that is, that although we should always be aware that enactments of political forgiveness are not ‘immune’ to expressions of self-interest, various political agendas, and corrupt strategizing, these shortcomings are not sufficient to rule out the political relevance of forgiveness on the whole. MacLachlan directs our attention to Arendt at this point precisely because Arendt seems to make room for an understanding of forgiveness that attends to the political nature of both interpersonal and larger expressions of forgiveness that occur at the national and global level. This is a response to critics like Griswold, MacLachlan states, who view the application of forgiveness on a broader political scale as an ‘unmeasured act of utterly disinterested generosity’. “If the political sphere retains the common respect Arendt describes and at least some minimal will to continue to share political institutions,” MacLachlan writes, “forgiveness is potentially both a politically legitimate and a morally valuable option for political reconstruction and renewal.”<sup>19</sup> Arendt offers no program or definitive framework through which ‘measured’ acts of forgiveness may be best applied to specific situations, and so the importance of Arendt’s work, MacLachlan suggests, lies in the ability of Arendt’s conceptualization of forgiveness to view relationships between individuals as examples of authentic

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<sup>19</sup> MacLachlan, “The Philosophic Controversy over Political Forgiveness”, p. 23.

political action. “An account of mutual political respect, like Arendt’s,” MacLachlan states, “explains how political relationships can be sufficiently ‘personal’ to ground and motivate decisions to forgive.”<sup>20</sup> The conceptual space MacLachlan makes for Arendt challenges the cynicism of contemporary philosophic responses towards the political relevance of forgiveness, that is, MacLachlan acknowledges Arendt’s important contribution to the notion of political forgiveness that begins with her commentary on the absence of the language of forgiveness within modern Western political discourse.<sup>21</sup> Because of Arendt’s insight into the political significance of forgiveness, an increasing number of contemporary political theorists and philosophers are engaging the possibilities of forgiveness for political life. In essence, MacLachlan argues that we have a better understanding of the potential and significance of political forgiveness because of the groundwork Arendt has laid out for us, and the ‘standard objections’ raised by theorists and philosophers do not present conceptual barriers.<sup>22</sup>

Konstan’s examination of the genealogy of forgiveness in his text, *Before Forgiveness: The Origins of a Moral Idea* challenges MacLachlan’s multidisciplinary

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>21</sup> MacLachlan references the work of Jeffery Murphy and Thomas Brudholm as notable examples of the philosophic cynicism directed toward contemporary discussions of the political relevance of forgiveness. The most pressing concerns raised, MacLachlan writes, focus on the distortion of forgiveness as a moral ideal once it has been brought into the political realm, and, following Kristeva’s own concern, that forgiveness negates proper acknowledgment of judicial procedure and notions of justice.

<sup>22</sup> In terms of the most obvious objections to notions of political forgiveness, MacLachlan suggests that violations of a victim’s prerogative to forgive, the argument that forgiveness is essentially illiberal, and that forgiveness between groups rather than individuals is largely incomprehensible are the most pressing.

approach by arguing that contemporary theorists move too quickly to draw from ancient sources of forgiveness without accounting for the different usages and absences of the idea within these ancient texts. Like Griswold, Konstan looks at the variances within the particular vocabularies of the ancients as a way of drawing attention to the discrepancies in our modern assumptions about the perceived moral equivalencies between ancient and contemporary ideas of forgiveness. Our present idea of forgiveness, which has grown to become a seemingly indispensable moral alternative to other outmoded reconciliation strategies, Konstan claims, would have been unfamiliar to the ancient societies in which we claim this understanding is rooted. This includes the ancient Roman and Greek traditions, but, most importantly, Konstan argues that any idea of modern forgiveness claiming to be rooted within the Christian biblical tradition is equally misplaced. Our contemporary notions of forgiveness that promote the moral transformation of the offender and the relinquishment of resentment by the victim simply do not resonate with the reconciliation strategies commonly found in classical antiquity or the Judeo-Christian tradition. Konstan argues that his task is not to contribute to an ‘indictment of forgiveness’, but that in our urgency to employ forgiveness everywhere and at all times, we should not mistake ancient forms of reconciliation as morally inferior to our present ideas of forgiveness, nor should we assume that our modern ideas of forgiveness were as self-evident to the ancients as we believe they are to us.

By turning to ancient Greek and Roman narratives of reconciliation, Konstan demonstrates how modern notions of forgiveness, which, he argues, rely on moral transformation, confession, and remorse, are unlike the scenes we find in classical Greek literature where the restoration of dignity and the transference of blame are the common strategies used to appease the anger of one who has been wronged. The *Odyssey*, Konstan writes, 'is hardly the place to look ' for the foreswearing of vengeance. In his rage at discovering the state of his household upon his return to Ithaca from Troy, Odysseus mercilessly slaughters each suitor that had designs to usurp his kingdom from him in his absence. Even when Eurymachus attempts to dissuade Odysseus from killing the entire group of suitors by offering him compensation for everything they have stolen and consumed, Konstan notes, Odysseus remains implacable. What is most interesting at this point in the story is that Eurymachus does not approach Odysseus in order to convey great remorse for what he or the suitors have done. Eurymachus knows what he has done was wrong, but he does not attempt to assuage Odysseus' anger by demonstrating a change of heart. Instead, Eurymachus shifts the blame to Antinous, the most aggressive of the suitors, claiming that he was the one responsible for everything. This scene, Konstan states, is representative of the broader absence of forgiveness amongst the strategies for anger appeasement in classical literature. "Eurymachus does what every pleader after him will do," Konstan writes, "he seeks to exonerate himself, not to prove that he is now a different person."<sup>23</sup> Admittedly, tragedy is not the most

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<sup>23</sup> Konstan, *Before Forgiveness*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 63.

likely genre in which forgiveness might appear, Konstan states, and so his reference to multiple genres and texts in which various scenes of reconciliation unfold work to highlight the absence of forgiveness across the spectrum of Roman and Greek narratives. In a lengthy analysis of Menander's comedy *Samia*, Konstan sums up the final reconciliation between father and son as a moment where "the appeasement of anger rests not on the remorse of the offender and the forgiveness that it invites but on a display of humility that shows a proper regard for the affronted party's status and authority. As a moral basis for the giving over of anger, it works. But it is not the modern paradigm of remorse, repentance, and forgiveness."<sup>24</sup> The complex father/son relationship and series of events that lead Moschio to be angry with Demeas makes it easy for a modern reader to view the reconciliation that takes place later on between these two characters as the enactment of forgiveness. That is, when Demeas concedes that he was wrong to accuse the innocent Moschio of seducing his concubine, Chrysis, Moschio abandons his anger towards his father not because he has forgiven him, but because his father has humbled himself in his error. This movement is a reflection of Aristotle's claim, Konstan notes, that humility is "an effective means of reducing ire."<sup>25</sup>

Even when we find moments of authentic remorse that seem to calm the anger of the offended party within these classical narratives, Konstan states, we should be cautious about treating these as moral examples commensurate with

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

modern forgiveness proper. In a letter to his friend Sabinianus, Pliny intercedes on behalf of the former's freedman who has committed an offense. This man has come to Pliny and has both confessed his error and expressed his deep regret over the matter through both his tears and his silence. The emphasis here, however, is not the great transformation that has occurred within the freedman, Konstan suggests, but when we consider Pliny's appeal to Sabinianus's 'gentle' temper, the picture changes to one where the virtue lies in the emotional self-control of Sabinianus rather than the forgiveness he extends to the freedman. So even though the exhibition of remorse is a requisite of genuine interpersonal forgiveness, Konstan argues that we should be wary to conclude that the images of remorse found within these classical narratives attend to the theme of forgiveness. What we find in Pliny, then, is that the freedman's remorse only serves to highlight Sabinianus's 'aristocratic forbearance' rather than forgiveness.

The Judeo-Christian tradition stands apart from classical Roman and Greek texts in terms of its understanding of forgiveness, Konstan notes, which is to say that while we can find instances throughout Greek and Roman literature in which human beings attempt to placate the anger of a deity, the Hebrew bible is different in its deliberate usage of forgiveness to describe attitudes of repentance and redemption. Yet this does not mean that biblical forgiveness and the fullness of our modern understanding of forgiveness can be understood in the same way. Konstan argues that the emphasis on the divine forgiveness of God we find throughout the Hebraic

biblical narrative suggests a disparity between interpersonal forgiveness and the forgiveness of God. Konstan writes:

There is a sense in which the representation of forgiveness in the Hebrew Bible falls short of the full modern conception: for the focus on the Jewish people's relationship to God not only has the consequence that it is for the most part God who forgives, rather than human beings, but also that the kind of offense that requires forgiveness is a generalized rejection of the Lord, as opposed to particular wrongs committed against a fellow being.<sup>26</sup>

In his exegesis of Exodus 10:16, Konstan makes the point that when Pharaoh seeks God's forgiveness through the intercession of Aaron and Moses, it should be noted that his act of contrition is primarily directed towards God and not towards the Israelites themselves. Pharaoh is moved by the plague of locusts sent by God to reconsider his treatment of the Hebrew slaves, yet his apparent acknowledgement of God's superiority is largely because he fears divine wrath. "As opposed to such self-interested petitions for mercy," Konstan states, "true contrition in the Hebrew Bible is always felt before God."<sup>27</sup> There is an important difference between repentance and forgiveness that Konstan draws our attention to here where the modern link between these two terms fails to point out the variances in ethical commitments which separate the Hebraic biblical tradition from our current context. Authentic repentance involves a decision to return back to God - to worshipfully orient oneself by committing to follow God's laws in obedience - yet this change of conviction may not always be an example of the transformation of one's moral character. Here is the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

difference for Konstan: when we harm another human being, we commit a wrongful act where the forgiveness offered or sought for this action is dependent upon a moral transformation of character. When we disobey God, however, we are acting sinfully because we are breaking his divine laws. God's anger is always justified, and so repentance is often about assuaging God's anger so as to mitigate punishment. The quality of sinfulness may be understood as a 'state' or 'spiritual condition' that, although it demands moral reform, can be amended by reaffirming one's commitment to God, Konstan argues. When we repent, we are essentially counting on God's anger to be balanced by his forgiving love and mercy. Forgiveness in this sense is a matter of fidelity and recommitment, so orienting oneself back to God differs from the fullness of our modern conceptions of forgiveness because it concerns a more generalized departure from God's laws "as opposed to the particular wrongs committed against a fellow being."<sup>28</sup>

In terms of New Testament images of forgiveness, Konstan states that his exegesis of the Gospels and Epistles is not an attempt to add or contribute to theological doctrine, but to follow up his analysis of forgiveness within Hebrew scripture by examining the teachings of Jesus within a Greco-Roman context. Like the images of God's reconciliatory work found throughout the Old Testament, Konstan claims that the appearance of Jesus confirms that the forgiveness of sins belongs to God alone. When Jesus instructs his followers to forgive others as God has forgiven them, the emphasis here is not on the capacity of humankind to forgive;

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 105.



rather, because only God can forgive sin, Jesus is asserting his identity as God's son. "Jesus...is not arguing here that forgiveness of sin lies within the competence of ordinary human beings," Konstan writes, "rather, he is demonstrating the legitimacy of his claim to be God's son, and hence his regent on earth, with the authority to act in behalf of his father."<sup>29</sup> In this context, sin may properly be understood as the breaking of one's relationship with God, and only God himself possesses the capacity to reconcile a sinner back to himself through forgiveness. What we find, Konstan notes, is that the forgiveness Jesus offers is morally distinct from modern acts of interpersonal forgiveness precisely because it responds to the problem of sin.

Konstan writes:

God is not an ordinary person: he does not go through a process of overcoming his resentment at mistreatment, or work through doubts about the authenticity of apologies and promises...there is something decidedly one-sided in the establishment or reestablishment of a moral relationship with God.<sup>30</sup>

There is continuity between the concept of sin and forgiveness in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, Konstan argues, which is shaped by a shared concern for humankind's disobedience of God's commands. The forgiveness Jesus offers is essentially about God's ability to amend human sinfulness, and so our imitation of Jesus is more about cultivating a proper spiritual disposition towards God than it is a statement about the human power to forgive as God forgives. In this way, the Gospel images of forgiveness have very little to say about interpersonal

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

relationships, Konstan argues, and here he claims that Arendt's argument pertaining to Jesus' discovery of the political value of forgiveness is a misreading. Arendt suggests that forgiveness is a human process derived from Jesus' observations, yet if we understand the context in which New Testament scripture emerged we find that there is no articulation of forgiveness that corresponds with a distinctly human account. That is, as much as confession and inward transformation are a part of the God's redemptive work, the focus is on God's power to release us from sin.

Konstan concludes his text by arguing that the differences between divine biblical forgiveness and the modern notion of interpersonal forgiveness rest, in part, on the secularization of individual transformation. That is, it is a secularized sense of conversion that ultimately changes the way we think about the divine obliteration of sin to actual transformation of the self. What Konstan seeks to demonstrate is that our modern understanding of forgiveness, which involves the transformation of both victim and offender, receives its moral weight in large part from the ethical thinking of Immanuel Kant rather than a particular Christian understanding of biblical scripture. Konstan's analysis turns briefly to Kant at this point because it is through Kant, he argues, that we begin to seriously consider the autonomy of human beings, and because we regard other individuals in their wholeness of their moral agency, the focus of forgiveness no longer rests upon God. "This new conception of the moral autonomy of the individual," Konstan writes, "and the requirement to treat human beings as ends in themselves, created the conditions for a secular

notion of interpersonal forgiveness, in which remorse, and the inner change it presupposed, were directed not to God but, in a way that might have seemed blasphemous in an earlier age, to the fellow human whom one had wronged.”<sup>31</sup> This movement brings us to the beginnings of a modern concept of interpersonal forgiveness, Konstan writes, and so our treatment of the Greek and Roman images of reconciliation we find in classical narratives, as well as the biblical accounts of forgiveness found in Judeo-Christian scripture, must be reconsidered in light of the assumptions we have made regarding the proper origins of this modern conception. That is, Konstan proposes that we revisit these classical texts ‘on their own terms’, and in doing so, we recognize firstly how very recent our modern understanding of interpersonal forgiveness actually is, and secondly that these societies functioned perfectly well in its absence.

The point Konstan makes is clear: Jesus did not discover the value of interpersonal forgiveness as Arendt claims, and to model our modern notion of forgiveness on Hebrew and New Testament scripture is problematic at best. For Augustinians, however, there is more to say here. Konstan is certainly right to distinguish historical contexts and vocabularies from one another, yet his analysis of Jesus demands some attention. The claim Konstan repeatedly returns to is that Jesus invites his disciples to follow his example, but as it relates to forgiveness, this example always seeks to highlight the power of God to forgive sins – to restore a relationship with God broken by sinful disobedience. Forgiveness, as it occurs

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

exclusively between individuals, is only a recent conceptual development that relies on a modern account of human autonomy. This is where the conversation between Arendt and the Augustinian themes of neighbour love and forgiveness develops a conceptual space in which Jesus' appearance and message of forgiveness may be evaluated differently.

First, Arendt's articulation of forgiveness, and her reading of Jesus' teachings, must be taken in light of her account of authentic political life and action – this is something other than the modern idea of interpersonal forgiveness Konstan presents. The absence of a moral framework distinguishes Arendt's idea of political authenticity, and so her account of political forgiveness cannot be about restoring a moral relationship between human beings. Arendt is clear that when she refers to the human capacity to forgive, she is referring to the forgiveness of everyday trespasses that are a part of the nature of action. These common transgressions are without the moral weight Konstan affords them and differ from acts of willed evil by corresponding instead to the damage that inevitably arises from our inability to precisely determine the consequences of our actions. Konstan suggests that the forgiveness Jesus discusses in Matthew 6:9-15 belongs to God alone because only God can forgive sins, yet Arendt draws our attention to the power of forgiveness that belongs to both God and humankind alike. That is, both Konstan and Arendt point to the fact that Jesus's sermon involves an element of human action, "if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you", and whereas Konstan

suggests that Jesus is simply affirming his role as God's Son in this passage, Arendt suggests that we need not consider Jesus's divine claim in order to grasp the full significance of his teaching. For Arendt, the divinity of Jesus is unimportant for recognizing how the capacity to forgive, which, she argues, must belong to human beings if they are to enact it, amends the damages caused by action. When we forgive one another, Arendt states, it is not a matter of God forgiving on our behalf but an expression of humankind's capacity to 'mobilize' the power of forgiveness - this is a matter of being released from the endless cycle of vengeance rather than the restoration of a moral relationship.<sup>32</sup> While Konstan's reading depends upon the divine claims of Jesus, Arendt's reading looks past the religious connotations towards an understanding of forgiveness that is related to the political experiences of Jesus and his disciples as they challenged the public authorities in Israel. Konstan writes:

The logic of foregoing return on a debt thus differs fundamentally from that of forgiveness in the moral sense of the term (despite the fact that we sometimes speak of forgiving a debt). But in the context of the Gospels and the actions of Jesus, the difference runs deeper. The scribes and Pharisees would not have made a fuss about Jesus cancelling a paralytic's loan or a debt due to him by the woman who washed his feet. But wiping away sin is another matter: it is this God alone can do. The language of debt remission is ambiguous, in that, in the case of human beings, it may be taken literally, but with respect to Jesus's actions it acquires the broader metaphorical meaning of rendering a person free of sin.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 239.

<sup>33</sup> Konstan, *Before Forgiveness*, p. 118.

For Arendt, the actions and words of Jesus pertaining to the call to forgive one another is less ambiguous than Konstan suggests. In the same way that Konstan argues that Jesus's forgiveness of a debt would be unremarkable if it was not attached to a particular divine claim, Arendt's account of Jesus's teachings on forgiveness begin by distancing the political relevance of his actions from the 'broader metaphorical meaning of rendering a person free from sin' Konstan refers to. Jesus need not be the Son of God for us to appreciate the political nature of his message of forgiveness, Arendt concludes, and so the 'decidedly one-sided' reality of the divine forgiveness of sins Konstan argues for may be far more accessible.

Secondly, the Augustinian themes of neighbour love and forgiveness can be used to respond to Konstan's critical reading of biblical forgiveness not by distancing Jesus's divine claim from his teachings on forgiveness as Arendt does, but by looking to the fullness of Christ's humanity and his divine abundance as the guarantor of our capacity to forgive. This interpretation of Augustine accomplishes several important tasks related to the objections raised by both Konstan and Arendt. Through Augustine, we find that Jesus, in his humanity, becomes the exemplar of normative human behaviour, that is, his appearance as the Son of God does more than maintain a division between God and his creation through the expression of a divine power that is unavailable to humankind. If we take Jesus's claim that he was both fully divine and fully human seriously, the 'one-sided' image of forgiveness that Konstan refers to can be reimagined in light of the radical way Jesus draws near to

humankind, and, in turn, draws humankind nearer to the divine. To be sure, Augustine would agree with Konstan when he suggests that humankind does not innately possess the capacity to forgive as Jesus forgives; yet Jesus comes in divine power that he makes available to those who confess and follow him. While Arendt argues that Jesus's divinity need not be taken seriously in order to make forgiveness politically accessible, Augustine responds to both Arendt and Konstan with an interpretation of Jesus's divine forgiveness that is accessible to humankind precisely because of his humanity. The purpose of examining Arendt's account of political life alongside her critical reading of the Augustinian themes of neighbour love and forgiveness, then, is to put us in a better position to consider the political relevance of forgiveness as it is enacted within Christian community. The objective is not to confirm the definitive historical origins of an idea, but to open conceptual space in which Augustine's theological imagination becomes a meaningful part of the broader conversation on political forgiveness.

### **C. Arendt and Augustinian Forgiveness: The Politics of Love and 'Otherworldliness'**

For Arendt, the images of Augustine's *civitas Dei* resonate more closely with Christian 'otherworldliness' than they point towards authentic political life. Whereas Augustine argues that the prayer of God's people on earth reflects the orientation of their love, the basis of Arendt's critique of love rests on her conclusion that love, by its very nature, is anti-political. For our purposes, however, we will

attend to the specific voices of Arendt and Augustine as a way of examining the political relevance of a Christian articulation of forgiveness within the boundaries of their conversation with one another. Arendt and Augustine find their place at this intersection of political philosophy and theology because each offers a distinct political rendering of forgiveness, and the admonitory challenge Arendt presents is worth attending to if we are to find in Augustine the possibility of a Christian theological articulation of forgiveness that can properly claim political authenticity. Through a comparative analysis of Hannah Arendt and the Augustinian themes of neighbour love and forgiveness, this project will respond to Arendt's critical assessment of Augustine as a way of demonstrating how forgiveness, as the enactment of loving one's neighbour, is a hallmark of authentic political life within Christian community. While Arendt's own discussion of forgiveness maintains a strict delineation between love and the political, for Augustine, forgiveness and love are constitutive elements of the political life Christians are invited to experience within the world at present.

For Arendt, political forgiveness is rightfully understood contextually, that is, by its appearance within the public realm, but we should not mistake forgiveness of this kind to be politically relevant just because it has been found to be occasionally useful for political purposes – as an alternative to legal measures, for example. Forgiveness is political for Arendt because it is the remedy to the unforeseen consequences of political action, and though traditionally the language of



forgiveness has been located within religious contexts, Arendt argues, we should not misinterpret this contextualization for inauthentic political experience. That is, Arendt's account of political forgiveness begins by addressing its religious origins and the problematic tendency of the Western political tradition to exclude certain authentic political experiences as apolitical because they originate or appear within religious contexts. Arendt argues that Jesus of Nazareth discovered the political relevance of forgiveness, yet she is clear that the origins of this discovery are not competitively related to her articulation of political forgiveness. Authentic political experience can occur within religious contexts because the political nature of forgiveness is not simply a derivative of Christian discipleship made secular; we need to think differently about what appropriately constitutes authentic political life, Arendt suggests, especially in light of what we may wrongly assume to be its contextual determinants.<sup>34</sup> Arendt relies on the claim that forgiveness need not be bound or shaped by religion; rather, we should recognize political experience even when it occurs in unexpected contexts.

For Augustine, conversely, we cannot understand authentic forgiveness without also understanding Christian neighbour love. Forgiveness is a movement of love, Augustine writes, and we are to understand forgiveness in light of the love God extends to us in our sinfulness. The object of one's love directs its movement, Augustine argues, and so Christian forgiveness is an enactment of the love that is differentiated from the way the world loves itself. This does not mean that Christian

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<sup>34</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 239.

love is removed from the world because is differently oriented; rather, loving and forgiving others is a visible and active witness of God's work within the world. Augustine argues that the forgiveness of humanity's sins accomplished by the death and resurrection of Jesus testifies to the reconciling work of God to restore all of creation, and this radical enactment of love and forgiveness is the exemplar for the Christian community. According to Augustine, Jesus is the beginning point for the political meaning of Christianity because he has become our neighbour. We are able to forgive, Augustine suggests, because Jesus-our-neighbour has become the exemplar of forgiveness and has given us the resources to do likewise. In this way, Augustine's account of Christian political life, our acting and speaking in the presence of others in the world, rests on our capacity to love and forgive as Jesus did.<sup>35</sup>

Arendt makes the claim that love is anti-political, and it follows for her that all articulations of political life that are dependent on loving the neighbour cannot be taken seriously. By its nature, love is otherworldly, which is a way of saying that Arendt's most influential contribution to contemporary political philosophy concerns her account of action and forgiveness. The interconnectivity between political action and identity leads Arendt to conclude in *The Human Condition* that the mechanism best suited to liberating human beings from the constraints of transgressive action is forgiveness. What is unique about Arendt's proposal is that forgiveness in this sense is entirely political, which is to say that forgiveness is so

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<sup>35</sup> Breidenthal, "Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation", p. 500.

closely related to political action that it can only properly be understood as a form of political action itself. While action grounds the disclosure of identity amidst a plurality, forgiveness overcomes the barriers that are established when a wrong is committed against another. Forgiveness, as action, re-establishes the possibility of mutual recognition through speech and deed because it offers something more than a purely reactive, retributive response. Arendt sought to rethink the possibilities of forgiveness in light of a purely political account of human interaction because both are constitutive elements of a truly human existence.<sup>36</sup> Arendt's conceptualization of forgiveness originates from within the political realm, and so the public dimension of her account challenges ideas about forgiveness that relegate it to private or sacred realms. Because Arendt claims there is nothing inherently religious or theological about her account of forgiveness, her acknowledgement of Jesus of Nazareth as the discoverer of the political nature of forgiveness is strictly historical.<sup>37</sup> That is, Arendt is reluctant to assign any kind of valuation, religious or otherwise, to forgiveness that would necessitate a particular commitment to anything beyond our interaction with one another within the public realm. If political action is constitutive of reality and human meaning, forgiveness, as the remedy for the unpredictability of action, must remain entirely unaffected by those things which would otherwise compromise its political significance. This is why Arendt draws such sharp distinctions between public and private realms, or, put

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 238.

differently, between what is worldly and otherworldly. It is also, in some ways, a response to various ideas of forgiveness that have conflated the private with the personal. For Arendt, forgiveness is personal, but it is not private. The personal nature of political forgiveness means that it considers *who* has committed the wrongful act, rather than focus exclusively on the content of the act itself.<sup>38</sup> Because appearance and identity figure predominantly throughout Arendt's account of the political, conventional usages of particular terminologies that have been used to describe forgiveness must be rethought in light of its personal quality. The personal, according to Arendt, refers to the kind of interaction that occurs between individuals with distinct identities. This is different from an understanding of the personal that closely corresponds to forms of self-reflection or activity that properly belongs within the private sphere of life.<sup>39</sup> Put simply, forgiveness is personal for Arendt because it requires the presence of distinct, recognizable individual persons, and these distinct identities are revealed exclusively through political action. This is a critical link for Arendt, for if action and identity are constitutive elements of

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 241. Sigrid Weigel makes the claim that Arendt did not intend to focus her discussion of forgiveness around the delineation of specific realms, though she is evidently aware of the differences between the public realm and the private. What this amounts to is a consideration of space that is primarily informed by its relation to the creation of identity through action. If action occurs between people, the space between cannot condition what appears, rather, it is simply the site that allows such appearances. "In this respect," Weigel argues, "the concept for forgiveness originates from a theory of the political that does not define different realms. Instead, this theory is interested in the position of the subject in the space of action and has been developed from that perspective" (Weigel, "Secularization and Sacrilization, Normalization and Rupture: Kristeva and Arendt on Forgiveness" in *PMLA*, Vol. 117, No. 2 (Mar., 2002), p. 321).

<sup>39</sup> While the differences between Arendt's understanding of public and private realms will be dealt with in greater detail in the subsequent chapters, it is important to note at this point that her categorization is not meant to function as an ontological ordering whereby the public realm assumes a level of importance greater than the private realm. "To be sure," Arendt writes, "this does not mean that private concerns are generally irrelevant; on the contrary, we shall see that there are very relevant matters which can survive only in the realm of the private" (*The Human Condition*, p. 51).

authentic political life, then forgiveness, as the remedy for the unpredictable nature of action, must be both public and personal at once.

It must also be noted that although Arendt is clear that transgressions are an expected corollary of political action, forgiveness never adopts a formalized structure that conditions its appearance. What Arendt appears to be saying is that while it is understood that unfavourable consequences are a regular part of life, we should not then think that forgiveness must originate from a higher faculty in order to respond to these consequences adequately. The term 'response' here can be misleading, for Arendt does not intend forgiveness to be taken as part of the movement initiated by the original act of transgression. To be sure, forgiveness is indeed responsive, yet it is a response that retains the unexpected quality of the original action, which is different than suggesting that forgiveness bears the image of the original act or is imprinted by it. Arendt argues that most responses that follow directly from an act of transgression are forms of retribution, and these forms do not share a likeness with forgiveness because they can be anticipated. It is the unexpectedness of forgiveness that differentiates it from vengeance or revenge. Arendt maintains that vengeance and revenge are terms used to signify the perpetuation of the consequences of a transgressive act and are natural, automatic responses that can be predicted. This means that although we recognize transgressions as potentialities of action, and can even expect them to occur throughout the course of our lives, acts of forgiveness are not conditioned by this

same awareness. In one sense, Arendt argues that forgiveness should be understood as a regular part of the political experience because undesirable acts are commonplace occurrences, yet in another sense, the unpredictable quality of forgiveness bespeaks its political relevance precisely because it shares this attribute with action itself. On this point, Sigrid Weigel argues that Arendt's articulation of forgiveness is largely concerned with 'normalization', and this is evidenced both by the site of its occurrence and by the limits of its scope. By normalizing forgiveness, Weigel claims that Arendt stresses its structural necessity by locating it precisely where all authentic political interaction takes place. That is, the public realm would not endure if forgiveness did not offer a remedy for action, and so forgiveness should be a normal part of political life. Because forgiveness is unexpected, however, normalization cannot then mean that it should be viewed as an unremarkable event. The newness which forgiveness shares with action is miraculous by virtue of its spontaneous appearance. It is unnatural because it is wholly political, which is to say that it is unattached from all aspects of life that are concerned with biological preservation or social economies. Normalization also describes the boundaries of forgiveness, Weigel writes, though only brief commentary will be offered on this aspect at this point. Because Arendt makes an important connection between acts of transgression and its unpredictability, that is, between action and the reality of not knowing definitively what will happen when we act, Arendt, citing Kant, draws a distinct difference between simple acts of

transgression and forms of radical evil.<sup>40</sup> While we do not know precisely what will happen when we act, it is this unknowingness that forgiveness responds to.

Forgiveness can put an end to an act of transgression, but it cannot address radical evil in the same way. Like action, forgiveness is both unexpected and unpredictable; it undoes what was done and begins something new. Vengeance, conversely, binds both victim and transgressor within the continuous chain of the action process allowing the original transgression to condition the terms of further interaction.

Forgiveness releases both victim and perpetrator from the consequences of a transgression and allows life to continue on. Forgiveness, as Arendt notes, is freedom from vengeance.

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<sup>40</sup> While we cannot sufficiently address Arendt's commentary on radical evil here, it is worth noting her description of evil that can be found in the introduction of her text, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*. Here, Arendt introduces the problem of evil by returning to the term she used to title her experience of the trial of Adolf Eichmann – 'the banality of evil'. Arendt breaks from classic literary, religious and philosophic images of evil in order to ask whether the phenomenon of evil can be related to sheer thoughtlessness. Though his deeds were monstrous, Eichmann, Arendt claimed, was neither a monster nor ideologue, but was entirely *unthinking*. Put briefly, the distinctions between acting wrongly because we cannot know the outcome of an act, and evil acts that occur because of our thoughtlessness is important in light of boundaries of political forgiveness. Forgiveness addresses action not born out of thoughtlessness, but our inability to foresee the full extent of action's consequences. Radical evil, then, must be considered differently than acts of transgression. As Arendt states, "It is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable. This is the true hallmark of those offences which, since Kant, we call 'radical evil' and about whose nature so little is known, even to us who have been exposed to one of their rare outbursts on the public scene" (*The Human Condition*, p. 241). Since radical evil is beyond the potentialities of human forgiveness, Arendt writes, her work in *The Life of the Mind* engages how we think about what we do in order to prevent these 'outbursts' that destroys whatever political space in which they make their appearance. Arendt writes, "The question that imposed itself was: Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually 'condition' them against it?" (*The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, Harcourt, Inc.: New York, 1978, p. 5).

Arendt rejects the idea that forgiveness must refer back to a particular moral or theological disposition. In this sense, Arendt's idea of political forgiveness centres on maintaining the freedom to act within the public realm, and though this affords us the opportunity to continually establish new relationships, Arendt's concern always returns to preservation of this freedom. We do not forgive for the exclusive purpose of restoring right relations amongst those with whom we have experienced conflict, but forgive so that the freedom to act is not impeded by our misdeeds. This is not to say that Arendt has no concern for the nature or quality of our relationships, we forgive because of our consideration of *who* the other is, but she is clear that political forgiveness cannot be conditioned by the love we have for those around us and must itself reflect the freedom it shares with all forms of political activity. We see, then, that Arendt's criticism of Augustine rests largely on his account of Christian love and the connection he establishes between the love we are to have for our neighbour and the forgiveness we extend that is based on this love. Put simply, Christian neighbour love draws our attention away from shared public life because it is continuously occupied with the needs of the neighbour, which, for Arendt, is tantamount to abandonment of the world. To be sure, Arendt does not differentiate Christian love of the neighbour from any other account of love in terms of its effects on political life, and though both Augustine and Arendt agree that political forgiveness necessarily involves a consideration of *who* the other person is, she is clear that Christian neighbour love shares no fundamental connection with her account of political action or forgiveness despite their mutual origins in Jesus of



Nazareth. Augustine's Christian articulation of neighbour love draws particular criticism from Arendt because it assumes that only love can forgive because only love is 'fully receptive to *who*' a person is.<sup>41</sup> For Arendt, Christian love attends so closely to the needs of the neighbour that it is always willing to forgive the other regardless of the harm committed. Political action, conversely, requires some distance from these concerns, and so it follows that forgiveness, because it is characteristically like action, must also be distanced. The problem for Arendt is twofold: on one hand, the narrow sphere in which love moves stands against the larger realm of political affairs, and when it trespasses into the broader arena of political life it destroys it. On the other, the infinite demand of love requires resources of equal measure to address the needs of the neighbour. Because of our own lack, loving the neighbour can only mean that our attention will always be drawn toward this need which we cannot satisfy. The severity of love's commitment to the neighbour ultimately precludes political action, Arendt maintains, precisely because this commitment comes at the expense of our being-in-the-world. Christian neighbour love and forgiveness, then, are not politically relevant for Arendt because of their inherent otherworldly nature.

For Augustine, Christian love is not merely a private expression; it is what constitutes our public being and is the basis for our involvement with each other and the world. The manner in which we relate to one another and to God is directed by the orientation of our love, which, for Augustine, means that both sinful love and

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<sup>41</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 243.

righteous love are parts of love's fundamental continuity.<sup>42</sup> We are moved by the weight of our love, which is a way of saying that all of our activities and relationships refer back to this movement. A sinful, self-oriented love, Augustine writes, "is a perverted imitation of God" which disdains "fellowship of equality under God."<sup>43</sup> Loving well, then, is about ordering our love after God's divine love in such a way that we open ourselves up to being in right relation with Him and our neighbour. Finding the right way to love, both in its offering and reception, are not strictly hidden enactments for Augustine, and this is why a disordered love is often disclosed publicly by the way it seeks "to impose its own dominion upon its equals, in place of God's rule."<sup>44</sup> The public enactment of righteous love bespeaks its orientation toward the divine, and so the visibility of active love witnesses to the 'Giver' after whom our love has been ordered. "The smoke of pride does not belch

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<sup>42</sup> On this point, Gregory writes that, "Human loves are various and in conflict. In a fallen world, they are disordered, misdirected, and disproportionate. Their operations are diverse and often self-defeating. Love has multiple directions and is beset by many potentially pathological corruptions that disrupt an original justice: the order of the soul that open up to relations with others" (Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, p. 21). The variations and differentiation of love which Gregory refers to demarcate the boundaries of Augustine's earthly and heavenly cities. "Both cities alike make use of the good things," Augustine writes, "or are afflicted with the evils, of this temporal state; but they do so with a different faith, a different hope, a different love, until they are separated by the final judgement, and each receives its own end, to which there is no end" (*City of God*, Book XVIII, ch. 54). For Augustine, we are what we love, and loving well is a matter of order. Sin is not simply acting without love, but is love improperly ordered. Thus, loving without a consideration of sin leads to misdirected love, while love that is attuned to God is rightly ordered. See also *Tractate* 87, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIX, ch. 12.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XIX, ch. 12. Augustine's point refers to a community that recognizes one another as equals through their mutual love and submission to God's sovereignty. The peace of God is found within communities that submit in this way, Augustine claims, but the unjust peace of those who abide by their own corrupt love seek another kind of peace, which, as Augustine suggests, is not really peace at all. "Thus, he who has learnt to prefer right to wrong and the rightly ordered to the perverse," Augustine writes, "sees that, in comparison with the peace of the just, the peace of the unjust is not worthy to be called peace at all" (Book XIX, ch. 12).

forth” from the deeds of those whose love is well ordered, but “the light of charity.”<sup>45</sup> Rightly ordered love refuses to conceal itself out of fear of becoming corrupt because it has been revealed publicly, which is to say that Augustine argues against refraining from loving or forgiving our neighbour because we are wary of our own sinful nature. Love should remain unhindered by the risk of temptation, and though Augustine repeatedly cautions against the enactment of self-interested love, the recognition of our own sinfulness does not invite us to then also cast judgement or preclude loving others with whom we find fault.<sup>46</sup> When we act we are to act so as to glorify God rather than ourselves, Augustine argues, and as a matter of love, forgiveness glorifies God because it resists framing an act of transgression within our limited scope of justice. Just as we are to seek God’s praise through our actions, we are to seek God’s justice rather than our own when we are harmed. When we assume the responsibility of determining whether the love of another is corrupt, we reveal our ‘ignorance of the justice of God and [seek] to establish our own.’ We are called to forgive those who have purposefully or involuntarily caused harm, Augustine claims, but we are not invited to self-righteously judge the orientation of

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<sup>45</sup> *Sermon 54*, (4).

<sup>46</sup> The appearance of good works may indicate a love that is oriented towards God’s divine love, but we do not possess the capacity to definitely make this judgement, Augustine says. Throughout his exegesis of Matt. 5:16, Augustine cautions us to be wary of sinfulness that appears in the guise of righteousness for our own sake. When we act, we are to make our good works known, but “it is only for the sake of God’s glory that [we] ought to aim toward having it become known” (*Sermon 54* (3)). Love that serves our own interests bespeaks an ordering that “does not love the will of God”. We are called to love so that the one who harms us may be brought into right relation with God and ourselves. As Oliver O’Donovan observes, “we cannot understand the place in which a fellow creature stands unless we also know the place to which he is being drawn. As we have seen already with love-of-the-enemy, to love someone is to love his possibility” (O’Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 33)).

their love. Instead, forgiving one who has wronged us is an enactment of well ordered love, Augustine writes, and it is better to love those who cause us harm than preferentially attend to those with whom we are already in right relation.<sup>47</sup> We are to love and forgive our enemies because in doing so we open the possibility of entering into a renewed relationship with them, but when we forgive, as Augustine reminds us, we are also at once confessing our own sinfulness in humility.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, confession contextualizes our relation to our neighbour within a shared sinfulness, yet it hopefully celebrates the forgiveness first extended to us from God from whom we have received our capacity to forgive. Augustine's continual referral to Matthew 6:12 grounds his understanding of the continuity that is established between the divine forgiveness we have received and the forgiveness we are to offer our neighbour in love. We are to forgive just as God has forgiven. The shift away from our natural desire to seek retribution is not a negation of transgression, as if forgiveness was simply a matter of selective amnesia, but is, instead, a desire to model our love after God's divine love. Forgiveness of this kind frustrates the perpetuation of enmity, or, put differently, it introduces the possibility of restoring

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<sup>47</sup> *Faith, Hope, and Charity*, ch. 19 (73).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 19 (74). John Milbank's account in *Theology and Social Theory* offers a different take whereby forgiveness is offered "as if sin were not there" (Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, (Malden: Blackwell, 1990, p. 411). This is not to say that Milbank does not take our sinful condition seriously, rather, he seems to frame forgiveness in a way that anticipates the fullness of human relatedness yet to come. Put differently, when we love and forgive our enemies, love transforms enmity so that we forgo all claims of retribution. This is a different movement than merely 'overlooking' transgression in order to restore a relationship; it acknowledges the sinful reality of the other without defining the terms of our political interrelatedness by it.

broken relationships because it is premised on the same divine love that is already at work to restore the entirety of creation.<sup>49</sup>

For Arendt, the implications of Augustine's commitment to love problematically directs attention away from the world, and because Augustine claims that the Christian should always be willing to forgive anyone, Arendt maintains that forgiveness premised on Christian neighbour love defeats the possibility of entering the political realm because it places severe constraints on the freedom to act politically. In this sense, Arendt's concern is with Augustine's economy of love. We know that for Arendt, political life requires a distinct separation from the burdens and requirements of all economic activity, and so the Christian commitment to attend to the neighbour's need of love introduces an economy and debt of love that prevents the Christian from treating appearances within the public realm as seriously as they should. The demands of the neighbour require a surplus of love, and, as Arendt contends, with the appearance of Christ-as-neighbour, the claim of Christ, because he is at once both God and man, is infinitely larger so as to draw all neighbour love to Himself. Arendt's contention here is that because of Christ, the demands of neighbour love are always impossibly greater than our available resources, and so by committing to love the neighbour, Christians are

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<sup>49</sup> Although we cannot know how forgiveness will be received, by acknowledging the forgiveness we have received from God when we do forgive, which Augustine describes as 'forgiveness from the heart', we allow for the possibility of establishing authentic peace between ourselves and those who were once our enemies. Maintaining the possibility of right relations between enemies is an imitation of the grace and forgiveness that is unceasingly offered to us from God. Thus, when we ask for divine forgiveness, as Augustine states, we need to bear in mind that we ourselves have 'no lack of debts to be forgiven' and should also be willing to forgive unceasingly.

effectively marginalized from the world because they must ceaselessly attend to the neighbour's unending need. We must consider, then, whether Augustine can sufficiently address Arendt's representation of the dynamic between the incarnation of Christ and the possibility of Christian political life that is premised on neighbour love and forgiveness. Throughout her corpus, Arendt continually refers to Christ's presence in the world as subversive to authentic political life, and Augustine's assumption that only Christian love is fully receptive to who our neighbour is, which is why Christians should always be willing to forgive regardless of the offense committed against them, is another way of describing the closing of political distance.<sup>50</sup> Arendt's problem with Augustine here is Christological, and Augustine's

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<sup>50</sup> In the second chapter of *On Revolution*, Arendt refers to Melville's 'Billy Budd' and Dostoevsky's 'The Grand Inquisitor' as a way of highlighting love's anti-political proximity. Arendt focuses on the compassion of Christ and Billy Budd, and how, in turn, each character transcends the political realm because of it. For both Billy Budd and Dostoevsky's Christ figure, the quiet compassion they each show those who are ultimately responsible for their deaths stands against the audible political exchange and argumentation common to the realm of human affairs. As we continually see throughout her work, Arendt argues that compassion of this kind, as with love, collapses the 'in-between' where political affairs occur. Love and compassion have no interest in political interaction, Arendt argues, and this is because love is entirely preoccupied with the need of the neighbour. Love does not attend to political process, debate or engagement, which only serves as a distraction from the need of love itself. Thus, as Arendt notes, both Dostoevsky's Christ and Melville's Billy Budd do not engage politically with those who sentence them to die, but, instead, become silent exemplars of love and compassion by meeting the suffering and need of their captors with such focus that they render political interaction impossible. In this same sense, Arendt argues that forgiveness premised on neighbour love, like the compassion of Christ and Billy Budd that is beyond virtue, is politically destructive because it can only engage the other intimately and directly. In political terms, the close proximity of Christian love and forgiveness demonstrates a certain unwillingness to forego attending to the claim of the neighbour for any reason, and so Arendt concludes that we can only understand these movements as politically irrelevant because they will always remove themselves from the realm of human affairs.

It is also important to note that Melville's work resonates with Arendt's assertion that goodness, upon entering the political realm, is inevitably corrupted. Arendt claims that Melville's recognition of this truth led him to the realization that the 'foundation stone of our political life' cannot support absolute goodness, but reveals, instead, the reality that goodness and evil both share an elementary violence that is necessary to make their enactment comprehensible. This is why the only adequate response to eliminate the depravity of Claggart was for Billy Budd to use fatal violence against him. Though Budd may have been 'an angel from God', even if he spoke with the 'tongues of

response to Arendt's challenge is also Christological. The source of Christian love is God himself, which, for Arendt, means that our love can only ultimately be directed back to God in Christ who has come as our neighbour. For Augustine, our capacity to fulfil the divine command to love and forgive rests on God's divine provision. That is to say, because Christ is the divine exemplar of God's forgiveness, our capacity to forgive is grounded within the self-emptying enactment of his love. Augustine argues that Christ is able to provide for his followers out of the divine abundance of his love, which stands against Arendt's assertion that the economy of Christ's love only serves to draw all other love into itself. This claim is the basis for the significant tension present throughout Arendt's critical reading of Christian neighbour love and forgiveness both in her dissertation and in her larger corpus. By returning to Augustine's articulation of Christian forgiveness, we find that he does not preclude the possibility of participating in political life, though he is unwilling to approach worldly political life as a means to our salvation. Jesus Christ, as the exemplar of divine love and forgiveness, is the true source of salvation for Augustine, and, as Arendt rightly observes, Augustine's claim will be that 'only love can forgive'.<sup>51</sup> By rooting forgiveness within the divine surplus of the Incarnation, however, Augustine allows us to consider Arendt's critical reading of Christ's divinity and humanity in a

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angels' it would not be sufficient to refute Claggart's evil. Absolutes of this kind, Arendt writes, "spells doom to everyone when it is introduced into the political realm" (*On Revolution*, p. 84). In short, Arendt's treatment of the complex dynamic between ethical commitments present within Dostoevsky and Melville's texts is not simply the negation of goodness for a lesser, manageable sense of political virtue. Her concern rests on the fact that commitments of any kind that close the space between human beings preclude political life. In light of this central concern, Arendt will argue that Augustine's account of Christian neighbour love, which is based on mutual love in Christ, successfully unifies Christian community but leaves no distance for authentic political interrelatedness.

<sup>51</sup> *The Human Condition*, p. 242.

different light. What we find in Augustine is not an image of Christ, who, through radical love, excludes interaction within the earthly political realm, but an ordering of abundant love that challenges the dangerous conflation of citizenship/discipleship as it allows itself to be worked out within this present reality. While this project does not seek to trace all of the emerging contemporary engagements with Augustine's political theology, especially as his broader themes relate to the topic of love and sin within liberal democracy, our focus will narrow on the political relevance of forgiveness and love within Christian community as a response to Arendt's challenge. While Augustine's work is not anticipatory of contemporary Western political structures in any way, this does not mean that he has nothing to contribute to discussions concerning the authenticity of contemporary Christian political culture and experience. Augustine is clear that the love and forgiveness exemplified within Christian community must stand apart from the self-oriented love of the world, yet we cannot then assume with Arendt that Augustine means for Christians to hold the world or political experience in contempt. Arendt and Augustine seem to mean the same thing when they say that forgiveness is central to political life, that is, political life is not possible without the capacity to forgive. Yet, for Augustine, we see that the possibility for forgiveness within Christian community rests entirely upon the radical surplus of love extended to us from Christ. Rightly ordered Christian political life, which Augustine understands as true justice, is not a negation of this world as Arendt maintains, but makes recognizable the fullness of political life that is and is yet to come. We can



conclude with Augustine that neighbour love and forgiveness are true hallmarks of Christian political life.

The first chapter of this project will continue to develop Arendt's articulation of the constitutive elements of authentic political life and how, in turn, these aspects correspond with her critique of Augustine's understanding of love and forgiveness. An exploration of Arendt's assessment of authentic political activity, with particular emphasis on political identity, power, and the shape of the public realm found in *The Human Condition*, contextualizes her central criticism of the dangerous appearance of love within the political realm. For Arendt, human meaning discovers its home within the public realm, and Arendt's resistance to conflate biological impulses and philosophic hierarchies with legitimate political interaction reflects her broader concern for maintaining total freedom from all commitments that would otherwise restrict the strictly human capacity to appear before one another in speech and deed. The modern shift towards replacing authentic political life with strategic collective efforts to manage societal interests, which Arendt terms the rise of 'society', risks conflating what should properly be understood as two competitive typologies. That is, Arendt will argue that political life must remain separated from the encroachment of economies that blur the important distinction drawn between political freedom and necessary forms of labour.<sup>52</sup> In the same way, Arendt

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<sup>52</sup> Arendt is clear that political freedom must be understood apart from philosophic self-reflection that prioritizes turning inwards toward the self in isolation. In a public discussion on freedom and politics, Arendt stated: "Hence, in spite of the great influence which the concept of an inner, non-political freedom have exerted upon the tradition of thought, it seems safe to say that man would

distances herself from philosophic traditions that place the highest forms of rational thought beyond the confines of the public world. Arendt maintains that there is no space or vantage point existing outside of the world from which one can judge human affairs, and so the pursuit of worldly transcendence cannot generate meaning, but destroys its very possibility.<sup>53</sup> After considering Arendt's treatment of

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know nothing of inner freedom if he had not first experienced a condition of being free among others as a worldly tangible reality. We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in intercourse with ourselves...in order to be free, man must have liberated himself from the necessities of life" (Arendt, "Freedom and Politics: A Lecture" in *Chicago Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, (Spring 1960, p. 29)). On this point, Mildred Bakan presents an important challenge to Arendt's ontology of activity by suggesting that Arendt's rejection of Marxist and Hegelian dialectics leaves her political philosophy seemingly both 'helpless and impotent.' Bakan's argument asserts that human labour is intimately related to our capacity as a species to move beyond instinctual activity. The problem Bakan identifies with Arendt's ontology of activity rests on the sheer groundlessness of Arendt's distinctions. That is, while Arendt is in agreement with Aristotle's distinct ordering of human activity, she ultimately rejects both the noetic basis for Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of divine ordering. The deficiency Bakan recognizes here corresponds with both the Marxist and Hegelian assertion that, "speech, labour, work, and action, even in Arendt's sense, belong together, not in any hierarchical order, but mutual dependence" (Mildred Bakan, 'Hannah Arendt's Concepts of Labour and Work' in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, p. 63). While Arendt wants to break with all philosophic tradition that she feels cannot sufficiently address the crisis of freedom faced by the modern political realm, Bakan notes that Arendt's efforts to unhinge political life from the baggage of philosophic tradition have largely misconstrued the important relationship between action, speech, and labour itself. There is no inherent *telos* within Arendt's political philosophy, or, at least, not the kind of teleology that grounds Aristotelian reason – reason as the final form for the entire world. Arendt remains distrustful of reason that leads her to ground political life entirely on public appearance. Because labour is instrumental in world building and transformation, according to Bakan, Arendt problematically breaks the necessary dialectical relation between labour and the freedom from determination by natural necessity. For Bakan, Arendt's treatment of labour misunderstands Marx's fundamental point that labour 'lies at the origin of freedom.'

<sup>53</sup> The act of thinking, or what it is we are doing when we think, occupied much of Arendt's later career. Arendt's consideration of the tension between political action and contemplation is not a matter of salvaging aspects of modern and ancient philosophic accounts of the contemplative life, rather, Arendt frames her interest in the act of thinking by turning to what she perceived to be the relationship between thinking and acts of evil. In the preface to *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt writes that there is a close correlation between acts of evil and our inability or unwillingness to think critically. From her experience observing Eichmann's trial, Arendt discovered that the problem of evil might not lie in particular motives, but in sheer thoughtlessness. That is, Eichmann's depravity was not the impetus for his action, but the total absence of critical thought. What is important here is that Arendt's engagement with the problem of thinking resists being grounded upon any particular transcendent ordering or determinate force. The tension between thinking and acting remained throughout Arendt's thought until her death in 1975, and, as Leah Bradshaw notes, "[Arendt] sought to restore thinking to some dignity among the process theories of historical materialism,

political action, identity, power, and promising in light of Arendt's overarching concern for the cultivation of authentic freedom, the chapter concludes by turning to the critical role of political forgiveness within Arendt's thought. The relevance of forgiveness rests on its capacity to overcome the unforeseen potentiality of action, and while Arendt's account may oversimplify the complex relationship between theory and the practical demands of judicial procedure, her conclusion, that forgiveness should be entirely free from the anti-political Christian commitment to love one's neighbour, constitutes her most significant objection of an Augustinian political theology that is premised upon loving and forgiving one's neighbour.

The second chapter builds upon Arendt's discussion of the nature of political life by turning to her critical examination of the role of love in the thought of Augustine. Written under the guidance of Heidegger and Jaspers, Arendt's 1929 dissertation is uniquely theological within Arendt's broader corpus, but her efforts to trace the maturation of Augustine's concept of Christian neighbour love reflects her enduring claim that love of this kind ultimately precludes Christian participation in authentic political life. While *Love and Saint Augustine* explores themes that are not dissimilar from Augustine's own concern for properly ordered love, which is to say that both Arendt and Augustine both caution against all love of self that draws

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psychological determinism, and even science. Arendt's most important contribution to the history of political thought, I believe, is her example of how one should think. Thought and politics may not always exist in harmony with one another, thought alone will not produce genuine political action, but she taught that of one thing we can be certain: if we do not think, we shall never be able to act freely and responsibly" (Bradshaw, *Acting and Thinking: The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989, p. 124)).

attention away from the broader realm of human plurality, Arendt claims that Augustine is never able to reconcile the Christian commitment to love Christ and love the neighbour in a way that clearly establishes the political relevance of the neighbour *qua* neighbour. Arendt's early efforts to uncover love's anti-politicality helpfully contextualize and ground her broader claims about the nature of political forgiveness. Put simply, Arendt's critical reading of Augustine's account of love is directly connected with her discussion of political forgiveness, and this is because, according to Arendt's view of Christian theology, only love is fully receptive to who the neighbour is, and so she will argue that a distinctly Christian account of forgiveness, as an enactment of neighbour love, is politically untenable.

Chapter 3 proposes an Augustinian response to Arendt's description of Christian neighbour love by examining the dynamic reality of Christ's appearance within the world. The presence of Christ amongst us, as Arendt interprets it, affects the enactment of our love by problematically directing our attention away from the neighbour towards Christ exclusively. Put differently, Christ's divine presence shapes our reception of those around us, and our engagement with others simply becomes an occasion to love Christ. We cannot grasp the wholeness of the neighbour's being when our attention is preoccupied with the infinite demand of Christ's presence. Augustine's Christology offers us a different take on the human and divine nature of Christ, and how, in turn, the divine humility of Christ becomes both the perfection and exemplar of neighbour love. The crucial shift here is

reflected in the way Augustine understands Christ's appearance in terms of his radical nearness and availability, which constitutes a reimagining of the neighbour's 'otherness'. Augustine argues that our relationship to Christ is premised upon an imitation of his love that does not negate the neighbour as a distinct being, rather, Christian neighbour love, as it is exemplified by Christ and enacted in the life of the Church, corresponds with Christ's nearness to us whereby the fullness of his humanity and divinity ultimately grounds our capacity to encounter the neighbour as complete beings. For Augustine, loving Christ and loving the neighbour are not competitively related, and so we must first address Augustine's account of Christ's divinity and humanity as a way of approaching his articulation of forgiveness. As we will see, Augustine maintains that the forgiveness Christ extends to us is an outpouring of God's renewing love, and while Arendt argues that Christian political life must be postponed until its eschatological fulfilment, the very act of forgiving one another is a witness to the renewing love of God that is already at work in the world. Because Christ has redeemed us from our sinful condition, we are called to forgive one another in kind. Yet, the divine forgiveness we have received from Christ is made possible because He has become our neighbour.

Chapter 4 continues to build on the discussion of Christ's appearance as neighbour by focusing on Christ's divine abundance. As we will see, Arendt repeatedly cautions against the encroachment of all economic activity that complicates the freedom to act within the political realm. For Augustine, our

inability to sufficiently address the claim of love owed to our neighbour resonates with Arendt's own concern for an economy of love that collapses political space. The important turn for Augustine, which Arendt misreads, rests on his assertion that Christ as neighbour, who is at once both fully divine and human, does not draw all neighbours to Himself, but stands, instead, as guarantor of our capacity to meet the demands of love. That is, Christ's radical self-emptying enables us to love the neighbour fully because of His divine abundance of love. This movement of love is, as we will see, a reversal of Arendt's understanding of love's economy. Arendt argues that the appearance of Christ introduces a claim of love that cannot be settled with any resource we individually or collectively possess, and this position is consistent with what she later takes to be the modern conflation of political life for social economy. Yet Augustine's account of love produces an image of interrelatedness that is markedly different than the conclusion Arendt draws. What we find in Augustine is the image of Christian community that participates in political life by relying on the love of Christ to outline the appropriate boundaries of this interrelatedness. On the one hand, Augustine cautions against a spirit of self-determination that places too much confidence on our own political sensibilities, while, on the other hand, proper constraint of our sinfulness does not then become an invitation to retreat entirely from political life.<sup>54</sup> The role of forgiveness comes

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Breidenthal writes that, "we must learn together how to speak and act out of the conviction that we are all loved and empowered by God, and we must not assume that we have achieved a perfect harmony between our convictions and our acts" (Breidenthal, 'Arendt, Augustine and the politics of Incarnation' in *Modern Theology* 14:4, October 1998, p. 501). Breidenthal's claim rests on the possibility of a healthy sense of uncertainty, that is, Christians should not be overly

into view as a sign love's constraint and redemption at work. Neighbour love enables Christian community to participate in political life on earth because it is the singular enactment of love that draws individuals back into right relationship with one another and with God.

Given their respective accounts of the politics of forgiveness, Arendt and Augustine seem to mean the same thing when they say that the possibility of continuing to interact with others in genuine political interrelatedness, despite our proclivity to trespass against one another, rests on our capacity to forgive. For Arendt, forgiveness, as a critical part of political life, solves the problem of action's unpredictability, yet her charge that love shares no proper relationship with political activity is misplaced in terms of her critical reading of Augustine's account of neighbour love. Christian neighbour love, as Augustine understood it, grounds the possibility for Christians to participate in political life within this reality because its source is the radical self-emptying love of Christ. Indeed, the appearance of Christ within our present reality is, for Augustine, the source of Christian political life, and though Augustine cautions us to be wary of our love, it is also by loving rightly that we are able to forgive and establish those political relationships that have yet to find their eschatological fulfilment.

## **Chapter 1: On the *Vita Activa*, the Public Realm, and the Political Relevance of Forgiveness**

### **A. Philosophy, Social Economy, and the Realm of Human Affairs**

Most contemporary engagements with Arendt's thought focus on her critical reading of both ancient and modern articulations of authentic political life and its constituent elements. Indeed, the continuing interest in Arendt's work is a testament to her profound efforts to defend the public realm from forces that she argues would otherwise undermine the possibility and potential of political life. By comparison, however, the topic of political forgiveness, which Arendt attends to most closely in *The Human Condition*, is significantly less visible amongst her more notable themes, and its significance in terms of its relationship with Augustinian political theology remains largely unexplored. To be sure, the most notable critics of Arendt's account of forgiveness, including Konstan, focus almost entirely on her claim that Jesus of Nazareth discovered the political value of forgiveness without offering much in the way of an analysis on how Arendt's idea of forgiveness fits into her broader examination of political action and the public realm. Arendt does not simply refer to the teachings of Jesus on forgiveness without considering the weight of her claim. Rather, if we are to understand the political nature of forgiveness, we must first contextualize Arendt's account amidst her broader understanding of political life. Arendt's idea of political forgiveness, as we will see, rests entirely upon



her development of political action, the freedom of the public realm, and her love of the world.

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1964 during an interview that was broadcast over West German television, journalist Gunter Gaus asked Arendt whether her role in the realm of professional philosophy was perceptively different because she was a woman who had chosen a typically ‘masculine’ occupation. Arendt’s treatment of the question considered gender only peripherally and she directed her response towards what she understood as the larger issue: the complex relationship between politics and philosophy. Gaus assumed that Arendt’s professional occupation was philosophy, or, indeed, that the occupation of a professional philosopher possessed common and easily identifiable parameters, but Arendt carefully resisted Gaus’ labels in her response. “I am afraid I have to protest,” Arendt replied, “I do not even belong to the circle of philosophers. My profession, if one can even speak of it at all, is political theory. I neither feel like a philosopher, nor do I believe that I have been accepted in the circle of philosophers, as you so kindly suppose.”<sup>55</sup> Arendt did not negate the obvious historical patriarchalism of ‘professional’ philosophy and agreed that it was a shortcoming requiring attention, but her insistence that she did not rightly belong within the company of professional philosophers bespeaks her own critical assessment of philosophy and its relationship to political life. Arendt found that political philosophy, when understood as a unified, descriptive title, moves too

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<sup>55</sup> Hannah Arendt, “‘What Remains? The Language Remains’: A Conversation with Gunter Gaus,” in *Essays in Understanding* ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1994), p. 2.

quickly to smooth over the inherent tension found between these two terms taken separately. “The expression ‘political philosophy,’ which I avoid,” Arendt stated, “is extremely burdened by tradition. When I talk about these things, academically or non-academically, I always mention that there is a vital tension between philosophy and politics. That is between man as a thinking being and man as an acting being.”<sup>56</sup> The concerns of the philosopher have a history of distancing the contemplative realm away from the realm of political action, and Arendt’s response to these concerns reflect her own attempts to reassert the importance and meaning of political action in light of the dominant philosophic traditions that have elevated contemplation above all other human activities. Her task, Arendt explained, was to examine politics and political action apart from any enmity, with eyes ‘unclouded’ by philosophy.

For Arendt, the enmity between contemplative thought and political action finds its origins in Plato. In *The Promise of Politics*, Arendt argues that at the beginning of our philosophic tradition stands Plato’s “contempt for politics [and] his conviction that the affairs and actions of men are not worthy of great seriousness.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 2. George Kateb writes that, “Philosophical thinking is least under accusation when it begins in wonder. How pitifully small the number of philosophers who have begun there...the real object of [Arendt’s] critique is here: the tendency to produce doctrines and systems, which consummate as they betray philosophical thinking.” (Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*, 193). Kateb outlines Arendt’s basic concern with philosophical thinking: the physical world is simply not enough for the intensity of philosophic thought. There is a kind of heroic quality to philosophy, but the wonder of the world is lost when the metaphysical or supra-sensory is elevated above it. Kateb rightly contends that Arendt loved philosophical thinking, which is also why her condemnation of Eichmann as totally ‘unthinking’ and ‘unphilosophical’ points to a world where right thinking is in the ‘service of praising life’ (p191).

<sup>57</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), p. 81.

The ordering of human pursuits, as Plato understood it, should be informed by a desire to move beyond the simple satisfaction of bodily requirements and appetites. For Plato, it is better to contemplate the eternal than to preoccupy oneself with the basic demands of bodily survival, which are functions that should rightly be governed by higher human faculties. Since it is often necessary to work with others to secure basic life requirements, Plato recognized that the need for politics was determined in part by the base interests of the body and that the function of politics, generally, was to manage the requirements and interactions of physical, mortal beings. This does not mean that the philosopher who seeks to depart the political realm is not concerned with proper political management to some degree, however, as Arendt noted, this concern is chiefly about avoiding a poorly managed polis or political culture that threatens the interests of philosophy. If Plato is right when he argued that the freedom to contemplate the eternal is only made available once the necessities of the life have been satisfied, it becomes evident, according to Arendt, that Plato's understanding of politics is derivative both by having its origin "in the pre-political data of biological life, and [having] its end in the post-political, highest possibility of human destiny."<sup>58</sup> As Arendt sees it, the appearance of justice or its pursuit is not dependent on plurality in the *Republic*, and so the philosopher, whose commitment to contemplation makes them the most suitable to understand justice and goodness, is not obligated to participate in political life directly or require the presence of other political actors. Instead, the activity and obligation of the guardian

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

class, Arendt notes, is to order the base necessities of labour while taking direction from the apolitical *theoria* of philosophy at the same time.<sup>59</sup> Consequently, the limits Plato places on political life, which begin with our pre-political biological requirements, reach a ceiling where the contemplative realm extends upwards into the quiet of eternal ideas, and though the *Republic* is not meant to function as a schematic for an ideal political framework, the comedy and challenge revealed by the image of a philosopher-king draws our attention to the chasm existing between those living in the common world of public appearance and philosophy's desire to distance itself from it. "What matters," Arendt writes, "in addition to the inherent degradation of this whole realm of life through philosophy, is the radical separation of those matters that men can reach and attain only through living and acting together from those that are perceived and care about by man in his singularity and solitude."<sup>60</sup>

The cave allegory in book VII of the *Republic* is central to Arendt's reading of Plato and how she understands the philosophic exodus from the world of men into the realm of the contemplation. While the philosopher leaves the darkness and confusion of the cave by turning upwards toward the light, he will only temporarily return to help those who cannot recognize reality on their own and thus fail to escape the illusion. The turning away from the shared space of human affairs is a

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

turn from false reality toward the “clear sky of eternal ideas.”<sup>61</sup> The cave, as the world of appearance, is the natural home of man, however, Arendt likens Plato’s philosopher to Parmenides who was carried upward beyond the gates of night and day, and, in the same way, the philosopher must also leave the common world for their ‘true’ home into which they are not originally born.<sup>62</sup> Plato’s rejection of ignorance, confusion and darkness resonates with Arendt’s own sensibilities, but his disdain for common political spaces problematically entitles the contemplative realm to measure all other realms against it. Arendt intends to reevaluate political spaces without simply reversing philosophic tradition or negating contemplation, but to demonstrate that action is ultimately constitutive of human meaning. Otherwise, as Leah Bradshaw suggests, “one might be tempted, then, to view all of the past in terms of two parallel developments: the history of thought and the history of action.”<sup>63</sup> The solution to Arendt’s problem cannot simply be to disregard the philosopher as she looks to the common world for meaning. Rather, Arendt must defend the importance of political action in a way that allows thinking and acting to be “framed in ways intelligible to people living in the rubble of a spent philosophical tradition.”<sup>64</sup> Put differently, Arendt’s consideration of action is not a devaluation of

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<sup>61</sup> Arendt, “Tradition and the Modern Age,” in *Between Past and Future* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 17.

<sup>62</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind Vol.I* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1978), p. 23.

<sup>63</sup> Leah Bradshaw, *Acting and Thinking: The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 36. Bradshaw suggests that the need to be understood by others connects philosophy to the world in spite of its alienation from it - which is why Arendt argues that the withdrawal of thought is “always recalled to the world in the need of human beings to make themselves understood, and philosophers have always tried to communicate their thoughts through the use of metaphor, that is, by referring to things of the world” (p. 81).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

thinking; the human condition properly includes the capacity to act as well as the capacity to think, and so Arendt's interests are about more than simply inverting a particular ordering. Acting responsibly requires the ability to think, and since human beings possess both faculties, Bradshaw rightly concludes that, "one cannot therefore treat the philosopher as though he were some extraterrestrial being whose shortcomings are anomalous to most of humanity."<sup>65</sup> Thus, historical reality is not shaped from without, Arendt argues, "for it is not ideas but events [that] change the world."<sup>66</sup> The alienation of humankind from its proper home limits our understanding of our place in the world, and by locating meaning outside of the public realm, the inevitable devaluation of authentic political life will inevitably inhibit the kind of regard for the world Arendt seeks to cultivate. In fact, it is because of Arendt's love of the world, as the space human beings create for themselves through their activity, that ultimately informs her critical assessment of ancient and modern philosophy.<sup>67</sup>

While the seclusion of the philosopher destroys political space, Arendt contends that the blending of public and private spheres is equally destructive. The difference between the private realm of the household and the public world of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>66</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 273.

<sup>67</sup> James Bernauer, following Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, argues that the possibility for responsible action corresponds with a well-balanced interrelatedness between thinking, judging and willing. Bernauer concluded: "Socrates became for her the model of what thinking is: the ability to purge the frozen opinions and truths which hide opportunities and challenges appearing on the world's stage. This thinking is both the creator of personal conscience and a form of critical love for the world...this critical love shows itself to the world in the action which springs from willing." ('The Faith of Hannah Arendt,' in *Amor Mundi*, 5).

activity, as the ancients understood it, concerns the freedom to act in way that is independent from life's necessities. Aristotle, Arendt argues, understood that the specific sort of labour required to maintain life within the household "did not possess sufficient dignity to constitute a *bios* (life) at all, an autonomous and authentically human way of life; since they served and produced what was necessary and useful, they could not be free, independent of human needs and wants."<sup>68</sup> The freedom to move from the realm of the household into the realm of political life is important for Aristotle because it is only apart from the struggle to maintain life that one can produce great and beautiful deeds. The problem with contemporary notions of society, as Arendt understands it, concerns the disintegration of the distinct boundary Aristotle placed between the household and the *polis*. Arendt writes that what both Plato and Aristotle took for granted, no matter how opposed to *polis* life, "is that freedom is exclusively located in the political realm, that necessity is primarily a pre-political phenomenon, characteristic of the household organization, and that force and violence are justified in the sphere because they are the only means to master necessity...and to become free."<sup>69</sup> Modern socialization, then, is the movement whereby the *polis* assumes the responsibilities of the household to manage and provide the basic requirements of life. Politics becomes useful to society insofar as it functions to satisfy social interests. Consequently, the entrance of a household economy into public life

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

essentially makes private well being a social and collective enterprise.<sup>70</sup> One important corollary of this movement is an increased sense of economic equality, or at least the pursuit of this kind of equality, and the devaluation of political freedom and virtues, as Aristotle understood them. The possibility of distinguishing oneself through excellence and great deeds became a private matter in this shift as social equality, which is a kind of economic equality, “changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of [private and political] and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen.”<sup>71</sup> This means that regardless of the various ways society has been described, and here Arendt refers to Locke, Hobbes, and Marx respectively, “society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual.”<sup>72</sup>

It would be misleading to suggest that Arendt’s critique of society is disinterested in how we can properly care for those who would truly benefit from a ‘national household.’ Her concern for political action is not a negation of justice in this sense; it is, instead, a deep interest in political freedom. The political realm does owe its existence in part to the labour of the household, for human beings would not be able to participate politically if they were constantly occupied satisfying life’s requirements, but the transformation of the *polis* into a society points to the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 41.



dangerous loss of any sense of authentic political freedom. What exists now, Arendt writes, “is a society of labourers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labour, and this society does no longer know of those higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won.”<sup>73</sup> Arendt does not mean that we should not bother ourselves considering those who live in poverty or are victims of social injustice; rather, it is a challenge to rethink the possibility of political space and its corresponding freedom as something more than what we have allowed it to be. Separating questions about proper distribution and fairness from strictly political issues presented serious concerns about the defensibility of Arendt’s position, but she concluded that matters concerning social aid programs and the need to help those who were at a disadvantage possessed enough clarity that they did not warrant political debate in order to arrive at an effective solution. When Mary McCarthy once asked Arendt to comment on the distinction between social and political issues at a conference held at the University of Toronto, Arendt responded stating that “everything which can really be figured out, in the sphere Engels called the administration of things – these are social things in general. That they should then be subject to debate seems to me phony and a plague.”<sup>74</sup> Arendt was responding to a history of socio-political interests that have

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Arendt, “On Hannah Arendt,” in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World* ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), p. 317. Concerning the implication of Arendt’s thought on contemporary human rights debates, Serena Parekh observes that for Arendt, the idea of human rights is only made possible by first considering the freedom to relate to, and recognize one another, within a shared physical world. “Arendt’s unorthodox views of human rights” Parekh writes, “as neither objective data, nor subjective illusion, but as a consequence of the conditions of plurality, can

largely been preoccupied with fiscal management and its proper allocation within a capitalist exchange economy. The reality that the poor require aid more than others and that the pressures of poverty should be alleviated wherever and whenever possible are issues that, for Arendt, have clear, intelligible solutions - it does not mean that these sorts of questions are secondary or unimportant. While Seyla Benhabib suggests that this kind of social/political distinction is defensible only if it is attitudinal and not content-specific, Arendt intends to deal with questions about distributive justice in a way that frees political action from society's overarching conditions and constraints.<sup>75</sup> It should be noted, however, that Benhabib's helpful criticism points to the obvious question Arendt's ontology raises: how do we distinguish between the social and the political when economic relations at even the most basic familial levels are politically charged with various, often gender-based, power struggles? All economy, Benhabib writes, is "political economy," but this is

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only be understood if we take into consideration her understanding of the common world as radically intersubjective" (Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Challenge of Modernity*, 68).

<sup>75</sup> Benhabib raises the important issue of how quickly Arendtian social issues can become political. For instance, debates over the fair distribution of economic resources and wage increases often include more complex political debates over worker exploitation and employee/employer power relations. Wherever the line is drawn to delineate the political from the social, Benhabib writes, the distinction usually "collapses under closer scrutiny" (*The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, 152). George Kateb notes that within these relations, true political action for Arendt depends upon a sense of equality. Arendt departs from Aristotle's praise of executive power and looks instead to the citizen as citizen – which means that in instances of unequal power relations, where one rules and the other is ruled, action is no longer its own end and is, consequentially, not revelatory. Questions that pertain to fair distribution of economic goods complicate how we reveal ourselves through political activity, and being able to distinguish between social and political action remains important for Arendt precisely because "political action is not a means to some end or ends lying outside itself, like protecting good men, saving souls, ensuring progress...only in the world of work is the means-end duality appropriate" (*Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*, 23). Kateb argues that the necessity for non-political activity is obvious, but the underlying theoretical point for Arendt is to try and avoid confusing administrative/economic activity with political action by making them indistinguishable from each other.

not a dismissal of the challenge Arendt presents.<sup>76</sup> Benhabib agrees with the ‘normative core’ of Arendt’s conception of the political – that the political requires a common space formed from the appearance of action and speech – without ignoring the ‘annoyance’ of having to continually defend this realm from the movement of the social and changing economies that complicate a clear ontology. So while the movement of social priorities into political life, as well as the departure of the philosopher from it, constitute two of Arendt’s essential concerns, we must continually refer to her consideration of what it means to “think what we are doing” as we engage the complexities and tension of her political ontology.<sup>77</sup>

At the outset of *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes that “the *vita activa*, human life insofar as it is actively engaged in doing something, is always rooted in a world of men and manmade things which it never leaves or altogether transcends.”<sup>78</sup> Being in the world means being amongst others in a way that complicates how the *vita contemplativa* has been traditionally understood. Political life must be understood as something other than a derivation of the *vita contemplativa*, Arendt argues, which requires more than a mere restructuring of philosophic hierarchical orders. Even with the modern shifts in philosophic thought, the overall framework has remained essentially intact, though it has been turned on its head. Arendt writes:

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<sup>76</sup> Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), p. 158.

<sup>77</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The modern [philosophic] reversal shares with the traditional hierarchy the assumption that the same central human preoccupation must prevail in all activities of men, since without one comprehensive principle no order could be established. This assumption is not a matter of course, and my use of the term *vita activa* presupposes that the concern underlying all its activities is not the same as and is neither superior nor inferior to the central concern of contemplation.<sup>79</sup>

For the ancients, action was only the handmaiden of contemplation and possessed meaning only insofar as it made contemplation possible. The conceptual shift that involved the reversal of philosophic hierarchies, and here Arendt refers to Marx's reversal of Hegelian dialectic and Nietzsche's preference of the natural over the supernatural, occurred entirely apart from any change to the concepts themselves. "What matters here," Arendt states, "is the reversibility of all these systems, that they can be turned 'upside down' or 'downside up' at any moment in history without requiring for such reversal either historical events or changes in the structural elements involved."<sup>80</sup> Though philosophic currents have shifted and even reversed themselves throughout history, Arendt contends that political action has never been taken seriously in terms of its constitutive meaning. This is because Arendt understands intellectual history as nothing more than intellectual experience, thus the 'game' of system reversal is simply a reorganization of concepts and not actual conceptual transformation. What is required, Arendt claims, is deliberate movement

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

away from these hierarchies altogether by reevaluating political activity from outside this framework.

Throughout her discussion of the public realm in *The Human Condition*, Arendt is clear about the fundamental differences between the common world of humankind and the natural realm. Essentially, the shared or common world is distinguished from what is privately owned and stands as the ‘in between’ for those who have it in common. Appearing publicly and being amongst others in a way that assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves depends upon the existence of a common realm that is unlike natural spaces more appropriately suited to the condition of biological life.<sup>81</sup> “To live together in the world,” Arendt writes, essentially means 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.”<sup>82</sup> The world is different from the natural earth in the same way a table is necessarily different from the tree used to produce it. As a human artifice, Arendt argues that the home mankind builds for itself must at once stabilize life and ground objectivity. There is sameness amongst those related by a table, and yet because it prevents our ‘falling over one another’ it allows us to appear as distinct individuals. The sameness of being related by the objectivity of the table is different from the sameness commonly found in mankind as animal, who, like all living things, consumes and is bound to a metabolic cycle. In

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

one sense, then, the sameness found in the natural realm is based on a subjectivity marked by constantly changing appetites and desires. The objectivity of the man-made world is what stands against the pure subjectivity of the natural realm. “Only we who have erected the objectivity of a world of our own from what nature gives us,” Arendt writes, “who have built it into the environment of nature so that we are protected from her, can look upon nature as something ‘objective.’”<sup>83</sup> The problem nature poses for a stable community of human beings concerns its ceaseless cyclical movement. Arendt says that there is nothing purely natural that does not succumb to the ‘overwhelming forces’ of the life process. Standing against nature as the political realm does requires objectivity, but it also requires durability.

The world as the immortal home built by mortals must transcend their own biological temporality. Consequently, the political world cannot only be built for the living, but must endure for those who have yet to appear within it. Arendt writes:

Only the existence of a public realm and the world’s subsequent transformation into a community of things which gathers men together and relates them to each other depends entirely on permanence.<sup>84</sup>

The crucial difference between transcendence in its usage here and Arendt’s description of the philosopher’s departure from the common world concerns the objectivity of fabrication. While the philosopher leaves the world by transcending the realm of objectivity into the lonely realm of eternal ideas, the political world

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

transcends the ‘natural ruin of time’ by building something outside of nature that outlasts the lives of mortal beings. The desire to share a lasting public realm connects those located in the present, those who came before, and those who will follow, and just as the political world transcends the forces of nature, the individual transcends their own life necessities in order to enter the political realm.

Being free from the requirements of life makes political activity possible, but this can only occur within a space liberated from natural decay. Freedom, in this sense, is closely associated with ‘newness’ and ‘beginning,’ which is important if we are to understand Arendt’s break with philosophic tradition. Since political action is meant to occur within a public, permanent space, the mortality of the actor cannot condition it. Death is something each individual must come to terms with as individuals, which is to say that the concerns of the community must transcend even the death of any of its particular members. Arendt writes that death can properly be understood as ‘ceasing to be amongst others,’ and if the philosopher’s departure from a community can be likened to death in this way, philosophy, for the ancients, is truly the practice of dying.<sup>85</sup> Thus, Arendt breaks with philosophic tradition by arguing that natality, rather than mortality, undergirds the political community. The difference can be seen in the way Arendt contrasts action and metaphysical thought. Arendt states:

The life span itself, running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction. Action, with all its

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

uncertainties, is like an ever-present reminder that men, though they must die, are not born to die but in order to being something new...with the creation of man, the principle or beginning came into the world.<sup>86</sup>

If natality is the central category of political life as Arendt suggests, this kind of beginning must be distinct from basic forms of biological reproduction. Human activity is about world-building, and the objectivity of this world depends upon things that stand between individuals. The durability of this thing-world also depends upon the capacity of humankind to take from nature through processes of destruction, and work to produce those things that subsequent generations will recognize as distinctly worldly. Man-made things are not ends in themselves, but have importance because they relate the living with the dead in the same way a chair endures beyond the lifetime of its maker. These are, as Arendt puts it, historical, tangible evidences that activity has occurred.

As we have seen, political action, as an end, produces nothing objective or tangible that endures, and amongst the forms of fabrication that action relies upon in order to gain objectivity, Arendt argues that the creation of art is unique because it does not manufacture use objects but is, instead, best suited to record significant human achievements. In *Reflections on Literature and Culture*, Arendt writes that art overcomes the futility of word and deed by transcending their temporality. Political action requires enduring forms, and art, as reified objects, record action by 'overreaching' human nature in the sense that they avoid decay precisely because

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<sup>86</sup> Arendt, "Collective Responsibility," in *Amor Mundi* ed. James W. Bernauer (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), p. 42.



they are not used or are found useful. Humankind lives in a world of things, Arendt says, and this thing-world can only be made into a suitable home for human beings if it is a “place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced.”<sup>87</sup> Work in its various forms are not unimportant for Arendt, but their appearance in public life as ends rather than means complicates the freedom that makes political action possible. Useless fabrication is, perhaps, most closely associated with political action because it provides tangibility to what would otherwise immediately disappear.

### **B. Labour, Work, and Political Activity**

It is important to pause at this point to consider what Arendt means when she distinguishes labour from work, and work from action. These two forms of activity, including political action, comprise what Arendt refers to as the *vita activa*. Though philosophic tradition has differentiated these categories only by degrees, Arendt argues that the things of the world “are of a very different nature and produced by quite different kinds of activities.”<sup>88</sup> If the significance of the public world and political action is to be recovered, as Arendt suggests, then all forms of activity, regardless of their nature, must be radically reevaluated.

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<sup>87</sup> Arendt, “The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art,” in *Reflections on Literature and Culture* ed. Susannah Young-Ah Gottlieb (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 178

<sup>88</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 95.

Arendt states that, “the least durable of tangible things are those needed for the life process itself.”<sup>89</sup> Nature, and its continuing cyclical movement, is marked by consumption, which means that what is produced in nature is consumed directly without trace or acknowledgement independent from its actual production. Arendt distinguishes labour from both work and action as the ‘means of consumption,’ and while the products of work possess some durability, what is consumed never properly possesses the kind of objectivity to be anything more than matter prepared for incorporation.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, labour is directed at sustaining the human species in a way that does not perceive beginning or end, but devours and destroys ceaselessly as a part of an ongoing regenerative process. This means that those who only labour are ‘worldless’ and can therefore only be recognized as members, or specimens, of a species rather than as distinct ‘selves,’ and though they die, Arendt says, without a world there is only the eternal recurrence of their species.

To the ancients, the process of sustaining human life was contemptible and relegated to the private, hidden realm of the household. It was not until Locke made the connection between labour and private property that the most natural, unworldly of activities became the foundation upon which humanity began to define itself. This foundation was ultimately expressed in Marx’s assertion that labour was the ‘supreme world-building capacity of man,’ yet, Arendt notes, because labour is the ‘least worldly’ of humankind’s activities, Marx could never overcome this

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

contradiction even after acknowledging the importance of reification.<sup>91</sup> Marx forgets, Arendt writes, that his own definition of the labour process, as a metabolic relationship between man and nature, ends up with the product being immediately “annihilated by the body’s life process.”<sup>92</sup> Arendt’s critique of Marx here rests on the elevation of *animal laborans* to such a level that the labouring activity becomes the expression of humanity itself. In terms of durability, the drive to sustain life is powerful, but it will yield nothing that outlasts what is consumed.

Arendt’s critique of Marx focuses largely on the creation of a labouring society that takes nothing into account besides the life process, and though Marx attributes the liberation of humankind to labour, Arendt contends that a society of labourers is the death of authentic political activity. It is worth citing Arendt at length here:

In order to become worldly things, that is, deeds and facts and events and patterns of thoughts or ideas, they must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things – into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments...the reality and reliability of the human world rest primarily on the fact that we are surrounded by things more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors.<sup>93</sup>

Labouring animals are contented by the ‘sheer bliss’ of nature, of life, yet this happiness is only a part of a larger cycle and so it cannot last. The difference

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

between wretched poverty and the joy of abundance depends entirely upon the availability of consumable goods, and while Marx's discovery of surplus labour led him to conclude that a ceaseless supply of produced wealth was possible, at no time, Arendt states, did Marx suggest that this accumulation is transformed into anything but consumables. Consequently, Marx's victory of the labourer over labour itself cannot end in total freedom as Arendt sees it, but remains "concentrated upon nothing but its own being alive, and remains imprisoned in its metabolism with nature without ever transcending or freeing itself from the recurring cycle of its own functioning."<sup>94</sup>

Marx's assertion that power of labour is the defining quality of humanity also means that the 'ideas' left to socialized human beings are only 'mere values' determined by society as a whole in its 'ever-changing functional needs.'<sup>95</sup> That is, the validity of thought and activity are bound by the requirements of social sustainability and are entirely alienated from the fabricated human world. Marx's discovery of the secret to history, buried within the class struggle, is really only the production of a pattern, Arendt notes, and whereas patterns can be and are continually made, meaning can only be disclosed or revealed.<sup>96</sup> The danger Arendt sees in the movement concerns the inability of the socialized being to truly recognize the futility of their labour. For even though the historical process Marx predicted eases the labour's difficulty, and here Arendt refers to the industrial and

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>95</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 40.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

atomic revolutions, these are changes solely to the conditions of labour and not changes to the basic condition of human life.<sup>97</sup>

The introduction of tools, which serve the labouring process, broke down the boundaries between the durable, objectivity of workmanship and the natural forces of life. Though the use of objects quicken the movement of the natural cycle of production and consumption, these tools are changed by the same processes into consumables themselves. “In our need for more and more rapid replacement of the worldly things around us,” Arendt writes, “we can no longer afford to use them, to respect and preserve their inherent durability; we must consume, devour, as it were, our houses and furniture and cars as though they were the ‘good things’ of nature which spoil uselessly if they are not drawn swiftly into the never-ending cycle of man’s metabolism with nature.”<sup>98</sup> Western society, consequently, is aptly referred to as a consumer’s society that reveals labour’s movement into all realms of human interaction. This is a ‘waste society,’ according to Arendt, that is in constant danger of losing all sense of necessity and thus cannot recognize the futility of life and labouring. Mankind takes from nature in order to ‘defend’ himself from the deteriorating effects of the life process, but an increase in abundance and fertility, as Arendt puts it, makes need less detectable. Recognition of life’s futility requires an appreciation of the permanence and durability made manifest in fabricated things that have not themselves been reduced to consumables. Without these permanent

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<sup>97</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 121.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

objects, Arendt states, human beings have no home, and, strictly speaking, their life cannot be human.<sup>99</sup>

The difference between *homo faber* and *animal laborans* consists in the ‘world-building’ capacity of the worker to do more than simply ‘mix’ their labour with nature, but to ‘work upon nature’ in such a way that an infinite number of products may be fabricated. The capacity to build a world is different from the natural forces that compel humankind to produce and consume, yet the labourer needs the worker not just for the use objects that can be made, but to “constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can be at home on earth.”<sup>100</sup>

Arendt is clear that the worker is not the final expression of humanity, nor is work an ultimate end, but it is vital to the freedom of the political realm and the possibility of action. The importance of *homo faber* is found in their ability to fabricate durable things which allow ‘great deeds’ and ‘great works’ to endure after they have been expressed and enacted. Arendt describes the work of *homo faber* as a ‘Promethean’ revolt whereby material is taken violently from nature and transformed into an objective thing through a process of destruction. In essence, while *animal laborans* is a destroyer of worlds, *homo faber* is a destroyer of nature. The great difference between labour and work, which Arendt repeatedly returns to, concerns the indeterminate beginning and end of natural cycles and the definitive beginning of an objective, fabricated thing. In this way, labourers are perpetually

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

bound to metabolic cycles, but workers are both masters of nature and of themselves. This is because, “alone with his image of the future product, *homo faber* is free to produce, and again facing the work of his hands his is free to destroy.”<sup>101</sup>

With the exception of art, the use-value associated with fabricated objects can challenge the appropriate boundaries of work activity when usefulness itself becomes the exclusive standard by which human life is judged. Arendt writes that what is at stake “is not instrumentality as such, the use of means to achieve an end, but rather the generalization of the fabrication experience in which usefulness and utility are established as the ultimate standards for the world as well as for the life of acting men moving in it.”<sup>102</sup> Arendt’s concern here is focused on the meaningless, repetitive fabrication of useful things that lose their distinct purpose when humankind, specifically as users, becomes the end instead. Useful objects, which have an obvious end when their process of fabrication is completed, run the risk of becoming meaningless when their independent value disappears into an endless chain of means and ends. If usefulness becomes the ultimate standard for the world, which is the great ‘temptation’ of *homo faber* according to Arendt, then “the most worldly of all activities loses its original objective meaning, it becomes a means to fulfil subjective needs.”<sup>103</sup> Though the fabrication of objects necessarily aids the life process, Arendt says that this is not its primary concern and that humankind’s preoccupation with technological efficiency and automated self-reproducing

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<sup>101</sup> Arendt, *Amor Mundi*, p. 36.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

machinery becomes more closely related to biological processes than to the freedom of the political realm. Specifically, Arendt writes:

The world of machines is even losing that independent worldly character which the tools and implements and the early machinery of the modern age so eminently possessed. The natural processes on which it feeds increasingly relate it to the biological process itself, so that the apparatuses we once handled freely begin to look as though they were 'shells belonging to the human body as the shell belongs to the body of a turtle.'<sup>104</sup>

Although the possibility of establishing objectivity exists in fabrication, and necessarily so for the building of the world depends upon it, ceases to distinguish itself from labour when it contributes only to the act of consumption. Put differently, the standards that govern the fabrication of the world, if they are left to rule, essentially render the world worthless.<sup>105</sup> Indeed, *animal laborans* requires the aid of *homo faber* to make labour easier, but *homo faber* must do more for the world, Arendt says, if a suitable home for humankind is to be built.

The highest capacity of *homo faber*, then, is to make the activity of political beings, their great deeds and speech, into a reality through fabrication. This process is of an entirely different nature than the fabrication of use-objects, or what Arendt refers to as 'sheer instrumentalism.' However, while Arendt differentiates the kinds of activities that correspond to the natural, biological cycle of life from the unnatural fabrication of worldly objects, neither of these two forms of activity can properly be the measure of human meaning. Arendt questions philosophic tradition that, as she

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<sup>104</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 153.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.



says, makes the claim that usefulness, “or that which is useful for a person or for a group or for a people, does and should rule supreme in political matters.”<sup>106</sup> That is to say, it is not in our struggle to sustain life or in our production of durable objects that meaning is established. Rather, though these two forms of activity necessarily meet the conditions of biological metabolism and provide a suitable, lasting home, Arendt is clear that only authentic political action can be constitutive of human meaning, not the interests of particular groups or leaders.

Against the assertion, then, that the greatest achievement of humankind is their own appearance and actualization “stands the conviction of *homo faber* that a man’s products may be more – and not only more lasting – than he himself, as well as the *animal laborans*’ firm belief that life is the highest of all goods.”<sup>107</sup> Arendt responds to these claims by looking to political action as the highest form of activity that not only binds communities together, but also allows them to appear before one another as distinct beings. Whereas the ‘herdlike’ sociality of *animal laborans* prevents the discovery of a home in the world, and unlike the common world of *homo faber* that is so easily reduced to limited associations within a market economy, political actors reveal themselves independently of the conditionality of both these realms. This movement marks a beginning through which the ‘somebody,’ the author and initiator of particular actions, is disclosed. In this way, Arendt offers an account of action that is critical of how humankind’s self-

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<sup>106</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1990), p. 22.

<sup>107</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 208.

understanding has problematically elevated biological life and economies of instrumentalism over and against the freedom of political activity.

The difficulty of considering the worth of authentic political action becomes increasingly complicated when the shift between labour and work occurs so easily. “In this situation,” Arendt writes, “where production consists primarily in the preparation for consumption, the very distinction between means and ends, so highly characteristic of *homo faber*, simply does not make sense, and the instruments which *homo faber* invented and with which he came to the help of the labour of *animal laborans* therefore lose their instrumental character once they are used by it.”<sup>108</sup> Even though political activity requires the work of *homo faber*, the natural impulse of biological life to absorb or metabolize the products of work into itself renders them meaningless.

The possibility of establishing an appropriate space for political action seems almost impossible amidst Arendt’s concerns, but she argues that these reflections are critically set against “a background of both reckless optimism and reckless despair.”<sup>109</sup> Arendt’s discussion of labour is not intended to be entirely bleak, and her consideration of art points to the very real capacity of humankind to act in ways that transcend the futility of life. At the same time, however, her critique of fabrications that form endless chains of means and ends discourages overconfidence in historical processes that claim an unwarranted sense of comprehension. The

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>109</sup> Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Meridian Books Inc., 1960), p. viii.

political realm is important for Arendt because it is the sphere that can effectively challenge both Platonic and Marxist ontologies, but it does this by asserting the worth of action amidst a tradition that has always considered it peripheral to true meaning.

### **C. Plurality, Identity, and Critical Concerns**

Thomas Hobbes, Arendt writes in *The Promise of Politics*, made the important discovery that human beings in singularity were not naturally political, nor was anything belonging to their essence inherently political. Politics happens between human beings, and so political interaction is something ‘outside of man.’ “There is therefore no real political substance,” according to Arendt, “politics arises in what lies between men and is established as relationships.”<sup>110</sup> The basic condition of political life is plurality which means that it stands in contradistinction to *animal laborans*, who cannot be distinguished as individuals amidst their collective, and *homo faber*, whose unredeemable activity properly occurs apart from others in isolation. The interrelatedness of human beings depends on a shared exposure of sorts that each individual experiences when they appear amongst others in the political realm. Arendt refers to this sense of connectivity as a relational web that is continually in flux as various actors make their appearances. Similarly, it is by appearing amongst others that we come to be known, recognized and made identifiable. It is the dualistic character of the public realm that enables us to be

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<sup>110</sup> Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, p. 95.

acknowledged by others as equals and in our own distinctiveness. Here Arendt means that we are equals because of shared speech and mutual comprehension, which is more than the sounds of labour that relate need and desire through mere noise. Arendt writes that, “Speech and action reveal this unique distinctiveness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men.”<sup>111</sup> The clear difference Arendt is referring to between *animal laborans* and the political actor concerns the revelatory capacity of each human being to appear before each other as human beings rather than as specimens of the human species. When we act amongst others we take an initiative, so to speak, and begin something that is entirely new. Thus, in our “acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world.”<sup>112</sup> To communicate specific biological need is to express some thing, while speech is required to express ‘someone,’ which is to say that action does not occur out of need or desire in the same way labour and work do. Rather, the initiatives that distinguish political actors are unconditioned from natural and economic forces and properly belong to the impulse that “springs from the beginning that came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 176.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>113</sup> Arendt, *Amor Mundi*, p. 39.

Arendt refers to the emergence into the realm of political affairs as a ‘second birth’, and whereas the birth of an infant is unremarkable in relation to the ceaseless regeneration of the human species, being born again into the political realm, as Arendt puts it, corresponds to a different kind of spontaneity and infinite possibility. One cannot know how one will be received in the same way one cannot know or anticipate how someone else might appear. These are moments of sheer, spontaneous revelation, and in these moments we become known to others and to ourselves. Our identities are not self-creations but belong to the revelatory capacity of action. We make ourselves known in human togetherness, yet plurality does not inspire confidence to act, rather, as Arendt says, it should be approached somewhat hesitantly. This is because when we act we risk the mystery of what we cannot foresee and must proceed courageously in the face of unlimited potential outcomes. Risk, in this sense, corresponds to our inability to control precisely how others will identify us, yet it is through this risk that action is made meaningful.

Action without an identifiable actor cannot be constitutive of meaning and loses its specific quality only to become “one form of achievement among others.”<sup>114</sup> In relation to some forms of fabrication, action that does not disclose an agent possesses the same characteristics of strictly useful objects, that is, they become a means to an end only. Arendt observes that practical responses to this problem can be seen in our need to construct monuments that are meant to connect events to unknown participants who would otherwise be ‘robbed’ of their human dignity.

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<sup>114</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 180.

Tombs dedicated to unknown soldiers are an obvious example of this. These are expressions of our need to attribute a 'who' to a particular event or action, and it is also a way of liberating an actor from the confines of an endless chain of instrumentalism.

Similarly, Arendt continually refers to the important connection between the disclosure of identity and what this means for a human being to share their life story. When we act, Arendt says that we enter an already existing web of human relationships where our unique story is 'produced,' but not in the same fashion as use objects. Production, in the way Arendt uses it here, seems to correspond to the artefacts, writings, and other tangible objects that preserve an account of our activity, but they cannot take the place of authentic revelation. As we have seen, these artistic fabrications directly relate to the unfolding of our unique history, in fact, they make history possible, yet their tangibility is what makes them something other than sheer revelation in the same way action can be understood as revelation. Stories, Arendt suggests, "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"<sup>115</sup> The risk of action shapes Arendt's understanding of history, and it is for this reason Arendt argues that history, as humankind's 'storybook,' is unable to unequivocally name specific authors because the occurrence of action is blind to the total effect of what it begins. We cannot know what we start when we act, but we can know who someone is by

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 184.

them. Knowing someone is related to knowing their story, which is something other than knowing ‘what’ someone was based on a definitive list of particular qualities or characteristics. In *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt makes the point that, “it is true that storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it,” and in the same way, the revelation of who we are through our stories resists reliable and predictive means of precisely articulating a complete identity based solely on our characteristics.<sup>116</sup> We reveal ourselves through action and so one cannot “solidify in words the living essence of the person,” and though stories require a concrete medium to endure, appearing in sheer human togetherness retain an ‘intangibility’ that cannot capture the totality of a being in “the flux of action and speech.”<sup>117</sup>

In relation to this, we know that the intangibility of disclosure through speech and action is made tangible in the story of the actor’s life, yet Arendt makes the claim that ‘as a palpable entity,’ the essence of a human being related within their story comes into fullness only after death.<sup>118</sup> Arendt’s appreciation of the immortal Homeric figure who commits wholly to a great, though fatal act, finds its exemplar in Achilles, who not only risked his life but also “expressly chose a premature death.”<sup>119</sup> The significance of Achilles, for Arendt, is found in the active spirit of Greek antiquity that strove almost selfishly to sum up life within a singular, deadly and final act. Dying in this way overcomes all potential results and

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<sup>116</sup> Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1968), p. 105.

<sup>117</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 181.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 193.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

consequences, and so those that do not survive their last ‘supreme act’ essentially end the story of their life in the same moment they end the story of their act. This is a way of achieving immortality, though the greatness of the action becomes worthless if it cannot find objectivity. And though Arendt repeatedly argues that men are born to begin something new, having ones deeds and words preserved within a story seems to be almost as important as action itself, for it is through stories that we inspire action in others.

Up to this point, we have seen that Arendt’s critical assessment of ancient and modern philosophy is not merely an attempt to transform an existing tradition by relying on a common framework, but is, instead, a departure that tries to locate human meaning within the realm of political action. The central problem Arendt identifies is that although philosophic systems have changed throughout the course of history, these transformations have all occurred within a larger framework that views politics as something lesser than the pursuits of the mind, thus political action has never been taken seriously. Arendt’s departure from this framework endeavours to move political action and the *vita activa* into the foreground so that we might reevaluate life within the public realm. The common world of human affairs, though treated peripherally, is both the immortal home for human beings and the realm in which freedom is made manifest, and by briefly examining Arendt’s articulation of labour, work and action, her efforts to cultivate a love for plurality and being in the world becomes clearer. We can now consider the complications of



action, the most significant being the problem of irreversibility, and how Arendt proposes to address these tensions by introducing a radical account of forgiveness that carries no moral or religious valuation, yet is the redemption of political action through political action.

Arendt claims that those who actively live and engage with one another in the world share something with those who, like Heraclitus, ‘preferred immortal glory to mortal things.’ That is, if immortality is concerned with durability, then how we view the world should begin with a love for spaces in which what we do and say can be made permanent. What we mortals produce through our words and deeds find a home in a world that should properly be treated as permanent, or, put differently, through our activity mortals can find a place in a cosmos “where everything is immortal except themselves.”<sup>120</sup> If we attend only to the needs, care, and sustenance of mortal bodies we forsake the world in which we can be known as something more than bundles of appetites. Political activity is essentially different from labour and work because it is free from dependency or restriction. Our collective identity as members of a species belongs within the natural realm amidst the infinite recurrence of natural processes, while our capacity to reveal ourselves as individuals requires a fabricated space in which we speak and act. While labouring and work are necessary, they are not political as such. Only action, as an end in itself, reveals who we are through word and deed.

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<sup>120</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 19.

Arendt's categorization of activity, however, has raised some important concerns about the nature of her typology. Seyla Benhabib argues that Arendt's categorization of activity moves too quickly to reduce complex socio-political relations into clear representations of private and public affairs. Benhabib writes:

Industrial factory work, for example, is not just labour or instrumental activity; depending on the nature of the social relations of power on the shop floor, and between union and management, there are unusually complex dimensions of social interaction involved. By building ten rather than fifteen chips per hour, workers may be engaging in a slowdown of production. Their activity in this case would not be merely instrumental labour; it would also be political activity...the same activity may instantiate more than one action type.<sup>121</sup>

For Benhabib, understanding the distinction between various forms of activity is largely contextual and *attitudinal*. The basic tasks that keep a physical body healthy may not always be reduced to sheer creaturely impulses, just as a preparing a meal for a loved one can be something more than the satisfaction of necessity. Benhabib breaks with Arendt's strict delineation of public and private realms, though she does not dismiss the importance of Arendt's typologies entirely. The 'porous' threshold of the private realm complicates the way Arendt wants to establish clear boundaries between social and political life, but Benhabib insists she is not arguing against making distinctions. "I do not consider action typologies for this reason to be useless or unnecessary," Benhabib writes, "I agree...that it is fundamental to

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<sup>121</sup> Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, p. 131.

construct ‘ideal types,’ or conceptual models, to guide us in such inquiry.”<sup>122</sup>

According to Benhabib, an attitudinal approach offers some defence of Arendt’s categorization because it is not content-specific, but this means that the complexities between social and political life need to be properly contextualized. George Kateb argues something similar, suggesting that, “it would be easier on Arendt’s readers if instead of suggesting that the content of political action is itself she had said that no matter what political speech and deliberation deals with – no matter what its subject matter – it could be genuinely political, provided it were carried on in the right spirit.”<sup>123</sup> The issue with both Benhabib and Kateb’s response here, which Kateb himself acknowledges, concerns how a *spirit* of political activity cannot draw sufficient attention to the criteria Arendt uses to delineate the *content* of authentic political activity – even when the criteria themselves are problematic. Kateb is referring to the major elements of private life that, in Arendt’s estimation, are simply not commensurate with political activity. Thus, if we choose to follow Arendt, we must be wary of the shortcomings of her categorization, but we also must adequately attend to the ways in which political action can be thought of differently or apart from other forms of activity. Though Arendt is not willing to agree on exemplars of political activity based on their content exclusively, like

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 131. Benhabib argues that the reality of human interrelatedness does not totally destroy Arendt’s categorization. In fact, because thinking requires making connections and setting things apart, the distinctions Arendt makes have value - though they require us to admit firstly that all categorization is problematic in terms of its relationship to reality. John McGowan takes this point further suggesting that, “to reject Arendt’s social/political distinction out of hand, to refuse to think through its challenge to our received ideas and heartfelt convictions, is to evade precisely what she wants us to confront about modernity” (McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction*, p. 47).

<sup>123</sup> Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*, p. 21.

Benhabib, we should be equally unwilling to dismiss the value of categorical distinctions altogether.

While Arendt's delineation of the reality of activity is perhaps less coherent than she intends it to be, she is clear about those forces, both philosophic and economic, that do not cultivate or support political action, but destroy it. Margaret Canovan, like Benhabib, has considered the kinds of activity that properly fit into the scope of authentic political action, and means to assess common political language and ideas of the political by holding them against Arendt's categorization. Canovan argues that our modern political language, according to Arendt, is 'curiously unpolitical' and reflects a philosophic and theological tradition that has not sufficiently recognized the importance of a public realm. In a reference to contemporary sociological methods of classifying various kinds of human association, Canovan claims that the way we think about human interrelatedness and networking all share the tendency to view human beings as things that can be interchanged for one another, that is, each member of a grouping, whether by class, job or behavioural type, can be interchanged without any regard for individual distinction. As types of categories, both labour and work share aspects of this quality, but political action is different because, as Arendt states, it is the only activity where individuals appear before one another *qua* individuals. Canovan writes that, "what Arendt is concerned to stress is, as she puts it, the fact of 'Nativity': the fact that we are not only all mortal, doomed to extinction, but that each

of us represents something new and unique in the world and is capable of doing the unexpected and acting in ways that no role-prescriptions can foresee.”<sup>124</sup> The network of relationships established within the public realm depends upon a world that both separates and relates, and it is through our capacity to begin new things that corresponds most closely with Arendt’s understanding of natality. Arendt states:

Labour and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born in to the world as strangers. However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.<sup>125</sup>

In this way, human nascence ensures the infinite continuation of the species, but more importantly, the individual life that ‘cuts through the circular movements of biological life’ through word and deed reflects the capacity of action to interrupt natural processes by continually beginning something new.

The centrality of the concept of natality in Arendt’s thought finds its origin in Augustine. For Arendt, freedom corresponds to natality and it is through this

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<sup>124</sup> Margaret Canovan, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, p. 59. Arendt’s articulation of the importance of natality was a radical departure from Heidegger’s own examination of human mortality. The possibility of revealing oneself to others and recognizing uniqueness amongst individuals begins with the idea of beginning, rather than our sheer temporality. “This is the step that Heidegger does not take,” Seyla Benhabib writes, “although the world is always a world shared with others...the most authentic form of Dasein is not Mitsein but being-unto-death, the awareness of Dasein’s temporality and finitude” (*The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, p. 53). In essence, where Heidegger finds inauthentic human existence in the ‘obscurity’ of public life, Arendt there finds the ground for human meaning.

<sup>125</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 9.

connection that political life can exist. “Because he is a beginning,” Arendt argues, “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.”<sup>126</sup> With the creation of humankind, the principle of ‘beginning’ entered the world, and it is Arendt’s appropriation of Augustine’s understanding of ‘beginning’ that guides her analysis of the public realm. In Book XII of *The City of God*, Augustine writes:

For they do not know how the human race and this mortal condition of ours began, not how it will be brought to a close, since they cannot penetrate the depth of God’s intention. For though He is Himself eternal and without beginning, He has nonetheless caused time to have a beginning; and man, whom He had not previously made, He has made in time not from a new and sudden resolve, but by His immutable and eternal purpose.<sup>127</sup>

In order for there to be a beginning, Augustine writes, God created humankind “before whom no man existed”, and so Arendt’s discussion of natality and political action appropriates Augustine’s notion of ‘beginning’ as a way of describing the preconditions of political freedom and the expression of individual identity.<sup>128</sup> Authentic action is predicated on the freedom to begin something new, and for Arendt, Augustine’s concept of ‘beginning’ shapes her understanding of human identity. That is, Arendt understands each human being born into the world as a new ‘somebody’ that is capable of acting in new and unexpected ways. “It is Man’s character of individuality that explains Augustine’s saying that there was ‘nobody’

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<sup>126</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 167.

<sup>127</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book XII, ch. 15.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, Book XII, ch. 21.

before him,” Arendt states, “namely, nobody who one could call a ‘person’.”<sup>129</sup> By virtue of their birth, all human beings are new beginnings, and so the relationship Arendt establishes between action and forgiveness becomes clearer when these ideas are understood within the context of natality. “Hence, it was for the sake of *novitas*, in a sense, that man was created,” Arendt writes, “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.”<sup>130</sup> In this way, forgiveness becomes essential to political life for Arendt because it is the embodiment of natality; it is the new beginning that overcomes the unforeseen negative corollaries of action. Just as Augustine observed the coincidence of natality and individuality in God’s creation of humankind, the basis of Arendt’s conceptualization of freedom, political action, and forgiveness shares this sense of ‘beginning’. While it is difficult to speculate, there is enough evidence to suggest that the impact of Augustine’s thought on Arendt’s formulation of forgiveness is significant. As Joanna Scott and Judith Stark have noted, “without Arendt’s reading of Augustine, whom she celebrated as the first philosopher of the will and the Romans’ ‘only’ philosophical mind, it is difficult to imagine the context out of which her analysis of freedom and its relationship to politics might have emerged.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Willing*, p. 109.

<sup>130</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 55.

<sup>131</sup> Joanna Scott & Judith Stark, “Rediscovering Hannah Arendt” in *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 147.

#### **D. The Political Nature of Forgiveness and the Irreversibility of Action**

Political action, as a beginning, redeems labour from the endless cycle of natural processes, and fabrication from the meaninglessness of means/end production, but is itself susceptible to the very qualities that differentiate it categorically from these other forms of activity. When something truly new begins it cannot be anticipated or expected in a way that would condition its newness or spontaneity. Thus, it is impossible to calculate precisely what the outcome of an action will look like prior to committing it. Just as no one knows exactly whom they will reveal when they disclose themselves through their activity, the consequences of political action are unknown – which means that acting is risky. This presents a problem for Arendt; how are we to understand and respond to the consequences of our activity, especially if they are negative? Arendt refrains from assessing action based on levels of progress, that is, the value of action does not lie in the content of its achievement but in its ability to reveal and disclose.<sup>132</sup> However, an actor is never at once only an actor; they are also a sufferer. Arendt writes:

To do and to suffer are like opposite sides of the same coin, and the story that an act starts is composed of its consequent deeds and sufferings. These consequences are boundless, because action, though it may proceed from nowhere, so to speak, acts into a medium where

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<sup>132</sup> Leah Bradshaw writes that there was never any notion of progress within Arendt's conception of the realm of human affairs. In fact, by privileging the present over what has occurred historically, "we do an injustice to the free and heroic deeds of those who lived before" (*Acting and Thinking*, p. 29). Meaningful action interrupts the natural continuum of natality and mortality, Bradshaw writes, and 'isolates the extraordinary from the mundane.' In a way, proper history, for Arendt, is about locating and immortalizing specific, unique moments without negating their particularity by folding them into historical patterns. Bradshaw argues that according to Arendt, no moment is truly free if all meaning is derived from 'the chain of life and labour.'



every reaction because a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes<sup>133</sup>

The consequences that follow a particular action are as infinite and unpredictable as the action itself, which means that an action occurring within a seemingly fixed set of parameters can potentially expand beyond all conceivable boundaries. Arendt argues that all action establishes relationships just as all political actors move in relation to other like actors, but there is no safeguard, institutional or otherwise, that can absolutely hem in the unpredictable nature of action. With each new generation, Arendt writes, the laws and customs that serve to stabilize the fragility of human interaction must attempt to withstand the emergence of new political actors. This is a limited effort to contain what Arendt refers to as the 'boundlessness' of action, but it does solve the problem of action's unpredictability. What we begin through our activity is closely related to whom we reveal, that is, we do not know whom we will reveal before the occurrence of action in the same way we do not know how far the consequences of our actions will travel. This also means that the consequences of an action are irreversible; one cannot undo what one has done in the same way an artisan can erase the traces of a glass sculpture by placing it in the kiln. The remedy for the unpredictable nature of action, Arendt states, lies in our ability to make and keep promises, while the remedy for the problem of irreversibility is the faculty of forgiving.<sup>134</sup> Both the faculty of forgiving and the faculty of promising are closely related to the condition of plurality and

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<sup>133</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 190.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

cannot, therefore, be understood apart from the presence of others. While the enactment of a promise preserves the identity of the one who makes and fulfils it, the ability to forgive releases the actor from the consequences of their actions. In both cases, Arendt points to these two closely bound faculties as necessary forces which both bind and release individuals, that is, the faculty of making promises allows human beings to overcome the inherent unreliability that is a condition of sheer freedom, while the faculty of forgiveness restores relationships that would otherwise be irreparably damaged by a single act.

In order to understand the importance Arendt places on the faculty of making promises, we must first look briefly at her concept of power. Arendt states that the public realm enters existence when acting and speaking individuals appear before one another in word and deed, but because the emergence of the public realm is prior to any political or governmental framework, there is nothing about political action itself that can secure its continued existence. For this reason, the polis, Arendt says, should be understood as the organization of people rather than a physical location or edifice, which also means that the destruction of political life is often initially instigated by the cessation of activity or the disassociation of its members. Arendt explains that because action exists solely in its actualization, it is unable to survive the very movement of its formation.<sup>135</sup> Accordingly, Arendt claims

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

that power, as a potentiality of action, keeps the space of public appearance in existence.<sup>136</sup> Arendt states:

Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together. When we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated to begin with...disappears, 'his power' also vanishes<sup>137</sup>

Power is often conflated with strength, but Arendt contends that strength differs from power because strength is an intrinsic part of someone or something's character. Essentially, strength is a measurable and inherent quality belonging to body or object in its singularity, while power, which is both immeasurable and unreliable, is contingent on plurality. The limits of strength correspond to the nature of each particular body, and each exertion or display of strength must reach a threshold. Power, conversely, is as 'boundless as action' and possesses no natural limitation besides the absence of plurality.

While power cannot be substituted by strength, Arendt examines how force is related to power as its alternative. Put briefly, Arendt describes force as the output of energy by 'physical or social movements', and although it is quite common to observe strength, power and violence together, it is misleading to use these terms synonymously. Though they are not opposites, Arendt indicates that power and

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 200. Bradshaw rightly observes that Arendt's use of power remains somewhat mysterious and obscure throughout her work, though it is clear that it is something that precedes the 'act of contracting and pledging' (*Acting and Thinking*, p. 121).

<sup>137</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 44.

force are competitively related, and by utilizing the instrumentality of violence it has often been the case that the “political combination of force and powerlessness, an array of impotent forces that spend themselves, often spectacularly and vehemently but in utter futility, [leave] behind neither monuments nor stories, hardly enough memory to enter into history at all.”<sup>138</sup> Arendt refers to the phenomenon of powerless force, generally, as tyranny. The exercise of force in place of the actualization of power is the failure of political life and is marked by the impotence of all political actors. As a term, force seems to be so closely related to violence that their usage has become interchangeable linguistically. The difference that Arendt suggests exists between these two terms concerns the inherent instrumentality of violence and the dynamic movement of force. Arendt indicates that in appearance, violence is actually more closely related to strength, since the instruments of violence are generally utilized to augment whatever kind of strength is possessed naturally. But whereas violence necessarily involves implements and implementation, force, as a movement, can be leveraged over others in order to influence choices and behaviour. As Jurgen Habermas has argued, Arendt’s understanding of power refers to unanimity in agreement, whereas force compels collective agreement through coercive measures or otherwise.<sup>139</sup> What matters

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<sup>138</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 202.

<sup>139</sup> Habermas understands the distinction Arendt makes between force and power as simply “two different aspects of the same exercise of political rule. ‘Power’ would then mean the consent of the governed that is mobilized for collective goals, that is, their readiness to support the political leadership; while ‘force’ would mean the disposition over resources and means of coercion, in virtue of which a political leadership makes and carries through binding decisions in order to realize collective goals” (Habermas, “Hannah Arendt’s Communications Concept of Power” in *Hannah Arendt*:

most for Arendt in this discussion is the reality that power - as distinct from violence, strength and force - is the *raison d'être* of the public realm because it is actualized when human beings act and speak in concert. In this way, power is entirely relational, but because it is always potential, it vanishes the moment a plurality disassembles.

There is nothing inherent about action that sustains a plurality or the conditions under which action is possible, and so Arendt looks to our capacity to make and keep promises as a remedy for the unpredictability of action, which is something other than the capacity of power to bring the public space of appearances into existence. Arendt writes:

Man's inability to rely on himself or to have complete faith in himself...is the price human beings pay for freedom; and the impossibility of remaining unique masters of what they do, of knowing its consequences and relying upon the future, is the price they pay for plurality and reality, for the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all.<sup>140</sup>

The uncertainty of action ruins any guarantee of continuity as it relates to both the formation of identity and the consequences of what we do and say within the public realm. For Arendt, sheer freedom prevents all efforts to precisely control the outcome of our actions; however, the creation of promises allows us, in a limited

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*Critical Essays*, p. 212). Habermas is critical of Arendt's terminological differentiation, arguing that Arendt is a 'victim of a concept of politics that is inapplicable to modern conditions'. While stark conceptual differences almost always exhibit weaknesses when applied to real life conditions, Arendt is clear that her distinctions, "though by no means arbitrary, hardly ever correspond to watertight compartments in the real world, from which nevertheless they are drawn" (Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 46).

<sup>140</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 244.

fashion, to overcome this kind of unpredictability without succumbing entirely to the ‘fiction of mastery.’ Lisa Jane Disch’s reading of Arendt’s critical assessment of instrumental or purposeful action draws attention to the way in which prolonged commitments attempt to limit action’s unpredictability. Disch states:

Mutual promise serves to mitigate the uncertainty of acting under the conditions of natality and plurality while protecting those conditions. It is because a promise is only a partial abrogation of both natality and plurality that it focuses individuals on a *limited* common purpose. That this purpose be a precisely specified short-term goal is crucial to the legitimacy of a promise, because the ‘basic unreliability’ of human beings conditioned by natality puts it beyond their capacity to commit to anything absolutely.<sup>141</sup>

Disch acknowledges that Arendt’s consideration of promise making, as a form of ‘agreed purpose’, conflicts with her understanding of meaningful action, but this, Disch argues, properly follows Arendt’s insight on totalitarianism. Since meaningful action is unconditioned, binding oneself to a particular outcome seems contrary to the freedom that is the hallmark of political action. Disch claims that because power requires enactment, there is a differentiation between power, principles and the ‘concrete content’ of promises. While power can only exist relationally amongst distinct individuals who agree upon a specific concrete goal - which is the basis of promise making - instrumental action often assumes a ‘world-historical significance’ whereby the principles that motivate action supersede and obfuscate its concrete goals.<sup>142</sup> As a result, Disch suggests that mass movements are largely propelled by

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<sup>141</sup> Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 49.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50. Disch makes the point that power should be thought of as ‘interspaces’ between unique individuals, but because totalitarian movements pursue strength over power, these spaces

principles that, unlike goal-oriented promises, cannot be concretely enacted and for this reason are unlike any world-building activities. What Arendt wants to avoid is the confusion of taking utility-based action for meaningful action. If totalitarianism is largely occupied with the pursuit of strength through heterogeneity, as Disch claims, then the principles of this movement belie its futility by attributing a greater significance to these pursuits than to acting itself. In effect, an absolute commitment to certain principles is required to sustain totalitarian movements, while the freedom to act spontaneously within a plurality of equals is offensive to it. The fiction of totalitarianism, that action should be valued for its instrumentality and not for its own sake, ultimately fails when it misuses the faculty of promise making to delineate the entirety of the future with all its potentialities.<sup>143</sup> This is why the danger associated with leaving humankind's unpredictability untouched is also what grounds political life. Arendt states:

The grammar of action: that action is the only human faculty that demands a plurality of men; and the syntax of power: that power is the only human attribute which applies solely to the worldly-in-between space by which men are mutually related, combine in the act of foundation by virtue of making and keeping promises, which, in the realm of politics, may well be the highest human faculty.<sup>144</sup>

Making promises, or voluntarily binding ourselves to others, is risky precisely because these promises cannot be guaranteed, but this risk is necessary in order to build a world in which human beings can be both related and distinguished by their

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disappear in the 'fusion' of mass movements. In this way, overarching principles that guide action without any real reference to specific outcomes obscures the evaluation of goals by their 'concrete content'.

<sup>143</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 244.

<sup>144</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 175.

activity. The faculty of promising allows us to master the ‘two fold darkness of human affairs,’ which is the unpredictability of action and our own unreliability, by creating ‘islands of certainty’ within an ‘ocean of uncertainty.’ The alternative, according to Arendt, corrupts the free and collaborative nature of political space through a self-defeating ‘mastery which relies on domination of one’s self and rule over others.’<sup>145</sup> As Disch concludes, “promising does not serve to fix the boundaries of individuals but opens up new possibilities by means of new connections. It is oriented to action, not exchange.”<sup>146</sup>

We turn now to the unpredictability of action and the problem of managing undesirable or harmful consequences. The enactment of a particular deed cannot be undone in the same way certain fabrications can be unmade, and because the revelatory capacity of human beings occurs through acting, the identity we reveal is directly related to what we do. Thus, the courage required to act within the public realm must also embrace the risk of committing unfavourable deeds. The problem for Arendt lies in the relational nature of acting, or how to restore the capacity of an individual to act when their relationship to others appears irreparable. If we are known and recognized by what we do and say, acting badly essentially binds the actor to the consequences of the action without recourse to amend it. Arendt

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<sup>145</sup> Arendt, *the Human Condition*, p. 244. In terms of identity, Arendt argues that making and keeping promises corresponds directly to action’s revelatory capacity. When we act we reveal who we are, but when we make promises, or commit ourselves to the performance of a particular action, our identity is intimately related to our commitment to fulfil that promise – the identity we reveal, in more ways than one, depends upon our word.

<sup>146</sup> Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy*, p. 52.



resolves the predicament of irreversibility, “of being unable to undo what one had done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing,” with the faculty of forgiving.<sup>147</sup> There is a temporal orientation, then, that corresponds to both the faculty of forgiveness and the faculty of promise making; forgiveness enables us to overcome the consequences of past actions just as promising overcomes the uncertainty of the future. To be sure, Arendt is clear that these capacities do not correspond with higher human faculties or originate from a divine source, but are, in fact, potentialities of action itself.<sup>148</sup> Arendt’s understanding of forgiveness breaks with metaphysical conceptions of the good by locating its actualization within the public realm, which is something other than the proper ordering of Platonic relationships that begin with the body, mind and soul of the individual, or, as Arendt puts it, “a relationship established between me and myself.”<sup>149</sup> The condition of plurality informs the faculty of forgiving precisely because there is no ground to forgiveness or promises offered in isolation; one cannot forgive oneself.

It is the active characteristic of forgiveness that, for Arendt, makes it essential to political life. Unlike retributive violence, which could be considered a normative response to an act of transgression, forgiveness, as a potentiality of action, is completely unpredictable. Arendt states:

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<sup>147</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 237.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

In contrast to revenge, which is the natural, automatic reaction to transgression and which because of the irreversibility of the action process can be expected and even calculated, the act of forgiving can never be predicted; it is the only reaction that acts in an unexpected way and thus retains, though being a reaction, something of the original character of action.<sup>150</sup>

Forgiveness is re-acting in a new and unexpected way, thus, like action itself, it belongs to humankind's natality. To forgive is to overcome the 'enormous strength and resiliency' of action, and the newness of forgiveness enables both victim and offender to be liberated from the stifling consequences of the original deed. As Arendt puts it, forgiveness breaks the spell of irreversibility. Arendt turns to the gospels of the New Testament, where, she argues, Jesus of Nazareth first discovered the idea of forgiveness. According to Arendt, the teachings of Jesus contain critical insight into the dynamic movement of human interaction that specifically address the problematic corollaries of retribution. "The freedom contained in Jesus' teachings of forgiveness is the freedom from vengeance," Arendt asserts, "which encloses both doer and sufferer in the relentless automatism of the action process, which by itself need never come to an end."<sup>151</sup> Jesus' prayer and call to forgive those who have trespassed against us, as we have received forgiveness for our own transgressions, demonstrates his understanding of the unpredictable nature of action. "The reason for the insistence on duty to forgive is clearly 'for they know not what they do,'" Arendt writes, "but trespassing is an everyday occurrence which is in the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships within a web

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

of relations, and it needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly.”<sup>152</sup>

The capacity to forgive safeguards the continuity of the polis by overcoming the fallout of our transgressions, and because action is irreversible, forgiveness allows for renewal and new beginnings for both victim and offender. However, Arendt’s conception of forgiveness has been criticised for its limited attention to the complexities of human relations. Arendt writes primarily with the continuity of the polis in mind, and so her conceptualization of forgiveness corresponds with her own reluctance to reflect a particular ethical or moral framework. In this way, forgiveness is something other than political efficiency, catharsis, spirituality, or love - it is about attending to the enduring quality of the public realm. What does it mean, then, to consider the relationship between forgiveness and reconciliation? While these two terms are often used interchangeably, there are important differences in their meanings that affect the way humans, as political beings, understand the purpose and function of these two processes, yet by reflecting on the interconnectivity of these terms, we see that forgiveness may require a broader scope of application than Arendt will allow. According to Jacques Derrida, reconciliation, when it is conceptually misappropriated or misunderstood, destroys the potential for meaningful forgiveness because of its apparent finality. Forgiveness as reconciliation, in Derrida’s terms, is an attempt to repair or ‘suture’

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

wounds that are inflicted when a transgression occurs.<sup>153</sup> The suture, however, only acts as an artificial or temporary closure. When the ‘injury’ is contained within a seemingly final act of forgiveness, the initial pain and trauma are not only revisited again when the sutures inevitably fail, but are experienced with greater intensity. To be meaningful and authentic, forgiveness cannot be contained within a single finite act or re-action - it must be a continual process or pattern of behaviour. “A ‘finalized’ forgiveness,” Derrida suggests, “is not forgiveness.”<sup>154</sup> Thus, for Derrida, political initiatives designed to suppress potential retributive violence by utilizing the language of reconciliation compromise authentic forgiveness because the process they follow seeks ‘completeness.’

Like Arendt, however, Derrida agrees that the truest expressions of forgiveness reveal their unnatural characteristics in light of surrounding natural or normative systems. Regardless of the motive, forgiveness that is forced into a normative framework loses its original power and meaning. Derrida argues:

Each time forgiveness is at the service of finality, be it noble and spiritual (atonement or redemption, reconciliation, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by a work or mourning, by some therapy or ecology of memory, then the ‘forgiveness’ is not pure – nor is its concept. Forgiveness is not, it should not be; normal, normative, normalizing. It should remain exceptional and extraordinary in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupts the ordinary course of historical temporality<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 50.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

The appearance of forgiveness cannot be an anticipated response, and on this point

Derrida and Arendt appear to be like-minded. Derrida writes:

If one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable what the church calls venial sin, then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear...forgiveness forgives only the unforgivable. One cannot, or should not, forgive; there is only forgiveness, if there is any, where there is the unforgivable. That is to say that forgiveness must announce itself as impossibility itself. It can only be possible in doing the impossible<sup>156</sup>

Arendt would agree with Derrida here on the grounds that because action is unpredictable, forgiveness as action must also be unpredictable. Therefore, a conditional forgiveness that is already aware of what may appear, that is, it already knows what can be forgiven prior to the appearance of an act is not authentic forgiveness. There are some important conceptual differences between Arendt and Derrida, however, which concern the social shaping of forgiveness. While Arendt argues that forgiveness is entirely possible and meaningful only in the context of political action, Derrida suggests that the broader social systems, which affect human plurality, both fulfil and compromise the power of forgiveness. Because our social discourse is largely framed by economic language, Derrida argues that our understanding of forgiveness is commensurate with these parameters.

“Forgiveness,” Derrida states, “can only be considered on the condition that it be asked, in the course of a scene of repentance attesting at once to the consciousness

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

of the fault, the transformation of the guilty, and the at least implicit obligation to do everything to avoid the return of evil. There is here an economic transaction.”<sup>157</sup>

Derrida is admittedly caught, as it were, between the ideal and the pragmatic. While he remains focused on the recovery of a ‘pure’ notion of forgiveness, Derrida understands what it means for the ideal to adopt a lesser form within the processes of human reconciliation. “I remain ‘torn,’” Derrida states, “(between a ‘hyperbolic’ ethical vision of forgiveness, pure forgiveness, and the reality of a society at work in pragmatic processes of reconciliation). But without power, desire, or need to decide.”<sup>158</sup> Forgiveness struggles to remain connected with its ideal conceptualization, Derrida suggests, and this potentially compromises both its meaning and relevance within the pragmatic reality of human interaction. Derrida is wary of the normalization of a politically administered forgiveness that simply cannot resist corruption. For Arendt, normalization is related to economics, which is about proper allocation and distribution, and so forgiveness as economy is problematic because it threatens the spontaneous quality of re-action. Economic exchange is largely about management and reciprocity, which, if applied to forgiveness, inevitably raises certain expectations. This means that while Derrida is willing to think about the practical reality of politically expedient forgiveness, Arendt is not. Derrida is clear about his own concern for procedural forgiveness, but if forgiveness is indeed political, as Arendt maintains, it must remain entirely

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 51.

liberated from economic or social lexicons – however practical or efficient they appear.

Julia Kristeva's account of forgiveness offers something similar, though she is unwilling to ignore the importance of repentance. It is impossible to extend forgiveness, Kristeva asserts, if repentance is not overtly expressed or offered by the transgressor.<sup>159</sup> For Arendt, we know that forgiveness is what enables an individual to overcome the irreversibility of their activity, but for Kristeva, the possibility for transformation and 'rebirth' necessarily includes a consideration of judgement, punishment, and repentance as it relates to the rule of law. "A community cannot maintain itself," Kristeva argues, "unless it gives itself laws that are impossible to transgress; for it is founded on law and punishment."<sup>160</sup> For Kristeva, forgiveness is a social event requiring both legal judgement and remorse, which is to say that forgiveness that does not demand repentance is far too generous and overlooks the important bonds established by the rule of law. These are the bonds the limit human action which the act of judgement reinforces. Like Arendt, Kristeva is critical of relegating forgiveness to the private realm, and so the introduction of private methods of managing and facilitating forgiveness destroys the critical relationship between forgiveness and communal judgement. "The idea that the social sphere would deprive itself of jurisdiction and punishment from the outset seems to me unbearable, for that would open the path to all sorts of racist, sexist, and various

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<sup>159</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Forgiveness: An Interview' in PMLA 117.2, 2002, p. 283.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

other violations.”<sup>161</sup> So while Arendt argues that forgiveness is essentially interested in liberating our capacity to appear before one another in speech and deed from the consequences of our actions, Kristeva asserts that, “the social sphere is the sphere of history; there is a past, a present, and a future. In that field, forgiveness must simply follow judgment and condemnation.”<sup>162</sup> Political continuity, then, for Kristeva, is understood as a process that includes forgiveness, but one that is accompanied by both repentance and punishment.

Moreover, while Kristeva is in agreement with Arendt’s account of forgiveness as the basis of beginning anew, the distinction between Arendt and Kristeva on this point highlights the emphasis each author places on the relationship between action and offender. While the capacity of forgiveness to overcome the potentially detrimental effects of action is central for Arendt, Kristeva states that, “forgiveness is a question of hearing the request of the subject who desires forgiveness and, once this request has been heard, of allowing renewal, rebirth...[forgiveness] does not efface the act or the culpability.”<sup>163</sup> For Kristeva, the allocation of responsibility, along with the necessity of judgment, sets the formal legal parameters that validate the petitions of the transgressor. The condemnable action must not be overwhelmed or absorbed by forgiveness, but must at all times remain visible and unaltered. This movement ensures that neither the victim nor the polis itself lose their integrity or the capacity to offer sound judgement. In this

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 283.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p. 281.



way, Kristeva follows Arendt's formulation of forgiveness as newness, but carries it further to suggest that forgiveness, as a process, must properly resonate with a working legal framework.

Kristeva's response to Arendt raises an important concern about the relationship between forgiveness and the juridical, that is, we must ask what is at stake for forgiveness if judicial processes are problematically negated. The claim Kristeva makes rests on the seemingly absent consideration of legal judgement within Arendt's account of forgiveness, yet there is evidence within Arendt's work that points to her awareness of this tension. For Arendt, the important question is not about the place of legal judgement exclusively, but what we are to make of the political nature of forgiveness amidst the flux of human interrelatedness and failing legal systems. As Arendt noted in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, depending on the particular legal framework at work within a specific context, the rule of law may have no rootedness in anything beyond the will of an individual.<sup>164</sup> Arendt's critique of totalitarianism comes into view here because her argument for political forgiveness always refers back to the sheer freedom to act. Ideas of forgiveness that participate too closely with judicial mechanisms and procedure risk conflating the juridical with the political, which is to say that Arendt's account of forgiveness

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<sup>164</sup> In *Responsibility and Judgement*, Arendt responds to the legal phenomenon in Nazi Germany where the penal code and Weimar Constitution remained unaltered under Nazi rule. This was not carelessness, Arendt writes, but recognition that all law places constraints on power, therefore no new legal code but the will of the Fuhrer himself became the rule of law. "In Nazi Germany," Arendt states, "the Fuhrer's will was the source of law, and the Fuhrer's orders was valid law. What could be more limitless than a man's will, and more arbitrary than an order justified by the 'I will'?" (p. 244).

resists intimate participation with judicial procedure because, as a movement of political action, the spontaneity of forgiveness cannot be curbed or prescribed by particular legal requirements – especially legal systems that do not facilitate or destroy authentic political activity. In this way, forgiveness must correspond with political freedom, and because the juridical requires some sense of established rule of law to which it can refer, the unpredictability of Arendt's notion of forgiveness, as political action, resists being coupled to the juridical in the way Kristeva demands. This is not to say that judgement is anyway unimportant for Arendt, for the latter part of her career was spent engaging questions concerning our capacity to think and to judge, yet legal judgement and the faculty of judgement are very different in terms of their social and autonomous natures.<sup>165</sup> So while Kristeva wants to close the distance between the juridical and forgiveness as a way of addressing overly-generous forms of forgiveness that do not sufficiently attend to the role of repentance, we cannot then assume that Arendt's exclusion of the juridical is prompted by any sense of generosity, which, interestingly, is part of Arendt's critical assessment of Christian forgiveness. Rather, Arendt is reluctant to base the enactment of forgiveness on anything that might condition its appearance. In this

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<sup>165</sup> Arendt writes in *The Life of the Mind* that, "the autonomous nature of judgement is even more obvious in the case of 'reflective judgement,' which does not descend from the general to the particular but ascends 'from the particular...to the universal' by deciding, without any overall rules, this is beautiful, this is ugly, this is right, this is wrong; and here for a guiding principle, judging 'can only give [it] as a law from and to itself'" (Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, p. 69). Kristeva and Arendt differ in terms of their respective uses of 'judgement' as it corresponds to forgiveness, and while Kristeva locates judgement within the social realm of human affairs, Arendt is clear that judgment, as set apart from legal procedure, occurs in isolation and moves outward from this point. The important difference concerning the relationship between judgement and forgiveness, then, rests on the important distance Arendt places between forgiveness as political action and those forces that would condition its appearance.

way, repentance is possible and may even be sought after, but it is not requisite for political forgiveness.

Most significantly, Arendt's account of political forgiveness is critical of the Augustinian idea that forgiveness as an explicit movement of love.<sup>166</sup> Though Arendt refers to Jesus' recognition of the potential and capacity of political forgiveness, she limits her consideration within an historical context that excludes his claims or appeals vis-à-vis his divinity. Jesus' call to love one's enemies and to forgive those who harm are separated from one another in light of their politically disastrous effects. Put simply, Arendt is critical of love because of its tendency to negate the distinctness of the individual – love problematically overcomes that which both separates and relates human beings. Arendt states, "for love, although it is one of the rarest occurrences in human lives, indeed possesses an unequalled power of self-revelation and an unequalled clarity of vision for the disclosure of who, precisely because it is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with what the loved person may be, with no qualities and shortcomings no less than with his achievements, failings, and transgressions."<sup>167</sup> Love is not only apolitical, it is anti-political because it destroys the in-between that both relates and separates us as individuals.<sup>168</sup> Alternatively, Arendt uses the term *respect* to describe the prompting

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<sup>166</sup> The relationship between love and forgiveness, as it pertains to Kristeva and Arendt, presents another important point of departure between these two accounts. While Kristeva is clear that love must be relationally present as an 'accompaniment', rather than an 'idealization', to help someone out of a traumatic situation, love, because Arendt considers it anti-political, does not correspond with her articulation of political forgiveness in any sense.

<sup>167</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 242.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

of forgiveness within the domain of human interaction, and whereas love, as Jesus described it, brings about the end of political life, respect “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, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or achievements which we may highly esteem.”<sup>169</sup>

At this point, we can turn to Arendt’s critical reading of Augustine’s account of Christian love in her 1929 Heidelberg dissertation. The challenge Arendt’s dissertation presents to the possibility of a politically compatible formulation of forgiveness traces Augustine’s own concern for love’s proper ordering. Arendt is critical of the connection between Christian forgiveness and neighbour love, and so what Arendt offers in her dissertation is a view of Christian love that is estranged from the world in which mankind builds his home. By locating love outside the realm of human affairs, Arendt leaves Augustine with an account of forgiveness that finds relevance and meaning only within an eschatological context. Central to Arendt’s claim is her differentiation between Jesus of Nazareth, who she argues discovered the political nature of forgiveness, and Jesus Christ, who, for Augustine, is the divine source of proper neighbour and the exemplar of forgiveness. Concerning this distinction, Arendt writes that the power to forgive “does not derive from God – as though God, not men, would forgive through the medium of human beings – but on the contrary must be mobilized by men toward each other before they can hope

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 243.

to be forgiven by God also.”<sup>170</sup> Arendt argues that the Christian command to love the neighbour directs us away from the world as it negates the neighbour’s distinct individuality through a love of God, and by reversing the origins of forgiveness, by beginning with human kind and not with God, Arendt challenges the political relevance of both Christian neighbour love and accounts of forgiveness informed by this movement of love.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

## **Chapter 2: On Christian love and Saint Augustine: An Arendtian**

### **Assessment**

#### **A. Jesus of Nazareth and the Human Capacity to Forgive**

In the preceding chapter, we examined how, for Arendt, the constitutive elements of political life contribute directly to her understanding of political forgiveness. Arendt distances herself from philosophic and moral tradition by centring on the sheer political freedom to appear before one another in speech and deed, and through her discussion of the political nature of action, she establishes an account of forgiveness that recognizes how the irreversibility of human activity requires a mechanism to respond to this problem. The entirety of Arendt's conceptualization of political life seems to rest on the human capacity to forgive, that is, without forgiveness we would be trapped within an infinite cycle of vengeance and retribution. The contribution Arendt makes here in terms of her distinctly political account of forgiveness is that forgiveness, as action, shares no relation to a particular moral framework or religious understanding of love. Forgiveness corresponds with political freedom, and as such, Arendt's reading of Augustinian neighbour love is highly critical of any connection between forgiveness as a moral responsibility we ought to have for our neighbour. This is especially so if, as Augustine maintains, the impetus for the Christian to forgive and attend to the neighbour is grounded in love.

The basic premise of Arendt's critical analysis of Christian love is most explicitly outlined in chapter 5 of *The Human Condition*. Here, Arendt identifies and responds briefly to the problematic assumption underlying Christian ideas of authentic forgiveness. That is, according to Arendt, Christianity wrongly assumes that only love can properly forgive, and for this reason, only love is entirely receptive to the wholeness of one's identity – to the point of being willing to forgive regardless of what has been done.<sup>171</sup> Though Arendt's commitment to restoring the political nature of forgiveness begins with the historical example of Jesus of Nazareth, she distances her account of political forgiveness from all notions of love that attend its discovery. Arendt is interested in the relationship between freedom and forgiveness, yet she is wary of having her account of Jesus' teachings misread simply as another theological interpretation of scripture amongst others. Jesus' discovery of forgiveness need not be bound by a particular religious context, Arendt suggests, but can be attributed to the political experiences of his community rather than a Christian religious message. Put differently, though Christian forgiveness is contextually rooted within a broader religious environment, Arendt argues that the origin and content of forgiveness is not essentially religious.<sup>172</sup> By stressing its political nature, Arendt's account of forgiveness focuses on the complex relationship between the small community of Jesus' disciples and the challenge they presented to the significantly more powerful body of 'public authorities in Israel'. As an

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<sup>171</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 243.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

awareness of the politically relevant power of forgiveness grew to become a founding principle amongst Jesus' community of disciples, the Greeks and Romans possessed only a limited familiarity with what Arendt terms the 'rudimentary signs' of forgiveness. The varying degree to which these communities recognized the political relevance of forgiveness is significant, Arendt argues, but these differences are not premised on the religious character of Jesus' community of disciples or his divine nature, as Konstan argues.<sup>173</sup> In other words, Arendt suggests that there is nothing about the difference between Jesus' community of followers and the Romans that makes forgiveness quintessentially Christian. To highlight her point, Arendt's exegesis of Luke 5:21-24 places the emphasis on the Son of man's capacity to forgive *on earth*. In this sense, the power to forgive, while remarkable, is not meted out to humanity by God. Jesus instructs his followers to forgive one another, and also those who trespass against them, yet, in these instances "the power to forgive is primarily a human power."<sup>174</sup> Arendt's interpretation of the human capacity to forgive follows directly from her account of political life, and it is no surprise that she would place considerable emphasis on Jesus' humanity and what she understands as the principally human capacity to forgive. "Man in the gospel is not supposed to forgive because God forgives and he must do likewise," Arendt writes, "but 'if ye in your hearts forgive,' God shall do 'likewise.'"<sup>175</sup> The political

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<sup>173</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 238; Konstan, *Before Forgiveness*, p. 115.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239. Peter S. Hawkins argues that Arendt's limited focus on Luke 5 is behind her misreading of the divine origins of forgiveness. Arendt dismisses the Christian mandate to forgive as essentially religious, yet Paul's account of forgiveness taken from Colossians 3:13, Hawkins claims, is



actualization of forgiveness is not dependent upon a uniquely Christian context, and, more importantly, Arendt makes the point that it is Jesus himself who places the emphasis on the human capacity to forgive, contra Konstan. In this way, Arendt makes no explicit theological claims concerning the divinity of Jesus, though she is clear to dismiss an essential correlation between Christianity and political forgiveness beyond the historicity of Jesus' teachings.

If the scope of forgiveness applies exclusively to political action, as Arendt maintains, then only those 'everyday trespasses' that correspond with the unknown possibilities of action can be forgiven. Accordingly, Arendt's exegesis of Luke 23:34, 'Forgive them for they know not what they do', grounds her account of Jesus' understanding of the dynamic between unpredictability and forgiveness.<sup>176</sup>

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clear that the initial movement of forgiveness belongs to God. "There is no doubt here that it is God who initiates the pardon necessary to salvation," Hawkins writes, "but the overall emphasis in the Pastoral Epistles is on the implications of the original divine mercy for what Arendt calls 'human affairs'" (Hawkins, "The Question of Forgiveness in Luke 15," in *Ancient Forgiveness*, eds. Charles Griswold & David Konstan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 158). Augustine's own account will offer something similar to Hawkins' observations, that is, the divinity of Christ points to an original source of forgiveness which grounds all other expressions of authentic forgiveness that follow it. In this way, the practical nature of both Jesus and Paul's teachings do not reflect a distinct separation between what is human and divine in origin, as if what happens to be practical to humans within the realm of public affairs connotes a proper human source. Rather, Hawkins, like Augustine, claim that the human enactment of forgiveness draws from the divine source that makes forgiveness possible. Moreover, that divine forgiveness happens to meet the practical requirements of action in the realm of human affairs is not simply coincidental, for both Arendt and Augustine agree that only forgiveness can redeem the unforeseen consequences of action. The difference that Hawkins identifies rests on Arendt's misreading of Luke where the initial movement to forgive belongs to human beings and not God. Augustine's Christology amends Arendt's misreading by locating both the source and exemplar of authentic forgiveness in the person of Jesus Christ.

<sup>176</sup> Arendt's usage of Luke 23 to support her argument concerning the relationship between trespassing and 'not knowing what we do' is complicated by its scriptural context. Here, Jesus forgives those who have crucified him, yet Arendt has already claimed that Jesus' recognition of the political value of forgiveness requires a differentiation between great evil and lesser transgressions that are typically encountered in day-to-day public life. The circumstances under which Jesus offers forgiveness are certainly not commonplace, and so Arendt's problematic compartmentalization of

Criminal action and instances of ‘willed evil’ are rare, Arendt suggests, and do not correspond with the authentic political nature of action. Arendt’s differentiation between trespassing and criminal activity seems to rest on her understanding of ‘knowing’ what it is we are doing when we act. As we have seen, the potential corollaries of authentic political action cannot be definitely known, yet there is a certain degree of expectation corresponding with ‘willed evil’ whereby the harmful consequences of criminal action, though not entirely foreseen, are related to their enactment differently, and, perhaps, more intimately than authentic political action and sheer unexpected trespasses. Arendt’s account of forgiveness in *The Human Condition* separates forgivable trespasses from unforgivable evil, and so the political implications of this movement are reflected in the difference between worldly forgiveness and divine judgement. It is ultimately God who attends to evil, Arendt asserts, and this seems to correlate with Konstan’s reflection on the exclusivity of divine forgiveness, but for Arendt, this occurs beyond all worldly boundaries at the Last Judgement and is best characterized as ‘just retribution’ rather than actual forgiveness.<sup>177</sup> The important distinction Arendt draws between divine judgement and forgiveness determines what properly belongs to God and what belongs to humanity, that is, while human beings cannot assume the divine responsibility of addressing evil, they do possess the capacity to forgive transgressions

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Jesus’ humanity and divinity complicates the coherency of her attempt to delineate a proper form of political forgiveness that is based on a misreading of Jesus’ enactment of radical forgiveness. God’s divine response to evil is not postponed entirely until the final judgement, but is already present in the forgiveness Jesus extends to those who put him to death unjustly.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

independently of a divine source. Arendt's exegesis of Luke 17:1-5 draws specific attention to Jesus' differentiation between the forgiveness of trespasses and the forgiveness of evil as a way of highlighting the human power to forgive trespasses and their inability to forgive evil in the same way. In essence, acts of great evil dispossess human beings of the power to forgive, and so it would be better, as Jesus claims, for one who sins, or causes others to sin, to 'have a millstone placed about his neck and be cast into the sea'.<sup>178</sup> The connection Arendt establishes between Luke 17 and Kant's notion of 'radical evil' describes the basic limitations of a distinctly human response to severe offenses. In this sense, the commonality between forgiveness and punishment rests on their attempt to put an end to cyclical vengeance, yet both forgiveness and punishment cannot sufficiently attend to manifestations of radical evil that make their appearance within the public realm because, as Arendt asserts, these events transcend and destroy the realm of human affairs in which both punishment and forgiveness are actualized.<sup>179</sup> Though these manifestations are extremely rare, Arendt claims, it must be God alone who will address evil of this kind at the end of the age. By distancing the fundamentally

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<sup>178</sup> Variations of this passage taken from Matthew 18:6-7 and Mark 9:42 differ slightly from the passage taken from Sirach 9:5, where stumbling concerns sinfully lusting after an unwed woman – "Do not look intently at a virgin, or you may stumble and incur penalties for her." In each of these cases, however, 'to stumble' has ramifications that extend beyond the one who initiates the sinful act. The broader theme amongst these texts seems to emphasize the severity of taking advantage of those who, because of their social position or gender, are particularly susceptible to exploitation and domination. Arendt's use of Jesus' words misread their significance by placing the emphasis on the general dynamics of forgiveness, rather than drawing attention to the danger of unrighteous power relations amongst those who claim discipleship.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 241. Here, Arendt writes that, "it is therefore quite significant, a structural element in the realm of human affairs, that men are unable to forgive what they cannot punish and that they are unable to punish what has turned out to be unforgivable."

political nature of forgiveness from God's divine eschatological redemption and judgement, Arendt is clear to distinguish Jesus' teaching from all other notions of Christian love. Forgiveness, then, though it shares a common ancestry with Jesus' teachings on neighbour love, is made relevant and coherent outside the confessing Christian community precisely because it does not depend on Christian love for its actualization.

If Christian love were the basis for forgiveness, as Augustine claims, then, in Arendt's estimation, forgiveness would have little meaning within a purely political context. To be sure, Arendt is clear that forgiveness based on Christian love is not simply one species of forgiveness amongst others, but that forgiveness of this kind destroys its political relevance altogether. Arendt's contention with Christian love concerns its anti-political nature, and so her initial effort to delineate Augustine's account of Christian love within her dissertation brings her broader articulation of political forgiveness into view. The critical claim we find in Arendt is that love, because it cannot be the basis for authentic political life, is an equally unsuitable basis for political forgiveness. We do not forgive out of love for our neighbour, but forgive in order to redeem political action. While this movement may constitute a certain kind of *amor mundi*, it nonetheless establishes a clear break between forgiveness and Christian neighbour love. While it would be saying too much to suggest that *Love and Saint Augustine* is an exact template for her further work on the relationship between forgiveness, love, and politics, the argument Arendt sets

out in her dissertation provides a compelling challenge that figures into her later formulation of forgiveness as it relates to Christian neighbour love. A consideration of Arendt's critical reading of Augustine's formulation of Christian neighbour love is essential in order to develop a coherent account of the political relevance of Christian forgiveness.

### **B. The Orientation and Instrumentalism of Christian Neighbour Love**

Arendt's critical examination of Augustine's conceptualization of Christian love concerns how, for Arendt, being at home in the world is competitively related to Augustine's understanding of a love that reconciles all creation to God. For Augustine, a properly ordered love of God overcomes our alienation from Him by allowing us to recognize ourselves as creatures that are a part of His good creation, and this, in turn, enables us to love those around us without self-preferentially reducing these relationships to mere instrumentalism – a reduction, Arendt argues, that Augustine's account of love of the neighbour is ultimately unable to escape. Arendt's critical reading of Augustine raises difficult questions about the nature and orientation of love's various forms that seemingly point away from the political world toward a specifically Christian 'other-worldliness.' Love, as Arendt has indicated, is anti-political precisely because it closes the distance between individuals and thus destroys the necessary space in which separation and recognition are made possible. Action, as opposed to love, relates individuals to one another by preserving their distinct appearances as it connects them through their

shared capacity to act in concert. When love that is oriented towards God emerges within the public realm as love of the neighbour, it overwhelms its object and collapses individual distinctness. The neighbour becomes only an occasion for loving God, which is to say that the neighbour merely mediates our love of God and is, in the end, estranged by it. Arendt's interest in the way Augustine understands the relationship between loving ones neighbour and loving God is something more than one effort amongst many that seek to demonstrate Christianity's disinterest in political life, though she is clear throughout her work that Christianity itself is inherently anti-political. Arendt looks to the Christian concern for the neighbour as a kind of love that admittedly has the capacity to bind people together, yet it does so by relying principally on the fact that the world is something to be overcome because it is sinful. Arendt writes:

Historically, we know of only one principle what 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...this surprising illustrating of the Christian political principle is well chosen, because the bond of charity between people, which 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 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')<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 53. Arendt makes the point here that even the descriptive imagery of the Christian community as corporeal is something other than political. The intentional

For Arendt, Christian love is shaped by the infinite claim of the neighbour who is to be loved without condition, and while *caritas* may form a bond strong enough to maintain a Christian community of believers, it is decisively otherworldly. This claim is not something original or exclusive to Arendt, but her attention to the question of *caritas*, the neighbour and its relation to the political is important if we are to pursue the question whether the Christian community has anything meaningful to say about political life, and, more to the point, whether Augustine's account of forgiveness and love of the neighbour can overcome Arendt's critical assessment of it.

It is worthwhile to note that there is no moral hierarchy at stake here for Arendt - as if she was simply attempting to replace Christian morality with a secularized account of proper human association. Rather, any ethic or moral commitment that draws attention away from the sheer freedom of the public world is problematic. Machiavelli is particularly helpful to Arendt on this point. The politically destructive nature of endeavouring to make goodness a political virtue is a focal point in Machiavelli's *The Prince*, who, by teaching men 'how not to be good,' emphasized that it is not simply a particularly corrupt religious figure who destroys public life by entering it, but that it is the idea that a religious institution could find a proper home within secular political life.<sup>181</sup> "For anyone who wants to act the part of the good man in all circumstances," Machiavelli writes, "will bring about his own

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usage of this kind of language indicates that they knew members of a body or family were anti-political (p.54).

<sup>181</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 77.

ruin...so it is necessary for a ruler, if he wants to hold onto power, to learn how not to be good.”<sup>182</sup> However, teaching men not to be good is different than making ‘badness’ a political virtue. Arendt writes that if Machiavelli is correct in his claim that glory is the ‘criterion for political action,’ then badness can “no more shine in glory than goodness” because it destroys the common world.<sup>183</sup> On both accounts, neither goodness nor badness can make an appearance within the public realm without causing corruption, and so, for reasons that reflect their different natures, they must remain hidden from it. For Arendt, love, like goodness, must necessarily be conditioned by self-concealment if it is to remain authentic, that is, love must resist the kind of public display that is the hallmark of political activity. Love that attempts to enter public life does so at great peril to itself and the political realm, in fact, the danger an absolute commitment to love presents to the freedom of the political realm is no less than the danger of absolute evil.<sup>184</sup>

To be sure, Arendt does not claim that all conceptualizations of love are misplaced. In a correspondence with Karl Jaspers, Arendt indicated she had considered entitling *The Human Condition* ‘*amor mundi*,’ though, as James Bernauer notes, such a title would be inappropriate for only one of her texts when this theme, beginning with her dissertation, “permeates all of her thought.”<sup>185</sup> In Arendt’s terms,

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<sup>182</sup> Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 15.

<sup>183</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 77.

<sup>184</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 82.

<sup>185</sup> Bernauer, *Amor Mundi*, p. V. In the preface to *Amor Mundi*, Bernauer states that though Arendt is continually critical of religious institutions and perspectives, “Arendt was preoccupied with the question of faith and the necessity for its survival beyond the modern crisis of institutional religion” (p. vii). Bernauer’s efforts to relate Arendt’s reluctance to align herself with a particular political or



love of the world corresponds to maintaining and caring for the world as the realm in which freedom is actualized. What is at stake for Arendt here is nothing less than sheer human freedom. This is not to say that Arendt is willing to abandon love and goodness at the cost of all human dignity; rather, her argument is that because Christian *caritas* requires our attention to be turned from love of the world toward love of neighbour, the unending task of caring for those whom we love impedes authentic political freedom.<sup>186</sup> The infinite claim of the beloved, because it is motivated and informed by a love of God, cannot be the basis for a consistent way of life because love which ceaselessly attends to the needs of the neighbour necessarily forsakes the world in which it can be actualized. Arendt states:

The otherworldliness of religious experience, in so far as it is truly the experience of love in the sense of an activity, and not the much more frequent one of beholding passively a revealed truth, manifests itself within the world itself; this, like all other activities, does not leave the world, but must be performed within it. But this manifestation, though it appears in the space where other activities are performed and depends upon it, is of an actively negative nature; fleeing the world and hiding from its inhabitants, it negates the space the world

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philosophic camp with the worldly estrangement of Christian faith seems to close the distance between them too quickly. Though Arendt may be somewhat of a self-described ‘pariah,’ the strangeness of her political identity is not a total estrangement from the realm of political life – which, according to Arendt, is a central characteristic of Christian faith. See James W. Bernauer, “The Faith of Hannah Arendt,” *Amor Mundi* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987).

<sup>186</sup> In the preface to the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes that, “human dignity needs a new guarantee which can only be found in a new political principle.” The crisis of political powerlessness is a central theme throughout Arendt’s work, and so those forces that dispossess human beings of political power, including love, are critically evaluated. Love’s anti-political nature should not be conflated with an abandonment of human dignity. Conversely, it is Arendt’s deep concern for human dignity that undergirds her effort to think about meaningful political participation and the consequences of negating healthy political discourse. Thinking what we do is directly correlated with the preservation of human dignity, which, for Arendt, means that the problem of human dignity is not extraneous to political life but is central to it. See also Jeffrey C. Issac, ‘A New Guarantee on Earth: Hannah Arendt on Human Dignity and the Politics of Human Rights’ in *The American Political Science Review* vol. 90, No. 1 (Mar., 1996), pp. 61-73.

offers to men, and most of all that public part of it where everything and everybody are seen and heard by others.<sup>187</sup>

A commitment to love and goodness cannot appear openly or claim to be good lest its quality become corrupt. On this point, Arendt is in agreement with Jesus of Nazareth when he observed that authentic goodness must be beyond self-interest to the point where ‘the left hand does not know what the right hand is doing.’<sup>188</sup> Goodness, if it is authentic, must be done “for nothing but goodness’ sake.”<sup>189</sup> Consequently, the Christian imitation of the love and goodness of Jesus can never be an attribute of ‘continuously existent relationships,’ for, as George Kateb observes, a love of Jesus, “if imitated, if taken with the utmost seriousness, [makes] political action as free initiative impossible.”<sup>190</sup>

Arendt’s dissertation reflects the beginning of her life-long interest in the theme of love and the political. Though it has not garnered considerable scholarly attention, her examination of love in *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* points to a vision of political life that runs throughout the whole of her corpus, though it should be noted that there are recognizable shifts in her perception and treatment of Christianity in her later work.<sup>191</sup> Politics, for Arendt, is about freedom and the

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<sup>187</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p.77.

<sup>188</sup> Matthew 6:3-4.

<sup>189</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 74.

<sup>190</sup> Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*, p. 89.

<sup>191</sup> Thomas Breidenthal makes the important point that Arendt’s post-war work reveals a marked change in the way her account of Augustine’s heavenly city is related to earthly political life. In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt writes, “Augustine’s conviction that some kind of political life must exist even under the conditions of sinlessness, and indeed sanctity, he summed up in one sentence: *Socialis est vita sanctorum*, even the life of the saints is a life together with other men” (p. 73). Breidenthal suggests that this account understands the city of God as human plurality that has come

capacity to act and reveal oneself to others through word and deed. It is a freedom from the kind of necessity closely associated with the natural conditions of biological life, and the inherent unending means/end cycle of fabrication. The freedom to act spontaneously and unpredictably, which finds its home in the world, is a counterpoint to love, which, Arendt argues, is a complete withdrawal from public life. Love, Arendt writes, “is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with *what* the loved person may be, with his qualities and shortcomings no less than with his achievements, failings, and transgressions.”<sup>192</sup> Because our presence in the world requires space enough to act independently and unexpectedly, our capacity for political action fails due to love’s intimate proximity. Though love is rare, perhaps even one of the ‘rarest occurrences in human lives,’ it poses a significant risk to political life precisely because it closes the space of action, the in-between that separates and relates, making it impossible to appear before one another as free and distinct individuals. Those who love are occupied with the object of their love, thus, when love is not oriented towards the world all political activity ceases.

The orientation of Christian love presents a unique problem for Arendt, and her engagement with Augustine reflects her interest in his attempt to navigate the contradictions inherent in the relationship between love of the neighbour, love of God, and political life. Arendt writes that Augustine’s importance can be traced back

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into its own, which is different than Arendt’s earlier account where the city of God is free from the curse of the political entirely. See Thomas Breidenthal, “Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation,” p. 492.

<sup>192</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 242.

to the shift from Christianity's 'early anti-political impulses' to the historical emergence of the Church as a stable political institution, which was made possible without the complete corruption of the Gospel because of Augustine's role as the "spiritual author and certainly the greatest theorist of Christian politics."<sup>193</sup> The monumental transformation of the Christian community into the '*Civitas Dei* on earth' occurred after the fall of Rome reaffirmed the belief for Christian theologians that no political framework built by human hands could endure indefinitely. The Church, then, could assume the 'burden' of political life because it displaced secular attempts to achieve earthly immortality by pointing to a heavenly community of saints grounded in a common love of God. Augustine recognized that Christian immortality could be understood as a continuation of Christian community in the afterlife, which is to say that the coming kingdom of God could be viewed as a future city where the saints could continue to commune with one another after they had departed the world. Arendt is clear that Augustine's political theology anticipated the fullness of the kingdom of God that was yet to come, but "without this reformulation of Christian thoughts through Augustine, Christian politics might have remained what they had been in the early centuries, a contradiction in terms."<sup>194</sup> That Augustine could think of the kingdom of God in this way, that the temporality of the world could be entirely commensurate with an enduring heavenly community, attests to Arendt's claim that Christian love, however it may relate to worldly

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<sup>193</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, p. 73.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

political tradition, remains fundamentally at odds with her discourse on love and the political. Arendt concludes that though the kingdom of God may testify to the '*vita socialis*' of the saints when it comes in eschatological fullness, Christian life on earth remains inherently otherworldly because of the orientation of its love.

For Augustine, properly oriented love can be described as the 'radical unity between love of God and love of neighbour.'<sup>195</sup> Though Arendt's claim is that Augustinian love anticipates its ultimate expression within the future heavenly city of God, Gregory contends that its earthly enactment is more than an abstract consideration of the dimensions it might assume in the afterlife. This is also a reflection of Kierkegaard's work, which, following Augustine, argues that the earthly physical presence of the neighbour, towards whom our attention should be directed, embodies an infinite need to which we must respond in love within this reality. This movement, as Kierkegaard suggests, properly locates love's enactment within the world between real people. In chapter V of the first series of *Works of Love*, Kierkegaard states that, "to be and remain in an infinite debt is an expression of the infinitude of love; thus by remaining in debt it remains in its element."<sup>196</sup> Christian love finds fulfilment in its unending need to be fulfilled, which is to say that both the claim of the neighbour and the possibility of its fulfilment are shaped by love's

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<sup>195</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 221.

<sup>196</sup> Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.181. Kierkegaard writes that "Christianity knows what it means to act and what it means to be able to occupy love incessantly in action," for loving and remaining in love's debt requires movement rather than, say, passive reflection. Christian love finds its guarantee in God, who, Kierkegaard states, "lovingly assumes love's requirement" (p. 189). Love that originates from God is like God in its infinitude – which, for Arendt, translates into a Christian prioritization of ethical values that can only run at cross-purposes with the political.

infinitude. For Arendt, Kierkegaard reaffirms another dimension of love's problematic nature. If love's infinite claim requires our undivided attention, then all other forms of action are superfluous in light of our responsibility to the neighbour. Active Christian love negates the world by subverting what Gregory calls, "the limited hopes of political action" in favour of a prioritized Christian ethic that is informed by a love of God.<sup>197</sup> This ethic, made manifest in the enactment of loving one's neighbour, requires unlimited resources in order to fulfil the neighbour's unlimited claim. Breidenthal helpfully outlines the problem this poses for Arendt:

Christianity refuses to entertain the actualization of its own political life until it has dealt with claims and problems which are more pressing. Augustine may well (we might hear Arendt saying) permit himself to imagine the political happiness of the saints in the city of God. Supposedly there are infinite resources in heaven to address the infinite need of each neighbour. These being addressed, it may be possible to move on from a neighbourlove, which is merely solicitous and minimally social, to a society grounded in and productive of mutual enjoyment. But in the world as we know it there are no such resources. For a this-worldly political realm, the infinite claim of the neighbour spells the end (or makes impossible the mere beginning) of political life.<sup>198</sup>

Breidenthal's point is that according to Arendt, the presence of need, regardless of its form, diminishes humankind's capacity to act in total freedom amongst others, and this becomes increasingly complicated when we consider what it means for Jesus, as God incarnate, to become our neighbour. The claim Jesus makes is greater than all other human claims because he is both saviour and judge; thus, for Arendt, it follows that a love oriented towards Jesus will seek to imitate and repeat the love he

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<sup>197</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 218.

<sup>198</sup> Breidenthal, *Arendt, Augustine and the Politics of Incarnation*, p. 492.

extends to us. And because Jesus is God and neighbour at once, loving God absorbs love of the neighbour into itself.<sup>199</sup> In this sense, Arendt understands the neighbour only as an occasion for a love of God that directs our attention away from loving the world. Jesus draws all political interaction to himself in the same way he draws love of the neighbour to himself, thus by loving the neighbour properly through Jesus, Christians refuse “to engage directly with one another until...[their] lack is filled in order that the neighbour’s claim may be answered.”<sup>200</sup> Arendt’s problem is that there will never be enough to fully satisfy the needs of everyone in a world where resources are often scarce, but because Christian love cannot neglect anyone in need, embracing a politic of ‘limited hope’ and turning away from God cannot be condoned. The commitment to love, then, pledges itself until need is no longer present in the world, which is a way of saying ‘until the world itself passes away.’

Arendt’s articulation of Christian *caritas* in *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* is an effort to come to terms with the ‘incongruity’ of Augustine’s interest in the neighbour despite what it means to be in the overwhelming presence of God. For, as Arendt notes, “Augustine’s every perception and every remark about love refer at least in part to this love of neighbour.”<sup>201</sup> All worldly love diminishes in light of a love for God, and so loving the neighbour is a contradiction for Arendt because loving God collapses neighbour love into itself. “To put her conclusion very schematically,” Shin Chiba states, “her understanding is that Augustine’s *theological*

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 491.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 494.

<sup>201</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 3.

notion of neighbourly love, in contradistinction to his *historical* or *social* notion of it, would lead to the denial of both the self and the neighbour, primarily because it is basically informed by, and preoccupied with, the ‘love of God’ and ‘love for God.’”<sup>202</sup> The negation of the neighbour’s alterity is a corollary of love’s preoccupation with God, and this is what, for Arendt, makes “a desert out of this world.”<sup>203</sup> Put differently, the love of God frustrates all other loves to the point where the entire external world including the neighbour is excluded. Love of the neighbour cast in this light is fraudulent, or, as Gregory indicates, it has been turned into a mockery.<sup>204</sup>

### **C. Arendt’s Critical Reading of Augustine: Love as Craving**

In the first analyses of her three-part dissertation, Arendt begins by examining certain variations of love that relate to Augustine’s broader phenomenology, especially as they pertain to the movement of desire and the relevance of the neighbour. This first section, entitled, “Love as Craving: The Anticipated Future,” also corresponds with Augustine’s own ‘pre-theological’ sensibilities, and so the inquiry Arendt undertakes throughout her dissertation is based on what Patrick Boyle has referred to as Augustine’s ‘conceptual contexts.’<sup>205</sup> Here, Augustine’s commentary on the nature of love is not influenced primarily by Christian theology, but reflects a philosophical commitment to the ‘neo-platonic

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<sup>202</sup> Shin Chiba, “Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political,” p. 527.

<sup>203</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 18.

<sup>204</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 222.

<sup>205</sup> Patrick Boyle, ‘Hannah Arendt’s Interpretation of Saint Augustine’ in *Amor Mundi*, p. 85.



rudiments' that can be traced throughout the development of his thought.<sup>206</sup>

Though Arendt herself claims that the direction she will follow is not committed to any 'fixed' theological or philosophic standpoint, her own objective, "far from seeking to yoke Augustine to a consistency unknown to him, merely attempts to interpret even seemingly heterogeneous statements and trains of thought in the direction of a substantially common base."<sup>207</sup> Because of the vicissitudes of Augustine's own intellectual maturation, Arendt insists that no common foundation is shared throughout his differing, 'disjointed' accounts of love. So while the heterogeneity of Augustine's work frustrates the discovery of an underlying principle that can be traced throughout each stage of the evolution of his thought, Arendt is convinced that the fluctuating perceptions of love of the neighbour will effectively demonstrate the incongruity of Augustine's claims. "We must," Arendt writes, "let the contradictions stand as what they are, make them understood as contradictions, and grasp what lies beneath them."<sup>208</sup>

Arendt begins her first analysis by considering Augustine's phenomenology of love as it relates to the classical Greek notion of craving. Love is a motion toward what we desire, and what we desire is a 'good,' that is, we seek it for its own sake. "Craving," Arendt writes, "or love, is a human being's possibility of gaining possession of the good that will make him happy, that is, of gaining possession of

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<sup>206</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 7.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

what is most his own.”<sup>209</sup> Our deliberations about what is good always refers retrospectively to our familiarity with happiness – we know what it means to be happy and therefore the objects of our desire are those things that will make us happy. The problem with craving, however, is the accompanying fear of losing those things that we desire. What we crave appears and departs from us independently of ourselves, consequently there is the persistent concern that what we desire will be taken from us against our will. “Craving, as the will to have and to hold,” Arendt states, “gives rise in the moment of possession to a fear of losing. As craving seeks some good, fear dreads some evil...the evil that fear makes us shun is whatever threatens our happiness, which consists in the possession of the good.”<sup>210</sup> The variance between expressions of craving and desire accounts for the differentiation in our understanding of what is good what is bad. However, Arendt finds common ground in our shared desire to live, thus, the happy life, she concludes, is life itself. If evil is that which removes the objects of our desire from our possession, then the evil that threatens life, the greatest good, is our own mortality. For Arendt, “death is interpreted in two ways: first, as the index of life’s lack of control over itself, and second, as the world evil encountered by life – its adversary pure and simple.”<sup>211</sup> Craving ultimately seeks the *summum bonum*, which is the good entirely liberated from fear of dispossession. Since life is what all humankind desires, the highest good amongst all other goods is eternity. Augustine’s assertion here is largely shaped by

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

his experience with death. Citing the *Confessions*, Arendt remarks that after enduring the loss of a friend, Augustine, in his grief, experienced the ‘death of the living’ after witnessing the ‘loss of life of the dying.’<sup>212</sup> Augustine becomes a ‘question to himself,’ which is a way of saying that the experience of death starts him on a journey of philosophic inquiry that eventually leads him, as Gregory observes, “to the Pauline assurances of the resurrection.”<sup>213</sup> Life, as either ‘no more’ or ‘not yet,’ wear us out into ‘nothingness’ Arendt says, and so Augustine’s search for the good of eternity, that endures even the finality of death, carries him into a discussion concerning the value of our desires - culminating in an ontological order where the highest love is oriented towards the most enduring good: a love of God. “No earthly goods can lend support to life’s instability,” Arendt writes, “the future will strip it of all of them and in death it will lose itself along with its acquisitions.”<sup>214</sup>

For Augustine, this turn means that all love directed towards worldly or impermanent things becomes meaningless in light of the goodness of eternal life. The desire to cling to temporal objects that are not durable, just as surely as mortal bodies are not durable, is informed by a fear of losing what we love. Our craving, or *appetitus*, draws us near particular worldly objects because we believe they will

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>213</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 224.

<sup>214</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 17. I am indebted to Eric Gregory’s reading of this section, especially the challenge he presents to Arendt’s confident delineation of the boundaries that separate Augustine’s philosophic and theological thought. Gregory writes that Arendt ‘gets ahead’ of herself in her attempt to position ‘pre-theological’ Augustine when she references his turn to Paul as a decisive moment of conversion. If the response to the fear of losing what is good is essentially a ‘philosophically conceived eternity,’ as Gregory puts it, Arendt moves too quickly between what are essentially theological and philosophic moments.

bring happiness, but the folly of loving impermanent objects is indicative of an improper love that is competitively related to a 'fearless' love of God. Augustine refers to these two loves as *cupiditas* and *caritas*, and though both of these are derived from our isolation from those things that will make us happy, it is the movement of our love that determines its quality. In their most basic forms, *cupiditas* is love oriented towards the world and worldly things, while *caritas* is a love oriented towards God and eternity. Thus, Arendt argues that our love is related to how we view the world, and the problem Augustine must overcome concerns the reconciliation between the externality of the object we desire and the internality of love's movement. We are not self-sufficient beings and so our desire is directed toward objects outside of ourselves, and though in both *cupiditas* and *caritas* we decide "whether we wish to belong to this world or to the world to come...the faculty that decides is always the same."<sup>215</sup> This is why Augustine cautions us to love, but to be careful of what we love. In Arendt's terms, the problem with love as desire is that it "presupposes the distinction of an 'inner' act and its 'external' object, so that desiring by definition can never attain its object, unless the object, too, is within man and so within his power."<sup>216</sup>

Augustine's indebtedness to Plotinus is evidenced by the categories he relies upon to address the problem of love's internal motion toward its external object. Through Plotinus, Augustine discovered that the estrangement of human beings

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

from the world was made manifest through their appetites and desires, yet Augustine could not finally agree with Plotinus that the human spirit, or *nous*, could be both self-sufficient and the source of complete contentment. “Plotinus carried, in a sense,” Arendt writes, “all the things within himself that Augustine desired. And it is for this reason that Plotinus did not know fear, that is, the very experience that prompted Augustine’s conversion.”<sup>217</sup> Plotinus held that fearlessness itself was to be loved, and so fearlessness, as the absence of dependence, can also be rightly understood as self-sufficiency. In this way, though the self-sufficiency Plotinus discovered amounts to the divination of the human soul, “Augustine never believed that such fearlessness or self-sufficiency could be obtained by man in this world, no matter how much he might strain all his capacities of mind and spirit.”<sup>218</sup> Here, Arendt’s interest in the connection between Plotinus and Augustine concerns how we are to understand the affinity between God and self. The Plotinian influence on Augustine’s theological conception of God as the ‘highest good’ underscores the relationship between Augustine’s understanding of human existence and human essence. While Plotinus found fearlessness in complete self-sufficiency, Augustine could not find serenity within himself in the same way, and it is this difference that led Augustine to reject worldly existence in an anticipation of his future essence that stands in relation to the eternity of God. Only God, because He is eternal, can sufficiently answer the question of self-identity, Augustine concluded, and so by

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

turning inward away from the world, away from the triumph of the human soul, Augustine finds God who becomes the proper object of his desire and love. It is God, Augustine argues, to whom he belongs and it is God who directs his 'transit' into future eternity. "With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel," Augustine writes, "and was given power to do so because you had become my helper...eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity: you are my God."<sup>219</sup> In short, because Augustine finds the teleological end of his desire for the highest good in God, Augustine's self-discovery and discovery of God coincide.

For Arendt, what is at stake in the relationship Augustine establishes between loving God and self-discovery may be understood as a matter of distinguishing creature from Creator, and essence from existence. Augustine states:

But when I love [God], what do I love? It is not physical beauty nor temporal glory nor the brightness of light dear to earthly eyes, nor the sweet melodies of all kinds of songs, nor the gentle odour of flowers and ointments and perfumes, nor manna or honey, nor limbs welcoming the embraces of the flesh; it is not these I love when I love my God.<sup>220</sup>

The essence of the inner self is not identical with God, Arendt argues, just as the essence of music does not belong to a particular sound. What interests Arendt here is Augustine's distinct departure from both Platonic and Plotinian philosophy by relating himself to God as a creature acknowledging their created nature as it stands in relation to their Creator. Augustine writes:

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<sup>219</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, x, 16.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, X, vi, 8.

It transcended my mind, not in the way that oil floats on water, nor as heaven is above earth. It was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it. The person who knows the truth knows it, and he who knows it knows eternity. Love knows it. Eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity: you are my God.<sup>221</sup>

At this point, though Arendt draws no immediate Christological connection between Augustine's Creator/created relationship, and her account of Pauline Christianity fails to establish how, for Paul, the role of Christ accomplishes the fulfilment of love, she is clear that proper Augustinian self-love can be expressed as a love for God in whom lies eternity. Though physical bodies are consumed over time, the 'quintessential being,' which adheres through love to the eternality of God, endures. Augustine concluded that there is no place within the 'dark abyss' of the human heart where the 'true correlative of desire' lies, which is to say that the coincidence of self-discovery and the discovery of God reveal to Augustine precisely what he is not; an eternal being. The significance of Augustine's move toward the eternal concerns this contradiction between immutable human essence and human existence. If love confers belonging, as Arendt states, then loving God acknowledges that one does not possess an eternal essence apart from God, but by loving God as the highest good, "he loves no one but himself, that is, that of himself which is the true object of all self-love: his own essence."<sup>222</sup> Proper self-love, or love of God that leads to the discovery of the essential self, does not rightly correspond with the temporality of this present life. Arendt argues that Augustine's pursuit of self-knowledge, a love of one's true self, constitutes this difference between essence and

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., VII, x, 16.

<sup>222</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p.26.

existence. That is, mortal existence must be overcome in anticipation of a future self who, because they exist in relation to an eternal God, is immortal. The same is true for the difference between use and enjoyment. All worldly love falls under the aspect of love's ultimate goal, Arendt writes, and to love the highest good is to either surrender oneself to the world or to eternity. For Augustine, proper love is bound to the highest good, and, as Arendt notes, "if the object of desire is God, the world is related to God by using it. Since it is used, the world loses its independent meaningfulness and thus ceases to tempt man."<sup>223</sup> Enjoyment, then, stands beyond the temporal confines of worldly life in such a way that there is no affinity between the user and the used, which, in this sense, means that loving God is tantamount to sheer worldlessness. In terms of its functionality, the world becomes a part of an ordering based on a point of reference whose end is the highest good. "Love of the world," Arendt writes, "guided by an ultimate transmundane purpose, is essentially secondary and derivative."<sup>224</sup> The use value of the world is regulated by the eternity of the good toward which love of God is directed, and so the world can never exist solely for its own sake.

Augustine's worldly self-denial can be understood as a certain type of 'forgetfulness', Arendt states, where the anticipated eternal self transcends all that is finite by necessarily abandoning love that corresponds with our present temporal reality. "Whatever man loves and desires," Arendt writes, "he always forgets

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 37.



something. Craving the world, he forgets his self and forgets the world; discovering that he cannot find his self except in the craving for God, he forgets his self.”<sup>225</sup> If Augustine’s account of loving God is about forgetting one’s mortality, as Arendt suggests, then craving eternity is about forgetting one’s very existence within a fixed temporality in order to ‘*be*’.<sup>226</sup> Being, in this sense, is the opposite of temporal existence, and so craving the love of God, as it stands in relation to a love of one’s eternal essence, requires the radical negation of our present realm of existence.<sup>227</sup> Arendt’s issue with love as desire is a matter of its relation with the definition of man, “as one who remains always wanting and forever isolated from what gives him happiness, that is, his proper being.”<sup>228</sup> Self-denial, then, is not concerned with the sake of the neighbour, or even of God, but of eternity itself. This movement amounts to the destruction of the possibility of authentic neighbour love precisely because the demands of love as desire ‘obliterate’ the mortal self by focusing exclusively on future immortality. Put briefly, love as desire, so conceived, denies human worldly existence rendering love for the neighbour impossible. In Arendt’s terms, self-hatred that forsakes neighbour love is a “desperate consequence of self-love that desires, but never attains, its own ‘good.’”<sup>229</sup> What is ultimately at stake for Arendt regarding the future fulfilment of love, then, is that Augustine’s resolution fails to provide any account of worldly meaningfulness. As Gregory states, “Augustine has

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<sup>225</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

been led astray by the account of love as desire and allows the absolute future to be the only horizon of experience.”<sup>230</sup>

Turning quickly to Paul’s account of Christian love, Arendt compares love as desire with Paul’s account of love’s unfailing nature found in I Corinthians 13. For Paul, a love of God is not characterized by a desire for a future that is ‘not yet,’ but in its perfection love binds us to God in our mortal reality as strongly as it does in eternity. According to Arendt’s exegesis of Paul’s epistle, Christian love is unfamiliar with desire, that is, Paul disagrees with Augustine’s notion of love as craving and considers love’s movement as an expression of the ‘bond of perfection’ that relates humankind to God regardless of context. This means that for Paul, proper love of God is unchanging within this present life and into eternity itself. It is belief, rather than love, that requires fulfilment. Love, then, does not cease nor increase in absolute futurity, but because love is rooted in God, like God, it remains constant. Arendt traces the discrepancies between Pauline Christianity and Augustine’s account of love as desire as a way of shedding some light on Augustine’s failing efforts to make sense of neighbour love in a world that no longer holds relevance for him. Whereas Paul is able to conceptualize the appearance of neighbour love in a sinful world because it is rooted in a love of God, Arendt concludes that Augustine’s first ‘pre-theological’ formulation of love as desire negates the neighbour because he cannot reconcile the discrepancies between the Christian mandate to love and the Plotinian and Platonic influences that shape his

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<sup>230</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 229.

early understanding of eternity. “Obviously there is no answer to this question in the present conceptual framework except the divine commandment itself,” Arendt writes, “which appears here like a *deus ex machina*.”<sup>231</sup> The actualization of the Christian command to love the neighbour is contradicted by the ‘basic lack of concern’ of an objective ordering of love fixed upon the future. That is, the conceptual groundwork Augustine lays out within his first formulation of love cannot bridge the gulf between the worldly reality of the neighbour for whom he struggles to provide an account, and the absolute future that radically separates what can be used and what is to be enjoyed. Arendt writes that Augustine must finally admit, albeit reluctantly, that the neighbour can only be loved for the sake of something else at present: the anticipated future.<sup>232</sup>

As Patrick Boyle claims, Augustine’s turn from the world is more complex than a simple negation of it. The world remains God’s creation and must be acknowledged as such, but because the highest good cannot be achieved in our mortality, the world to which we cling in *cupiditas* must be denied. “True attachment to God in charity severs human dependence on all transitory things because it ultimately frees the human being from mortality,” Boyle writes, “therefore, rightly ordered love or charity ascribes to the individual a love for the world, insofar as the world is God’s creation, and a withdrawal from the world, insofar as the ultimate good is neither the world nor anything one can possess in

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<sup>231</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 39.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

it.”<sup>233</sup> In Augustine’s first formulation of love as desire, the neighbour exists only peripherally and cannot be truly loved as an end in itself. A love of the highest good stands above all other loves, and so Arendt claims that everything else, “our own selves, our neighbours, our bodies – must be loved for the sake of the highest.”<sup>234</sup> The Christian command to love the neighbour appears out of place in a pre-theological context where properly ordered love both anticipates and exists in the absolute future. For Arendt, the explicitness of the divine commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself stands in contrast with Augustine’s “ideal of absolute isolation and independence of the individual from everything ‘outside’ this self over which the self has no power. And this ‘outside’ includes not only ‘neighbours’ but also [ones] own body.”<sup>235</sup> Yet the movement within Arendt’s reading of Augustine’s first formulation also draws our attention to the difficulty Augustine experiences as he confronts an ordering of human relationships that ultimately “[degrade] men into mere means for an end.”<sup>236</sup> Our relationship to the object of our desire is shaped by either use (*uti*) or enjoyment (*frui*), but this is a ‘degradation of love,’ according to Arendt, who argues that the centrality of love in Augustine’s thought contradicts this first formulation. In the end, love’s proper source must be something other than desire.

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<sup>233</sup> Patrick Boyle, ‘Elusive Neighbourliness,’ in *Amor Mundi*, p. 89.

<sup>234</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 40.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

#### **D. Augustinian Love as Remembering**

The second section of Arendt's dissertation approaches the question of desire by turning from a 'pre-theological' account of 'desire' or 'craving' to a consideration of the function of memory and how, for Augustine, happiness projected into the absolute future is only guaranteed by turning to the absolute past.<sup>237</sup> "In truth," Arendt writes, "craving and its relationship depend upon a pre-existing reference whose object was forgotten in desire's exclusive direction toward the future. Memory thus opens the road to a transmundane past as the original source of the very notion of the happy life."<sup>238</sup> For Augustine, the faculty of remembrance is a search for the origin of our existence, Arendt argues, which is something different than a quest for the eternal that prompts us only toward absolute futurity. By remembering, we discover from 'whence' we came, which is to say that by remembering we return to a point prior to the cultivation of desire and worldly experience, a point prior to the dispersion of the self through mundane desires. Arendt is referring here to the recognition of our own 'createdness' or 'creatureliness,' and that our existence is dependant on something other and outside of ourselves. Arendt states:

Only in referring back from mortal existence to the immortal source of this existence does created man find the determinant of his being. For in the Creator who 'made him,' the 'reason for making man' must necessarily precede and survive the 'act of creation'...man's cause of

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

existence is the one who *is*. If man returns to where he came from, he finds his Creator.<sup>239</sup>

Desire is shaped in part by a prior knowledge of happiness, for we must possess some conception of happiness in order to pursue it. Thus, when we remember the absolute past we are not guided by a ‘desiring love for the highest good,’ which, Arendt says, is God, but by the love we have for the love of God that has already been given to us. “You are before the beginning of the ages,” Augustine writes, “and prior to everything that can be said to be ‘before’ ...all mutable things have in you their immutable origins.”<sup>240</sup> The move from future-oriented desire to remembrance “expresses a desire inherent in the fact of createdness.”<sup>241</sup> By conceptually orientating himself towards the created origins of his being, Augustine discovers that, “in this quest, which takes place in memory, the past comes back into the present and the yearning for a return to the past origins turns into the anticipating desire of the future that will make the origin available again.”<sup>242</sup> The way to the absolute future, then, is through the absolute past and the faculty of remembrance accomplishes this. This shift constitutes a particularly unique development within Augustine’s thought, which is to say that Augustine’s reflections on human existence in relation to God as Creator arise from a Judeo-Christian context that is, as Arendt notes, “much more original than the more conventional considerations centering on

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid. p. 50.

<sup>240</sup> *Confessions*, I, vi, 9.

<sup>241</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 51.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

desire and fear.”<sup>243</sup> This movement, moreover, places Augustine’s Greek philosophic and Christian theological sensibilities into tension with one another, for, as Arendt’s account maintains, “Augustine’s understanding of Being is derived from the Greek concept that identifies Being with everlastingness or endurance, ‘for being refers to what remains.’ This Being, as we shall see, is nothing but the sempiternal structure of the universe. “In contrast,” Arendt writes, “Augustine’s understanding of the world is guided by the Christian teaching that conceives of all mundane existence as being created, thereby precisely denying its endurance.”<sup>244</sup> The Christian distinction between the world and the universe rests on this difference between the ‘divine fabric’ of the created universe and the world that is constituted by humankind. In Arendt’s terms, Augustine must reconcile ‘being of the world’, that is, a part of God’s creation, and the distinctly human movement of making the world a home. So whereas a love of the world, or worldliness, constitutes ‘being at home in the world’, belonging to the creation of God places humankind in a position to continually refer back to their Creator. Put simply, humankind is presented with the choice to recall their origin in God, and in so doing reject the world, or to love the world and look to it alone as their source of both ‘good and evil’.

While remembering transforms Augustine’s conception of God, whom he now understands as both absolute future and past, he must still conceptually differentiate what it means to be of the world created by men and a creation by God.

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

“On the one hand,” Arendt writes, “man’s quest for being is answered by the structure of the universe in its totality, of which man himself is a part. On the other hand, in the Christian view of creation, by saying ‘I have become a question to myself,’ man has begun to ask himself out of the world in his quest for ‘true being.’”<sup>245</sup> In essence, Augustine is faced with two seemingly antithetical conceptions of creation that view being as either a part of the eternal structure of the world or as creations of God. On this point, Arendt argues that Augustine’s indebtedness to the Greeks concerning his conception of the universe must be considered in order to frame Augustine’s struggle with the possibility of a world that is at once constituted by human beings and also a creation of God. Put differently, the influence of the Greeks is, once again, brought into the foreground by Arendt in order to contextualize the appearance of Platonic and Plotinian cosmologies amidst Augustine’s distinctive efforts to conceptually locate a love for God that stands apart from a love for the world constituted by men.

Stated briefly, Arendt’s interest in Augustine’s Platonic cosmology concerns how Plato’s notion of ‘imitation’ shares some similarities with Augustine’s account of humankind’s relatedness to God. To be sure, while Arendt is clear that Augustine is in disagreement with the supremacy of Plato’s eternal model, his sense that humankind belongs within an encompassing whole that imparts order is partially derived from Plato’s influence.<sup>246</sup> The Platonic world is everlasting because it

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., p. 61.



imitates the eternal model upon which it was fashioned, while for Augustine, imitation is indicative of a dependence on God as the source and creator of the cosmos. For Aristotle, Arendt notes, the eternal nature of the universe is not a derivative of imitation, but an inherent quality of the cosmos. The order, or 'keeping-together,' of the universe must precede the Becoming of its mutable parts, which is to say that while Plato can think about the movement and appearance of an ordered universe, conceptualizing a moment when an eternal order emerges from chaos is impossible for Aristotle. "The very order of the cosmos," Arendt writes, "that is, what makes it a cosmos, must somehow exist before chaos could become cosmos."<sup>247</sup> Augustine would seem to follow Aristotle here up to a point. Both agree that the physical universe is not part of an ontology that is dependent upon a supreme eternal design that is above all else, but for Aristotle, this is because there simply is no moment when the universe enters into existence – it has always existed.<sup>248</sup> For Augustine, the universe exists because God as Creator is prior to all things and establishes order from chaos, thus the eternal framework and design of the universe exists because God caused them to be. Augustine states:

But you, Lord, live and in you nothing dies. You are before the beginning of the ages, ad prior to everything that can be said to be 'before'. You are God and Lord of all you have created. In you are the constant causes of inconstant things. All mutable things have in you their immutable origins. In you all irrational and temporal things have the everlasting causes of their life.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>248</sup> Aristotle, *On the Heavens II*, I, 283b 26-31, Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 63.

<sup>249</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, I, vi, 9.

The changes that occur with the ‘coming and going’ of bodies have no effect on the immutability of the universe for Aristotle; the whole will forever endure the variation of its parts. Augustine, conversely, understands the ‘coming out of nothingness and rushing into nothingness’ as existence that always stands in relation to God, which is to say that humankind can only be related to Being as creations of God. “No matter how closely [they] adhere to the ‘highest good,’” Arendt writes, “[humankind] will never ‘become’ true Being: that is, eternal, unchangeable, or self-sufficient.”<sup>250</sup> Only God, as the divine source who stands beyond the horizons of both absolute past and future, is true Being.

In Arendt’s estimation, however, it was Plotinus who influenced Augustine’s cosmology most profoundly. This is because, in contradistinction to Plato and Aristotle, Plotinus’ interests are less about the composition and nature of the universe than they are about the fate of humankind within it. All creation within the universe is subject to Becoming, which, for Plotinus, is identical with the imitation of eternal Being. Evil, then, can be understood as a departure from this total order. Augustine’s own formulation of wickedness is rooted here, and although he disagrees with the inclusiveness of Plotinus’ own formulation of imitation, Arendt cannot fully separate Plotinus’ discussion of order from Augustine’s own considerations. According to Plotinus, the concept of Being relates directly to the

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<sup>250</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 53.

order of the whole, and this is decisive for Augustine's concept of the well-ordered man.<sup>251</sup> "Therefore nothing happens in the world by chance," Augustine writes, "this having been established, it seems to follow that whatever is done in the world is partly by divine agency and partly by our will."<sup>252</sup> The world is at once both the creation of God and the home of mankind, and it is the object of our love that determines proper ordering. Arendt states:

So the world consists of those who love it. The concept is twofold: first, the world is God's creation (heaven and earth), which antedates all love of the world; and second, it is the human world, which constitutes itself by habitation and love (*diligere*)...what happens by our will is guided by the love of the world (*dilectio mundo*), which for the first time turns the world, the divine fabric, into the self-evident home of man.<sup>253</sup>

What is important here is mankind's relationship to the world. By remembering and referring back to God as the source of our being, mankind alienates himself from the rest of creation. "Man has the chance of not wanting to be at home in the world," Arendt states, "and thus keeping himself constantly in a position to refer back to the Creator: 'do not love to dwell in the building, but dwell in the Builder.'"<sup>254</sup> In *cupiditas*, conversely, we love the world in a worldly manner, that is, we learn to covet the creation that came before us and in doing so we confuse creation for the creator. Arendt writes:

Since the world antedates man, having been created into the world, he came after it. The world has for him an imperishable quality. Though

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>252</sup> Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 24.

<sup>253</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 66.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 66, quoting Augustine, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, 141, 15.

death removes him from the world, it leaves the world intact. In covetousness he turns to this world and desires it, and in loving the world for its own sake, he loves the creation rather than the Creator.<sup>255</sup>

Augustine's Greek conceptual inheritance forms his view of the world as a place where mankind possesses the capacity to move at will and influence his surroundings. By being in the world and by loving the world we shape it and make it our home, which, on the face of it, is not a concern for Augustine because, as Arendt observes, all created things are good when taken in relation to their creator. If we follow Greek cosmological ontology, however, the eternity of the world becomes the focal point of our love, a place rightly belonging to God according to Augustine's Christian ontology. Thus, just as Arendt had argued that worldly love problematically misdirects us from the authentic eternity and fullness of the eschaton, this same love causes us to 'forget' the true origin of our being as creature of God.

The covetousness of mankind appears when we begin to view ourselves independently of our creatureliness. We become a part of the world by perversely imitating the creative capacity of God through the voluntary movement of the will. Arendt states that this turn is an attachment to the wrong 'before,' a 'before' that turns to the world itself as the eternal source and point of origin of humankind's being. Augustine, Arendt claims, understood this turn as habit, that is, "through habit, covetousness constantly seeks to cover this real source by insisting that man

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

is 'of the world,' thereby turning the world itself into the source. Thus man's own nature lures him into the service of 'things made' instead of to do the service of their Maker."<sup>256</sup> In this sense, we are habituated to the sin we willingly abandon ourselves to. Clinging to a past that negates the reality of our createdness causes us to forget our origin in God and obscures the limit of our existence - our mortality - that would otherwise remind us of our dependence. Habit secures us from uncovering this peril; it is the shroud covering our contravening "the meaning of the creature as such."<sup>257</sup> Arendt writes that for Augustine, we must be brought *coram Deo*, into the presence of God in order to realize our being. We are drawn by our conscience, which, as the 'voice of the Creator,' directs us "beyond this world and away from habitation."<sup>258</sup>

Arendt notes that being conscious of divine law and our mortality is insufficient to reconcile us with God, for though the law imparts knowledge of sin and challenges the confidence of independent being, it cannot prompt a turning from it. Rather, the turn toward God, from '*ante* to *coram*,' must recognize the gulf separating our will and the power to accomplish it. In God alone does the coincidence of will and power occur, Arendt writes, and so our return to God must be an act of humility - a self-denying acknowledgment and confession that we possess no innate power of our own to overcome our sinful nature. In this way, the command to return to God is part of our conscience as creatures, but the power to

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

return comes from divine grace. “Grace is God’s renewed acceptance of the creature He made,” Arendt states, “and corresponds to the plea for help in the renewed turn to God.”<sup>259</sup> *Caritas* accomplishes the renunciation of the will, yet it is only by choosing to accept providential grace that the world itself is renounced. In effect, *caritas* is the fulfilment of divine law that does not recognize it as a ‘demanding and fearsome’ presence, but as grace. This is a ‘return of love’ that refers back to God with a ‘stronger will’ than the “the will that nature has implanted in us.”<sup>260</sup> By extending grace to humankind, God draws near to his creation revealing the ‘whence’ and origin of their being. Augustine writes:

When a man lives according to truth, then, he lives not according to self, but according to God; for it is God Who has said, ‘I am the truth.’ When he lives according to self, however – that is, according to man, and not according to God – he then certainly lives according to falsehood. This is not because man himself is falsehood; for his Author and Creator is God, who is by no means the Author and Creator of falsehood. Rather, it is because man was created righteous, to live according to His Maker and not according to himself, doing his Master’s will and not his own: falsehood consists in not living in the way for which he was created.<sup>261</sup>

Viewing the world as creation is to remember our proper source that is ‘before’ it, and though loving the world is possible if it is loved as creation, it cannot be loved for its own sake. Thus, proper love of self corresponds to how we love the world, Arendt claims, and for Augustine, proper love of self is to love as God loves, which is to say that we should love those things about ourselves that relate to the goodness of

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>261</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, XIV, 4.

the Creator. This also means that properly ordered love must remain obedient to divine law; yet, as Arendt argues, our dependence upon God leaves us in isolation from all others precisely because loving as creatures negates all worldly relatedness. To briefly sum up: through remembrance, Augustine begins to move away from his Greek philosophic inheritance by conceptualizing the world in terms of its created nature, and as creatures, Augustine's concept of God becomes more than an ontological consideration of the Creator and created origins of humankind as they stand in relation to the world they constitute for themselves. It is this new movement, Arendt writes, where Augustine begins to understand God's involvement with human life in a distinctly Christian theological way. That is, God no longer stands simply at the beginning and end of the world, but is understood as a commanding presence with specific demands and claims. The human conscience prompts their recognition of their sinful conditionality, yet God's personal relationship with his creation is made evident through the grace he extends to those who, in their humble turning from the world, petition for his divine help. This is a 'return of love' that follows humankind's referral back to their created origin as the necessary movement that makes recognizable the truth and meaning of their createdness. In self-denial the turn toward God is made, yet it is this critical aspect of loving God properly that forms the basis of Arendt's critique of Augustinian neighbour love, for how, Arendt asks, can the self-denying person meet their neighbour?

The conclusion of the second section of Arendt's dissertation is an explicit return to the question raised by Augustine's formulation of Christian neighbour love. According to Arendt, Augustine's consideration of remembrance fails to reconcile the other-worldliness of Christian self-denial with the concrete reality of the neighbour. This is because when we return to our origin and source, we recognize the meaning of our true being as God's creation. The love we have for our neighbour 'springs from *caritas*' and is guided by the divine command to love those around us as we love ourselves. Because love for the world is renounced in *caritas*, love for self and for all worldly relationships must also be renounced. The relationships we form on the basis of *caritas*, then, have no continuity with the relationships formed in *cupiditas*. Arendt states:

In this way the neighbour loses the meaning of his concrete worldly existence, for example, as a friend or enemy. For the lover who loves as God loves, the neighbour ceases to be anything but a creature of God. The lover meets a man defined by God's love simply as God's creation. All meet in this love, denying themselves and their mutual ties.<sup>262</sup>

Arendt questions the possibility of our capacity to relate to a neighbour specifically connected to us when the basis for any meaningful encounter is shaped by a love that renounces the self. Our capacity to love the neighbour properly is derived from our own discovery and acceptance of God's love and grace. When we learn to love ourselves as creation, we learn to love those around us as creation – without distinction. Arendt writes:

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<sup>262</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 94.



The prerequisite of the right comprehension of my neighbour is the right comprehension of myself. It is only where I have made sure of the truth of my own being that I can love my neighbour in his true being, which is in his createdness. And just as I do not love the self I made in belonging to the world, I also do not love my neighbour in the concrete and worldly encounter with him. Rather, I love him in his createdness.<sup>263</sup>

Only love that extends beyond the neighbour towards God possesses meaning, which is a way of describing a love that does not focus on the mortality of the neighbour, but loves what is eternal in them. The source of this eternality is identical in everyone, and so love of this kind does not distinguish between friend and enemy, but is capable of loving equally. For Arendt, the neighbour has no relevance if they are loved only as an occasion of love of God. In a sense, it is not the neighbour that is loved; it is love itself.<sup>264</sup>

### **E. The Body of Christ and the Negation of Political Individuality**

The tension remaining between neighbour love and Christian *caritas* prompts Arendt to continue her search for a different context in which Augustine's love of the neighbour possesses relevance despite all of the discrepancies surrounding love as craving and love as remembering. From Arendt's perspective, there is no opportunity for meaningful interaction with the neighbour if the self stands in between the origin of their being and eternity in such a way that the neighbour can only be viewed "from an absolute distance," which is another way of saying that by

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

loving of God, the self is set apart from all others.<sup>265</sup> Arendt is not seeking to diminish Augustine's efforts to articulate a comprehensible and relevant love of the neighbour, but to demonstrate that by looking to the absolute future or referring to the absolute past, those who orient their love toward God are indeed isolated. The significance of the neighbour may be discovered by approaching Augustine's account of 'facing the world' and 'relating to others,' that is, how Augustine can relate a Christian community of faith to communities that make their home in this world. Arendt is searching for what she refers to as "a common ground of experience on which the Christian community becomes decisive for the individual believer."<sup>266</sup> But it is not Christianity that grounds the relevance of the neighbour initially; rather, Augustine traces the common lineage of humankind back to its roots in Adam as a way of establishing an historical point of connection for all humankind. Because we share a common Adamic ancestry, we are related by something other than our traits, skills, or preferences. Our kinship is derived from Adam's own mortality, and though various forms of interaction may allow for specific associations, what Arendt is referring to here is the fate of humankind – a larger situation that finds each of us heading toward a common end. Put simply, we are all equal before death. Augustine writes:

God chose to create the human race from one single man. His purpose in doing this was not only that the human race should be united in fellowship by a natural likeness, but also that men should be bound

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

together by kinship in the unity of concord, linked by the bond of peace.<sup>267</sup>

As Augustine notes, though human kind was purposed for an interrelatedness founded on a ‘bond of peace,’ by sinfully grasping after God’s likeness we now share in the mortal fate of human kind as members of an Adamic lineage. Yet, as Arendt will argue, it is our sinful nature that both conceals and reveals to us the relevance of the neighbour as one whom, like us, stands equally before God in their sin.

We are driven to engage life in the world interdependently, Arendt writes, and our coexistence constitutes a world that has its origins in Adam. This is the characteristic of the *civitas terrena* – a community constituted by people who not only live alongside one another, but also live for and with each other. The worldly city is not arbitrarily founded or dissolved Arendt argues, and the mutual ‘give and take’ that defines the life of this community is premised on a belief in a purpose that will ‘prove’ itself in our common future.<sup>268</sup> In fact, all social life depends upon this belief - that our interdependence carries meaning - but we can only trust this without clearly understanding it, Arendt says. Moreover, this same interdependence has made the world familiar to us, and by crafting the world after our own design we have legitimated our own existence. We depend only on one another by wilfully separating ourselves from God, and so, as Arendt observes, “there are always, in fact, two cities – the good and the bad, the one based in Christ and the one based in Adam. In a similar sense, there are but two loves: love of self (or the world) and love of

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<sup>267</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV, 1.

<sup>268</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 101.

God.”<sup>269</sup> Belonging to Adam by posterity grounds both the sinful and historical reality of the world, which, in a seemingly paradoxical move, locates the origins of the human race prior to any *civitas Dei*. This mortal human community rests on their own origin, and as such they are already familiar with the world they are born into “both by nature and historical generation.”<sup>270</sup>

It is precisely this world that the death of Christ redeems, Arendt writes, for it is only the “whole world (*mundus*), understood as the man-made world” into which Christ can enter as an historical reality.<sup>271</sup> The contrasting relation between the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas Dei* defines Augustine’s attempts to articulate the social quality of our being, which is contextually removed from the individual’s isolated consideration of their being as creatures. Being at home in the world is simply a matter of course for Augustine, and so it follows that his account of love of the neighbour is characterized firstly by our sinful origins. In this way, our social interdependence results from a common separation from God that traces its historical origin back to Adam, and because our relatedness is generational, we are all alike in our sinfulness before God having been born into a world that is familiar with a love oriented towards itself. Relating back to God, then, requires a divine revelation that reaches out to humanity in its sinfulness and historical reality. This is a movement of grace that calls all people from their entanglement with the world, and yet “the manifestation of equality in their new situation of having been

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

redeemed is identical with the knowledge of their sinful past.”<sup>272</sup> Nothing within our own range of capacities enables us to participate in this redemption; it is, as Arendt observes, offered to us without condition, and just as we are made equal in our sin so too are we redeemed together. However, the sinful nature of the historical world is not simply swept away by the redemptive work of Christ, rather, because the relevance of the neighbour is derived from this historical reality, our view of the world is reinterpreted in light of God’s grace through Christ in a way that allows the “pre-existing past to continue independently beside the newly experienced being.”<sup>273</sup> Sin remains sin, that is, it does not cease to be sin though divine grace has overcome it, and so because our equality with the neighbour is rooted in our common sinfulness, they stand as a continual reminder of our shared corruption.

The difference in this final situation, Arendt contends, concerns the explicitness of equality that is expressed in the command to love the neighbour. We can respond to this command because we are equal in our sinfulness, yet it is not the sinfulness of the neighbour that we are to love. The command to love one’s neighbour rests on the relatedness that originates from the sinful historical reality of the worldly city, but the divine grace gifted through the incarnate Christ gives this sense of equality a new meaning. “It is no longer the same equality,” Arendt states, “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

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<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

everyone's equally sinful past."<sup>274</sup> So while the divine grace of God makes visible our equality, our understanding of it is dependent upon our sinful past. Christians continue to live in the world even though, in their turn toward God, they are estranged from it. "Thus the world is still relevant, not because the Christian still lives in it, to a certain extent by mistake," Arendt argues, "but on the ground of his constant tie to the past and thereby to original kinship, which consists of an equal share in original sin and thus in death."<sup>275</sup> How we view the neighbour is dependent upon the orientation of their love – we relate to them either "as one in whom God has already worked his grace" or "as one who is still entangled in sin."<sup>276</sup> The work of the divine grace of Christ is made manifest in the neighbour signifying a relational transformation from mutual dependence to mutual love. It becomes our duty, then, to direct those who remain fixed in their worldly love toward 'the explicitness of their own being' because we acknowledge that we, who share an Adamic lineage, are of the same redeemable 'substance.'<sup>277</sup> Estrangement from the world is not the same thing as the abandonment of those who willingly remain familiar with it, for, as Arendt claims, this would be robbing them of the opportunity to change.

The believer enters a new social life grounded in the historical reality of Christ, Arendt says, but this sociality purposefully stands against the encroachment of past sins whose presence continues to hinder even the faithful. This new life

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

together is not a ‘matter of course,’ as it is for the *civitas terrena*, but a decision made by the individual to accept the grace extended to them by Christ in faith. The corporeal language depicting the new relation believers have with one another as members of the body of Christ points to a mutual love that is, at the same time, self-love “since the being of one’s own self is identified with the being of Christ.”<sup>278</sup> Consequently, Arendt writes that, “what was once necessary by generation has now become a danger involving a decision, one way or the other, about him – the individual. The pure fact of belonging to the human race is no longer decisive.”<sup>279</sup> Arendt is referring here to Augustine’s awareness of the ambiguity of the human being within a world where both earthly and heavenly cities intermingle. To be sure, Arendt is clear that social life grounded in Christ transforms individuality into membership or kinship, that is, the community of Christ is hallmarked by a mutual love that abides all things, and the necessity of *caritas* that grows from this community is concerned with the entirety of the human race. Yet to be in the world, for Christians, is to be linked to a sinful past and to continually ‘be in danger.’ The existential drama manifested by the constant peril of living in the world comes to a head with Augustine’s account of eternal death. Christ’s redemption has overcome death, but the orientation of one’s love continues to determine one’s fate in the afterlife. For those who follow Christ, death leads to eternity, but for the wicked, physical death leads to eternal death. We are made aware of the danger of eternal

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

death when we enter into the presence of God in conscience, but this movement also informs how we are to understand mutual love. Arendt writes:

Coming from the thought of one's own danger that is experienced in the conscience in God's presence, that is, in absolute isolation, this love (*diligere invicem*) also thrusts the other person into absolute isolation. Thus, love does not turn to humankind but to the individual, albeit every individual.<sup>280</sup>

The menace of eternal death binds humankind insofar as each of us is subject to the same danger, which means that it is not humankind that is threatened, Arendt states, but every individual. Our capacity to love the neighbour in their individuality corresponds with the dissolution of human kind into its many individuals who, in their isolation before God, confront the peril of eternal death, but this is a love for the neighbour that is contingent upon their relation to God. We love only indirectly, and so the problem Arendt identifies with this kind of love concerns the provisional nature of our new relatedness. We love the neighbour because we love God, and so this movement reveals the indirectness of a love that transforms our relation with the neighbour into a relation with God. "The other as such cannot save me," Arendt states, "he can only save me because the grace of God is at work in him. We are commanded to love our neighbour, to practice mutual love, only because in so doing we love Christ."<sup>281</sup>

In her third formulation of Augustinian Christian neighbour love, Arendt ultimately concludes that Christian love of the neighbour falls short of establishing a

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 111.



meaningful relatedness that acknowledges the distinctness of the neighbour's individuality. What we are left with is a relation to the neighbour that is, in reality, premised entirely upon their relation to God. Christian love of the neighbour, Arendt reveals, is not love that considers the other for their own sake; rather, it is love of the divine grace at work within them. With this in mind, the movement of Augustine's thought from philosophic inquiry of being toward the theological affirmation of Jesus Christ as neighbour differentiates the significance of Arendt's challenge from other familiar accusations of Platonic otherworldliness.<sup>282</sup> The source of all being for Augustine is God, Arendt writes, and he discovers the neighbour only in their isolation before God. The sheer alterity of the neighbour as they exist apart from God does not enter the field of vision at all.<sup>283</sup> Yet as we will see, Augustine's account of Christ as neighbour stands in contradistinction with the Arendt's dissertation because it is *only* in Christ that love for both God and neighbour can be distinguished while remaining correlative. Here is the connection: whereas Arendt views Christ's divine claim of love as an infinite deficit that will draw all love to itself, an Augustinian account of Christ's appearance points to his divine abundance of power which he gifts to his followers. We have seen how a required surplus maintains freedom within Arendt's political space, that is, in order to act and speak freely we must be totally unfettered by any claims that would otherwise determine our appearance before one another. In the same way, Christ's

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<sup>282</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 239.

<sup>283</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 112.

love *is* the surplus that allows us to love God and to love our neighbours freely as distinct beings. This radical outpouring of divine love, most importantly, finds expression through the forgiveness Christ extends to humankind as part of the movement of his love. Christ forgives because he loves, and in so doing, Christ becomes the exemplar of forgiveness for his followers. We enter into a relationship with Christ because of the forgiveness he extends in love, and we enter into Christian community in the same way. Christian forgiveness restores us to an interrelatedness of proper ordering, which is to say that because the movements of Christ's love and forgiveness intermingle, Christian forgiveness is a sign of love properly ordered after Christ's divine love. In the following two chapters, we will turn to examine Augustine's account of Jesus Christ as neighbour and what it means for the Incarnation, who is at once fully human and fully divine, to affirm political life for Christian community within the world by guaranteeing our capacity to love and forgive without restriction or redirection.

### Chapter 3: Christ as Divine Neighbour

#### A. Political Forgiveness and Loving Christ as our Neighbour

The importance of Arendt's critical reading of Augustine's account of Christian love and forgiveness rests primarily on her assertion that, for Augustine, the Incarnate God made manifest in Christ effectively stands between the neighbour and ourselves in a way that prevents the possibility of meaningful human political activity. In terms of Arendt's articulation of the political relevance of forgiveness, then, her consideration of Jesus of Nazareth, as the discoverer of the political value of forgiveness, remains fundamentally at odds with Augustine's confession that Jesus of Nazareth is also Christ. For Augustine, the appearance of Christ as the Son of God and Son of Man presents an ontological reordering of human/divine relations as well as human/human relations that challenges the restriction Arendt imposes on Augustine's natality. Christ enters history as a new beginning that changes the limits of political interaction, that is, while Augustine argues that Adam brought death, it is Christ as second Adam who brings life.<sup>284</sup> To be sure, Arendt's differentiation between Jesus' humanity and divinity is an unremarkable claim on its own, yet Augustine's defence against Arendt's charge of Christian otherworldliness depends largely on his reading of Jesus' twofold nature. At the conclusion of her dissertation, Arendt suggests that the provisional relationship we have with our neighbour is indicative of the dissolution of humanity into individuals, that is, Christ's divine

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<sup>284</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book IX, xiii (34).

command calls us to turn our gaze toward the neighbour in love, yet we can only view the neighbour as they stand in isolation before God. “This indirectness,” Arendt writes, “which is unique to love of neighbour, puts an even more radical stop to the self-evident living together in the earthly city.”<sup>285</sup> As we have seen, forgiveness possesses political relevance for Arendt because it offers the only adequate response to the unforeseen possibilities of living and acting together. Contextually, forgiveness so understood corresponds with the world that humanity has built for itself as a home, and so Augustine’s account of forgiveness, as an enactment of neighbour love, is problematic for Arendt because it dissolves political interrelatedness rather than enables its flourishing. The appearance of Jesus Christ directs our love away from the neighbour toward himself, and while Arendt will later refer to charity as the Christian political principle best suited to guide this ‘worldless’ community throughout their life on earth, the unending need of the neighbour, which the Christian community has resolved to address, introduces an inescapable economy that is antithetical to Arendt’s idea of political freedom. Christian community is bound together within this reality by their shared commitment to love and forgive the neighbour, yet Arendt argues that this commitment can never be satisfied by the resources this community possesses. For Arendt, the freedom to appear directly before one another in speech and deed, to live together within the world, requires a commensurate space conducive to the spontaneous nature of political action. Consequently, the Christian commitment to

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<sup>285</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine.*, p. 111.

attend to the needs of the neighbour can only be competitively related to a political equality that must remain insulated from the infinite cyclical nature of a social economy. Arendt presents us with a conceptualization of political life that is premised upon a love of the world uninfluenced by an overarching responsibility to the neighbour. This does not mean that Arendt ignores all obligations to properly address the suffering of the marginalized due to unjust socio-economic systems. These are issues that, in her estimation, are so obvious that they do not warrant serious political debate. Her claim is that because Augustine's account of love and forgiveness is grounded upon an understanding of Christ who comes both as servant and neighbour, the Christian prioritization of an ethic that models its own love after the self-emptying love of Christ complicates Arendt's own articulation of authentic political association, which is to say that the possibility for Christians to enjoy political life here on earth is frustrated by an orientation of love that is occupied with the infinite need of the neighbour. Put differently, Arendt contends that Augustine's account of Christian neighbour love problematically closes the distance between individuals in a way that negates a proper love of the world. Thus, because the Christian responsibility to meet the needs of the neighbour is only ultimately satisfied with sufficient resources, Arendt's charge is that Christianity must postpone the enjoyment of political life on earth until the coming fullness of the Kingdom of God arrives, which is to say that the Christian church cannot find a home within the *civitas terrena* precisely because the radical abundance for which it

patiently waits, and to which it is a witness, does not originate from within this world.

To complicate this problem further, because Christ himself has become our neighbour, both the relevance of the neighbour and our own individuality are absorbed, as it were, into a love of Christ himself, and so our regard for the neighbour occurs only indirectly. Recognition of one another and ourselves occurs in light of the grace God extends to us as sinful beings, which is something other than encountering the other in sheer alterity.<sup>286</sup> What Augustinian neighbour love makes recognizable, Arendt suggests, is not ‘otherness’ as such, but is, instead, our inherent sinfulness made visible by God drawing near to us. Therefore, what is made relevant and what we recognize within the neighbour is our shared sinful conditionality rather than any aspect of the other’s being that is apart from the movement of God’s love in our own lives. For Arendt, this is an important failing of Augustine’s articulation of what it means to imitate the love of Christ. As Breidenthal has noted, the Christian theological claim that Christ is redeemer and judge is greater than all other human claims, and so Arendt’s contention with Augustine concerns not only

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<sup>286</sup> Romand Coles offers a worthwhile commentary on the seemingly contradictory nature of Augustine’s account of neighbour love. Coles, like Arendt, argues that Augustine’s articulation of Christian love predetermines our encounter with the neighbour such that “the other never appears in otherness. The other is either nothingness and evil or a moving toward inclusion with the same.” (Coles, *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas*, p. 3) This criticism addresses a particular notion of ‘self-defeating generosity’ that results from a Christian imagination of *caritas* that is unable to appreciate the other *qua* other. Coles refers to the various forms of violent exchange that occur both outside and within the Christian church as examples of Augustine’s failure to acknowledge the value and ‘radical alterity’ of those living resolutely outside of Christian community. While Coles suggests that Augustine’s writings do convey the idea that Christian community cannot embody a ‘vision of homogeneity’, the expression of Christian *caritas* is largely based upon a ‘profound blindness’ where the other, as Arendt puts it, does not enter the “field of vision at all.” (Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 112).

the way in which we are drawn away from all other worldly loves, but because Christians view Christ as God incarnate, their love for God stands between themselves and the neighbour.<sup>287</sup> Arendt maintains that by orienting our love toward God we negate the world - a shift in love's orientation that Gregory refers to as a kind of 'spiritual distraction,' and though Christian community is bound together by their shared love of God, each individual member of this community, as neighbour, possesses relevance only insofar as they stand isolated in relation to God.<sup>288</sup> For Arendt, the Christian mandate to love the neighbour and forgive those who harm us are the hallmarks of a community that is, as Gregory suggests, "a wandering collection of individuals – truly resident aliens – knit together by the love of God as a defence against the world."<sup>289</sup> Yet, for Augustine, these are the critical hallmarks of authentic political life. The coming eschatological fullness of God's kingdom is made visible by the appearance of Christ within this reality, and so Christian community need not postpone political life until this world has passed. Essentially, love of the neighbour and forgiveness challenge inauthentic political life that has turned from God by pointing toward the richness of political life of which Christ is the exemplar. How, then, might Augustine's own theological framework respond to Arendt's critical examination of it, and can the claim be made that an Augustinian political theology does, in fact, remain faithfully committed to God without negating either the neighbour in their individuality or the possibility of

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<sup>287</sup> Breidenthal, "Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation," p. 491.

<sup>288</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 238.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

enjoying political life here on earth? By exploring the ways in which Augustine understands Christ's appearance as neighbour, as *kenotic* servant, as infinite resource, and as the exemplar and guarantor of forgiveness, we discover that Augustine makes room for more of an authentic political life for the Christian community on earth than what Arendt affords him.

### **Part B: Augustine and the twofold nature of Jesus Christ**

For our purposes, we may begin by looking briefly at Augustine's account of the divinity and humanity of Christ, or what it means for the Incarnation to draw near and become our neighbour. Arendt's understanding of Christian community is premised upon the idea that a fellowship of believers appear before one another only by first relating to Christ, which is something other than authentic political relationships that occur between independent beings. Augustine argues that Christ deserves our attention because of the divine claim he places upon us as the salvific answer to our sinful condition, and this is also the basis of Arendt's argument that confronting Christ as both God and neighbour dismisses the possibility of encountering the neighbour as anything but an indirect aspect of our love of God. However, Augustine seems to be making a different movement here than the direction Arendt attributes to him. The coextensive reality of loving God and loving the neighbour is made manifest in Christ, but this does not mean that love of the neighbour and love of God are competitively related or hierarchically ordered. As Oliver O'Donovan rightly notes, for Augustine, "love of God' will include any act,



thought, or impulse which is in accord with man's created teleology, no matter whether it is a 'religious' act, though or impulse or, in a narrower sense, a 'moral' one."<sup>290</sup> O'Donovan makes the point that, for Augustine, the possibility of all rightly ordered love flows from a love of God, but this does not mean that one love is weakened by the other. Rather, a proper love of God makes perfect a love of the neighbour, and, in turn, a proper love of the neighbour makes perfect a love of God. The two coexistent and coincidental loves cannot be independent of one another. In the same way, Christ's divinity and humanity are not competitively related so as to weaken one nature at the expense of the other - as if Christ's humanity diminishes his divinity. Augustine's argument with Alypius, a follower of Apollonaris who believed the divine Christ was without a human mind or soul (Book VII of the *Confessions*) demonstrates that, for Augustine, the seemingly contradictory claim that Christ could be both God and man is settled in light of the truth of scripture. Augustine suggests that he, in contrast to Alypius, initially believed Christ was simply an exceptional man and great teacher. The gospels portray Christ as a man who exhibited the emotional and deliberative qualities characteristic of the human mind and soul, and so because scripture attests to Christ's complete humanity, Augustine must conclude it to be true. Augustine writes:

But the mystery of the Word made flesh I had not begun to guess. I had only realized from the writing handed down concerning him that he ate and drank, slept, walked, was filled with joy, was sad, conversed. I knew that his flesh was not united to your Word without a soul and a human mind. Everyone knows this if he knows the

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<sup>290</sup> O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, p. 37.

immutability of your Word. I knew it to the best of my understanding, nor had I the least doubt of the subject. To move the body's limbs at will at one moment, not another, to be affected by an emotion at one time, not another, to utter wise judgement by signs at one moment, at another to keep silence: these are characteristic marks of the would and mind with their capacity to change. If the writing about him were wrong in so describing him, everything else would be suspected of being a lie, and there would remain no salvation for the human race based on faith in these books. So because the scriptures are true, I acknowledged the whole man to be in Christ, not only the body of a man or soul and body without a mind, but a fully human person.<sup>291</sup>

Augustine's rejection of both heretical views grounds his assertion that the mortality Christ takes upon himself, the 'weakness' of becoming like us, neither signifies a dominant human form nor diminishes his divine nature. Instead, Augustine will argue that Christ is made 'weak by clothing himself in flesh,' but this does not merely veil his divinity until such time that his weakness can be undone by it. For Christ to become our neighbour he must become like us in all aspects, and so the union of Christ's humanity and divinity must do more than simply feign weakness until strength is revealed. To be sure, Augustine is not saying that the weakness of Christ's humanity should be taken as the absence of divine power, for this merely repeats Alypius' misunderstanding that both natures cannot be present at once in Christ. Rather, in his humanity, Christ draws close to us by becoming 'weak', but it is only through the 'weakness' of Christ's humanity that we strengthened. "They see at their feet divinity become weak by his sharing in our 'coat of skin,'" Augustine writes, "in their weariness they fall prostrate before this divine weakness which

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<sup>291</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, xix, 25.

raises and lifts them up.”<sup>292</sup> The apparent contradiction of ‘divine weakness’ is precisely what allows God incarnate to become our neighbour. Augustine claims that in his ‘infant condition,’ Christ’s humanity ‘nourishes’ those who long to know him as their neighbour, and by his humility, we are taught also to seek the strength that is derived from his ‘weakness’.<sup>293</sup> In this sense, Augustine understands weakness or vulnerability as something other than deficiency or need, for it is only by the weakness of Christ’s humanity that we are ‘lifted up’. Here, Augustine makes the move to closely link weakness with humility rather than binding limitation, which is a way of emphasizing the graciousness of God’s movement amongst us without competitively elevating God as Father over and against God as Son.

While Arendt interprets the weakness of Christ as a condition of dependency amidst scarcity, Augustine points to a reversal accomplished by Christ’s appearance amongst us whereby weakness and vulnerability become, for us, a form of strength. “And in order that the mind might walk more confidently towards the truth,” Augustine states, “the Truth itself, God, God’s son, assuming humanity without putting aside His Godhood, establish and founded this faith, that man might find a way to man’s God through God made man.”<sup>294</sup> In humility, Christ is made comprehensible, which is to say that the boundlessness of God’s grace is made visible by Christ becoming one of us, and for this reason Augustine will argue that those who love him can know him and be strengthened by his mediation of a new

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., VII, xix, 25.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., VII, xviii, 24.

<sup>294</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book XI, ch. 2.

possibility in the world. However, the strength Christ offers his followers is unlike conventional conceptualizations that closely follow patterns of conquest and domination, for Augustine indicates that strength of this kind is a movement of love that overcomes the sinful condition that underlies those patterns. Thus, Christ who is our neighbour, as both God and man at once, extends to us the possibility of a relatedness that is something other than what our corruption allows.

Because Augustine's discussion of Christ's humanity is centred on the underlying need of those who are born into corruption, he interprets God's appearance amongst us as an act of grace, and through this radical availability Christ allows us to recognize and approach him on like terms. It is a closing of distances made possible only through God's initial extension of himself towards us in love, and so Augustine is firm in his belief that the God who appears as Jesus Christ not only takes upon himself all aspects of our humanity, but enables us to properly orient our love toward him as sovereign Lord. "For the only Son of God, remaining immutable in Himself, put on humanity and bestowed upon mankind the spirit of His love through the mediation of a Man," Augustine states, "through this, it was made possible for us to come to Him, Who was so far from us: to the immortal from the mortal; to the immutable from the mutable; to the righteous from the ungodly; to the blessed from the wretched."<sup>295</sup> Christ becomes the exemplar of humility though his divine nature remains unchanged, and so the implication of Augustine's understanding of neighbour love concerns how we, in turn, must humbly frame the

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid., Book X, ch. 29.

movement of our love in kind. Of course, accepting the divinity and humanity of Christ remains impossible for those who trust in their own rational insight, and Augustine asserts that the scandal of Christ's humility stands in contradiction with worldly rationality in such a way that human pride is revealed to be the chief source of opposition to Christ.<sup>296</sup>

Though God desires to be reconciled with all people, Augustine continually reminds us that only those who acknowledge Christ as both God and man, who understand the limitations of all human endeavours to reach God on their own, will actually accept the truth of Christ's identity. God desires to be in relation with his people, Augustine argues, but this restorative work requires an intermediary who, as one of us on our behalf, overcomes the sinful condition separating humankind from God and makes God's presence known amongst us. Augustine writes:

For it is as man that He is the Mediator and the Way. If there is a way between one who strives and that towards which he strives, there is

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<sup>296</sup> In Book X, ch. 29-30 of *The City of God*, Augustine specifically addresses the Platonists whom, he claims, are too proud to confess Christ's divinity. The discussion attends to various aspects of soul transmutation, corrections made to Plato's original positions, and the reincarnation of human souls – many arguments which Augustine credits Porphyry for amending. However, the underlying assertion Augustine makes concerns the stubbornness of the Platonists for remaining fixed in a position no longer tenable in light of the evidence he produces. "Why, then, when the Christian faith is commended to you, do you forget or pretend not to know what you yourselves habitually discuss or teach? Why do you refuse to become Christians on the ground that you hold opinions which, in fact, you yourselves oppose? Is it not because Christ came in humility, and you are proud?" (*City of God*, Book X, ch.29) Coming to know Christ as neighbour is intimately linked with the humble spirit first demonstrated through the incarnation itself. So while Augustine can argue with the Platonists over various contradictory aspects of their teachings, no amount of human effort on its own allows one to truly recognize Christ – this is a movement of love rather than an intellectual exercise. See also *City of God* Book XVII, ch. II – Augustine's exegesis of Psalm 89 and 144 contrasts the vanity of man with the reconciliatory work of God. While man has separated himself from God because of his vanity, the work of Christ the Mediator is not done in vain, though, if he were not both God and man, it would not have been possible for him to redeem the 'sons of men'. Men struggle uselessly against their condition of sin, but Christ has overcome this condition as both man and God.

hope of his reaching his goal; but if there is no way, or if he is ignorant of it, how does it help him to know what the goal is? The only way that is wholly defended against all error is when one and the same person is at once God and man: God our goal, man our way.<sup>297</sup>

Due to their fallen state, human beings have no power of their own to amend their corruption, and to believe one can accomplish this is pride. Put simply, God becomes human so that it might be possible for human beings to be reconciled with God, and only God as man can accomplish this. God becoming one of us is what allows mankind to attain knowledge of God, for though we are naturally rational creatures, Augustine claims, we cannot confidently approach God because of our sinfulness. “But the mind itself,” Augustine states, “even though reason and intelligence dwell in it by nature, is by its dark and inveterate faults made unable not only to embrace and enjoy but even to bear His immutable light until it has been renewed from day to day, and healed, and made capable of such great felicity.”<sup>298</sup> Augustine does not deny the original goodness of human creatureliness, for we are made in the image of God, but in order to come to know what we love, there is nothing within our range of capacities that would allow us to come to know God without God making himself known to us first; human sinfulness prevents it. Augustine’s argument maintains that Christ attends to our limited capacities by enabling us to bear God’s ‘immutable light’, and, importantly, he allows us to come to know and enjoy God as God intended.

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid., Book XI, ch. 2.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., Book XI, ch. 2.

Knowing and loving God are a part of the same movement for Augustine, which is why our capacity for rational thought cannot confidently bring us to God on our own. Our very being, including our rationality, must be reoriented in light of Christ's humble presence amongst us. In effect, Augustine presents us with a kind of Christological epistemology and ontology; an understanding of our being that corresponds with Christ's gracious humility.<sup>299</sup> Augustine writes:

Therefore, my brothers, I would implant this in your hearts: if you wish to live in a devout and Christian way, adhere to Christ according to that which he became for us, so that you may reach him according to that which he is and according to that which he was. He came to us that he might become this for us; for he became for us this upon which the weak may be carried and may cross the sea of the world and reach their homeland where there will be no need of a ship because no sea is crossed.<sup>300</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> "Christ is God," Augustine writes, "and he speaks with men; he wishes to be understood. Let him make us capable of understanding. He wishes to be seen; let him open our eyes" (Tractate 22, 2,(2). This is not to suggest that those to whom God is unfamiliar are incapable of rational thought, for Augustine will continually appeals to the Platonists to use their rational thought that they might recognize the inconsistencies within their arguments and properly respond to God's invitation. Rather, according to Augustine, knowledge of God, or knowing God, belongs to the Incarnation insofar as 'understanding is the fruit of faith.' Thus, knowing Christ as God is not dependent upon rational thought, but confessing Christ as God reorients rationality.

This is also the difference between Aristotelian magnanimity and Augustinian humility. While Aristotle will argue that the 'high-minded' man recognizes his excellence and properly expresses it as pride, Augustine claims that the excellence of Christ is revealed by his self-sacrificial love, the supreme example of humility – a shift he makes explicitly clear in the *Confessions* book VII. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle writes that, "honour is the prize of excellence and virtue, and it is reserved as a tribute to the good. High-mindedness thus is the crown, as it were, of the virtues: it magnifies them and it cannot exist without them" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1123b 35-1124a 1-5). On this point, Michael Krom writes that for Augustine, man's corruption has precluded the possibility of Aristotelian magnanimity. Following James Wetzell, Krom states, "Augustine undermines the possibility of magnanimity by denying that fallen humans can possess the virtues that magnanimity adorns" (Krom, 'Modern Liberalism and Pride: An Augustinian Perspective' in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol.35, No.3, Sep., 2007, p. 459). Believing it is possible to rationally suppress one's passions and appetites is a vice of pride, Krom argues, and so Augustine rejects the pursuit of human excellence and the cultivation of virtue if it occurs independently from God. Christ comes to us so that we may be shown how to love because he is the source of perfect love, thus, we do not seek self-perfection, but rely on the grace extended to us by God as our neighbour.

<sup>300</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate II:3.

The conclusion Augustine reaches suggests that we imitate or ‘adhere’ to Christ because he is the exemplar of neighbour love, that in his humility, Christ allows us to draw close to him according to that which he is. But the broader implications of this passage point to the dynamic reality of God’s love as it relates to the Persons of God. God desires to make himself known to us because he is a compassionate God, “not an unknown or essentialist one...perhaps even to the point of an intra-Trinitarian *kenosis*.”<sup>301</sup> The suggestion that Christ becomes for us according to “that which he is and was” references God’s unchanging love, which is different than suggesting that Christ’s appearance in the world somehow complicates the interrelationship of the Trinity. Peter Burnell makes the point that the Incarnation is not indicative of a transformation in the Persons of the Trinity because “the relationships within the Trinity are precisely eternal in their reference to the Incarnation.”<sup>302</sup> Augustine’s claim that Christ becomes for us who he always was suggests that the Incarnation is prior to Christ’s appearance, that is, we should not understand the incarnation of Christ as a deviation from the nature and love of the triune God; in this way it may be said that God has always desired to be our neighbour. We see, then, that Augustine does not take the humility of Christ incarnate to be anomalous to the Persons of God, but holds that it is already present in the Trinity before Christ appears in the world.

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<sup>301</sup> Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 239.

<sup>302</sup> Peter Burnell, *The Augustinian Person*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005) p. 121.



The graciousness of God made visible with the appearance of Christ demonstrates that, for Augustine, Christ is the electing God but he is also the elect human being. Bruce McCormack's critical reading of Karl Barth's doctrine of the Trinity offers a helpful commentary on the complexities of conceptualizing this Augustinian move. McCormack writes:

In part, the conceptual difficulty we encounter here is the consequence of our inability as humans to comprehend the meaning of an eternal decision. We think of decisions as involving deliberation and, therefore, as involving a before and after. First, there must be a subject; without a subject there can be no act. But that is to think all too anthropomorphically. That is to understand 'decision' under the conditions of our own finite experience, which is structured by time as we know it. But God's gracious decision is an eternal one and that means that the triunity of God cannot follow this decision in some kind of temporal sequence of events. The two things belong together because God is a Subject insofar as he gives himself (by an eternal act) his own being.<sup>303</sup>

The implications of this assertion concern the way the humanity of Christ becomes the necessary restorative connection between humankind and God. The historical appearance of Christ in the world becomes the perfect example of humanity, but this move does not make Christ's humanity larger than our own. Christ becomes, instead, the exemplar of 'true humanity' contrasted against our sinfulness. McCormack argues that, "the covenantal relation established by God's eternal act of Self-determination is a relation with the man Jesus and with others only 'in Him,'"

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<sup>303</sup> Bruce McCormack, "Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p. 104.

but this is not a redirection of love away from the neighbour towards Christ alone.<sup>304</sup>

Like Augustine, McCormack suggests that the interrelationship between God and Christ should not be taken as an interaction between God and God, but between God and man. The sovereignty of God is not at stake with the appearance of Christ, for the interrelation between Christ's divinity and humanity is not competitively grounded. On this point, McCormack states:

That divine sovereignty and human freedom are compatible realities, that they belong to such different planes of reality that they cannot possibly compete, is not something that can finally be demonstrated philosophically (by philosophical 'compatibilism'). The demonstration of the truth of 'compatibilism' is strictly theological. It is found in the history of Jesus' free obedience to the will of his Father. 'Omnipotence' may not be defined in abstraction from the event in which God gives himself to rejection, judgment, and wrath. By the same token, human 'freedom' may not be defined in abstraction from Jesus' freedom for self-surrender to these realities for the sake of redeeming the whole of the human race. The unity of the two is finally Christological; it is the unity of the one God-human in his divine-human unity.<sup>305</sup>

The argument here suggests that the nature of God is not challenged by Christ's humanity; rather, the sovereignty of God is illuminated by Christ's obedience and self-sacrificial love. Augustine would agree that our capacity to love the neighbour is informed by this love, for it is because of the freedom that Christ both exemplifies and provides that we are afforded the opportunity to orient our love selflessly away from ourselves toward the other. God's love for us is made compatible with our love of the neighbour because Christ chooses to love as our neighbour, which is a way of

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<sup>304</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

saying that Christ does not stand in the way of our neighbour love, but is its source and perfect example. Turning to the *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, we see how Augustine's examination of the dynamic between Christ's divine sovereignty and humility resonates with McCormack's articulation of Christological unity. It is here that Augustine provides us with a clearer image of how his understanding of Christ does not fluctuate between God and man in turns, but displays the human/divine unity of the incarnate God in a way that makes love of the neighbour possible. "And let the Christian not disdain to do what Christ did," Augustine writes, "for when the body is bent to the brother's feet, the affection of humility itself is either stirred in the very heart or if it was already there, strengthened."<sup>306</sup>

### **Part B. The Divine Sovereignty of the Son of Man**

At the outset of *The City of God*, Augustine begins his initial discussion of the two cities by delineating the basic boundaries that separate what is worldly from what belongs to the Kingdom of God. Augustine writes:

For by His most wholesome doctrine Christ forbids the worship of false and deceitful gods; and by His divine authority He detests and condemns the poisonous and shameful lusts of mankind. Indeed, He is by degrees withdrawing His servants from a world decaying and collapsing under these evils, in order to build with them an eternal and most glorious City; a City founded not upon the plaudits of vanity, but on the judgement of truth.<sup>307</sup>

The distinct differences between the foundations of the two cities have implications for Augustine's discussion of the human/divine nature of Christ and how this affects

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<sup>306</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 58, 5.

<sup>307</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, Book II, ch. 18.

our understanding of Christ as the exemplar of neighbour love. While the worldly city is founded on humankind's sinfulness and pride, the foundations of the Kingdom of God rest upon the judgement of truth made manifest through Christ. Augustine indicates that Christ's nature directly corresponds to his capacity to judge, and so his exegesis of the gospel of John, which shares many thematic similarities with *The City of God*, engages Christ both as the Son of God and as the Son of Man to determine whether divine authority is commensurate with the entirety of his being, that is, how the authority of the Son of Man relates to Christ as the Son of God. What Augustine confirms here is that the divine authority Christ possesses allows him to bear witness to the truth of God in such a way that those who would otherwise be unable can recognize him.<sup>308</sup> Christ comes with the power and authority to judge the entirety of the world, and so Augustine's interest in the question of Christ's nature concerns how the humility of Christ bears an authority to which the world must respond. God's decision to approach humankind, to draw close, is a movement of

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<sup>308</sup> Augustine argues that the power of God is made recognizable through Christ as the Son of Man, for if God were to simply appear as God he would not be known or made accessible to anyone save those who were already familiar with him. Augustine writes, "For your sake he was crucified, that he might teach humility and because if he were to come as God, he would not be recognized. For if he were to come as God, he would not come to those who could not see God. For neither comes nor departs according to that which God is, since he is present everywhere and is confined by no place. But according to what did he come? According to that which appeared as man" (*Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 2,4,4). That the two natures of God coincide in a singular movement of grace and compassion points to a God who does not appear for those who already love him, but comes as man in order that he might be seen by those 'who are in darkness' (Eph. 5:8).

both humility and authority at once, thus Augustine is required to disclose precisely what he means by ‘authority’ according to his account of Christ as judge.<sup>309</sup>

When Augustine refers to Christ as either the Son of Man or the Son of God, his referral corresponds to Christ’s humanity and divinity respectively, but it would be misleading to conclude on this basis that the dominant expression of one nature signifies the yielding of the other.<sup>310</sup> This can be seen throughout Augustine’s exegesis of the gospel of John, particularly chapter 5 where Christ appears to judge the living and the dead. The power to judge originates from God, but the judge that appears ‘at the end of the world’ is Christ as the Son of man. Augustine states:

For this Christ is both Son of God and Son of man. ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.’ See how he was given him to have life in himself. But because the ‘Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,’ having been made man from the Virgin Mary, he is the Son of man. Accordingly because he is the Son of man, what did he receive? The power also to do judgement. What judgement? At the end of the world; and there you will have a resurrection of the dead, but of bodies...But one must distinguish what he has [and] why. The Son of

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<sup>309</sup> Augustine quickly dismisses the idea of conceptualizing the interrelationship of the Trinity as one marked by a hierarchical ordering, as if the titles of the Persons of God functioned as strict thresholds of authority. In Tractate 59, 2,(3) Augustine writes: And so, restrain the temerity of your presumption; and in these words do not seek as great a difference of the Father and the Son as of the Son and the apostle. Hear rather the Son himself speaking, ‘The Father and I, we are one thing.’ Wherein the Truth had left you not an inkling of a difference between the Begetter and the Only-Begotten, Wherein Christ has shattered your gradations, wherein the Rock has broken your ladders.” Augustine is responding to the accusation that the words of the apostles carry less weight than the words of Christ, which is to say that the authority of Christ is weakened if it is communicated by another human source. Instead, the focus should be placed on the One who sends he who has been sent, Augustine argues, “and so in him who was sent, you accept the Sender without any error.” Put simply, since Christ’s authority originates from God, we cannot then conclude that Christ’s authority differs in any way from the authority of the Father.

<sup>310</sup> Drawing on Lucretius, Augustine states, “You do not find in God anything changeable, not anything which is now one way and a little before was another way, there has occurred there a kind of death; for it is death when what was is not” Tractate 23, 9, (2).

man has a soul, has a body. The Son of God, who is the Word of God, has a human nature, as the soul has a body. As a soul, having body, does not make two persons, but one man, so the Word, having human nature does not make two persons, but one Christ.<sup>311</sup>

Christ receives the power to judge because he is the Son of God, but Christ's divinity is not made visible until the final judgement. Referring to Zechariah 12:10, Augustine states that in their judgement they will look upon the one whom 'they have pierced' and shall be looked upon in their judgement, for the form that was 'judged wickedly' is the form that will 'judge justly'. The concealment of Christ's divinity should not be understood as a limitation; rather, Christ, who has received the power to judge from the Father, is present in judgement though the 'Father has not withdrawn from the Son'.<sup>312</sup> Breidenthal helpfully outlines the connection Augustine establishes between Christ's humanity and his capacity as judge here. According to Breidenthal, "the one who returns to judge the living and the dead must be visible to the wicked as well as the righteous. If Jesus appeared in the form of God, he could not be seen by the wicked: only the pure in heart will be able to see God."<sup>313</sup> Both concealment and revelation correspond to the movement God makes at the final judgement, but Augustine is clear that Christ's visible human presence is

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<sup>311</sup> Tractate XIX. 15, (1-2), Jn 5:26-29.

<sup>312</sup> Augustine's reading of Mt 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God," is closely tied to his reading of Jn 19:37, "And again another passage of scripture says, 'They will look on the one whom they have pierced,' in such a way that the humanity of Christ made manifest at the final judgement does not corrupt God's holiness and power, for his capacity to judge corresponds to his divinity, otherwise he would simply be a 'man without power'. Yet because it is Christ in his humanity who draws near to both the righteous and the wicked as their neighbour - suffering their judgement unjustly, Augustine notes that, "that form will be judge which stood before the judge; that [form] will judge which has been judged. For it has been judged wickedly; it will judge justly" (Tractate XIX. 16, (3).

<sup>313</sup> Breidenthal, "Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation," p. 495.

not disconnected from God, but is indicative of his self-emptying obedience.<sup>314</sup> The form of the servant conceals the form of God but does not cause it to vanish; instead, Christ becomes the exemplar of God's perfect justice though he himself was judged unjustly by humanity. In this way, the concealment and revelation of Christ corresponds to the uncovering of the faithful and the wicked by clearly distinguishing each as they enter into Christ's presence. At present, "we are divided in secret," Augustine writes, "we are separated in secret, as grains on the threshing-floor, not as grains in the grainary. The grains on the threshing-floor are both separated and mixed; they are separated when they are stripped from the husk, they are mixed because they are not yet winnowed."<sup>315</sup> The judgement of Christ will separate the faithful from the unrighteous, and it is at this moment that Christ will reveal his divine nature, cast the wicked out from his presence, and lead his people into the kingdom of God. Augustine explains how this will occur:

And the form of the servant will pass. For, it was for this that he had shown himself, that he might do judgement; after the judgement, he will go from here; he will lead with him the body whose head he is, and will offer the kingdom to God. Then plainly that form of God will be seen which cannot be seen by the wicked to whose sight the form of the servant had been displayed.<sup>316</sup>

Augustine's Christology becomes clearer throughout his exegesis on the gospel of John, and it is his account of the permanence of Christ's humanity that

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<sup>314</sup> "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, through he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross." Phil 2:5-8.

<sup>315</sup> Tractate XIX. 18, (2).

<sup>316</sup> Tractate XIX. 18, (3).

allows him to articulate a love of the neighbour that avoids the constraints of a superseding commitment to God. In other words, because Augustine argues that Christ's continuing presence on earth informs our love of the neighbour, this love, as expressed by the community of followers that form his body, is a witness God's love for us. This is something other than a redirection of our love away from the neighbour towards God, yet it is not a movement of love that is separated from God. Augustine's Christology rests on his assertion that Christ remains fully human even as his divinity becomes visible at the final judgement, and so both Christ's human and divine aspects characterize perfect neighbour love. Christ belongs within our history just as he has, and will always belong to the Father and the Holy Spirit. "Look, he is here even now," Augustine states, "and he was here, and he is always here; and he never departs, he departs nowhere."<sup>317</sup> This assertion bespeaks the connection between Augustine's Trinitarian theology and his ecclesiology, which is to say that because Christ remains with his followers, the proper function of his community is to testify to God's enduring presence within the world.<sup>318</sup> Augustine writes:

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<sup>317</sup> *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 2, 8, (2).

<sup>318</sup> "For one does not approach God across intervals of space but by likeness," Augustine writes, "and by unlikeness he draws away from Him...but as we have already mentioned, man is said to be 'to the image' on account of an imperfect likeness, and, therefore, 'to our image,' in order that man might be the image of the Trinity, not equal to the Trinity as the Son to the Father, but approaching it, as has been said, by a kind of similarity, just as nearness, not of place but of a sort of imitation, may be signified even in distant things" (*De Trinitate*, Book VII, ch. 6, (12)). The work of the Church is to proclaim the 'nearness' of God, Augustine argues, which is a way of saying that the testimony of the Church points to the presence of God in the world because of the movement of its love. The Church, as the body of Christ, imitates Christ without seeking to be God. Thus, the tension between Augustine's account of the 'imperfect image' of Christ's community as the body of Christ, though they are not



But you have not stood upright: recall from where you have fallen, from where he who fell before you cast you down. For he cast you down not by force, not by compulsion, but by your own will. For if you did not consent to evil, you would stand upright, you would remain enlightened. Now, however, because you have already fallen from where that light can be seen, and have been wounded in your heart, there has come to you such a one as you might be able to see; and he has shown himself as man in such a way that he sought witness from man. From man God seeks witness, and God has man as witness.<sup>319</sup>

This does not mean that God requires humankind as witnesses, Augustine suggests, but God has man as witness for man's sake so that God may be clearly revealed to the world while confounding those who do not believe. Augustine's assertion here is that the movement of the Church within the world reflects God's love insofar as its function as witness is entirely for the benefit of humankind and not a satisfaction of

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equal with Christ's own perfection, can be addressed by considering how Augustine articulates the relationship between the Persons of God (*De Trinitate*, Book VI, ch. 8, (9)). Following 1 John 4:16, Augustine argues that God is love, and so the Persons of the Trinity are eternally unified as love. "But this communion itself is consubstantial and coeternal," Augustine states, "and if this communion itself can be appropriately designated as friendship, let it be so called, but it is more aptly called love" (*De Trinitate*, Book VI, ch. 5, (7)). This same movement of love corresponds to Augustine's understanding of the Church's relationship to Christ in the sense that it is God's love that shapes and characterizes the Church. The Church is Christ's body, yet the Church itself is not God, but loves after God's own love in a way that testifies to God's presence and likeness. Just as the Trinity is unified by love, Christ's body is also unified with its Head through love. However, because the Trinity is the proper source of love, the community of Christ's followers are related to Christ by imitating this love rather than becoming the source themselves. Thus, unity between Christ's disciples, and between the Church and Christ himself, relies on the same love of God that unifies the Trinity. "But we are blessed by Him, through Him, and in Him," Augustine writes, "because by His gift we are one among ourselves; but we are one spirit with Him, because our souls hold fast to Him" (*De Trinitate*, Book VI, ch. 5, (7)). The term 'imperfect', then, does not bespeak a deficiency of love or an inconsistency in the relatedness between Christ and the Church, but appropriately resists the kind of self-love that would otherwise lead to an ecclesial self-determination that sets itself apart from the love of God. "Consequently, neither the whole nor any part of the Church desires that it be worshipped instead of God, nor to be God to anyone who belongs to the temple of God – that temple built out of gods created by the uncreated God" (*Enchiridion*, ch. 15, (56)). The Church will inherit the Kingdom of God when it comes in fullness, and so Augustine uses Paul's words from Romans 8:17 as his point of reference. "Therefore we are called [Christ's] heirs," Augustine writes, "for he has left us the peace of the Church, a peace which we possess in this life, in our possession through faith in the divine plan of salvation revealed in time...moreover, we will become his coheirs when death will be swallowed up into victory at the end of the age, for we will then be like him when we see him as he is" (*Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Question 75, (1)).

<sup>319</sup> *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 2, 8, (3).

God's need. Instead, the Church glorifies God by being a witness of God's grace, and this witness is characterized by the love and forgiveness God extends to the world through Christ.<sup>320</sup> If not for the Church, Augustine argues, "then charity itself, which unites men to one another with the bond of unity, would have no way of joining and almost fusing souls with each other, if men learned nothing from other men."<sup>321</sup> This is the reason the celebration of the Eucharist is a useful image for Augustine's articulation of the relationship between Christ and the Church. We are that which we receive, Augustine states, and so the Lord's Table intimately connects Christ's followers both to himself and to one another. "Be united in love;" Augustine writes, "be united in undivided charity. When Heretics receive this sacrament, they receive

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<sup>320</sup> For our purposes we have concentrated on Augustine's account of Christ's relation to the Church, however, the maturation of Augustine's Trinitarian theology involved an imaginative consideration of the mysterious, non-corporeal elements of Trinitarian unity. As Lewis Ayres notes, "Augustine seems to see our reimagining of the created order as an essential part of our learning to think through the Trinitarian communion. Growing in understanding that the divine transcends the creation and operates through, in and with a *sui generis* power and by an immediate and mysterious presence helps us in the imagining of the divine three and their relations beyond corporeal imagery." The purpose of this move, Ayre suggests, is to acknowledge that Christ does not move independently of his communion with the entirety of the Trinity. "Just as Christ uses his flesh – and fleshly words – to draw us towards the mystery of God, the triune God constructs and governs the intelligible created order such that it may draw the mind towards knowledge and love of, and humility before, its Creator" (Ayres, *Augustine and the Trinity*, p. 192). The love enacted by the Church, then, is rightly understood as a love that turns creation back toward God – which can be said to be a restoration between the created order and the Trinity.

<sup>321</sup> *De doctrina Christiana*, Prologue, (6). Oliver O'Donovan rightly notes that the Eucharist is especially significant not only because it corporeally links Christ with his followers, it signifies the manner in which the witness of the Church is manifested in the world. The community of Christ is a community of love, and this is exemplified through the suffering they willingly endure after Christ's own suffering. O'Donovan writes: "*The eucharist* is the sign that marks the suffering community. Of all the sacraments none had been so badly misrepresented by the inclination of the Western theological tradition to individualise. The effectiveness of this sign should not be looked for in a 'sacramental grace' which affects the believer in a different way from other kinds of grace but in the *formation of the church*. The 'one loaf' binds 'many' into 'one body' (*The Desire of the Nations*, p. 180). Augustine's account of Eucharistic ecclesiology seems to place significant weight on what it means for the Christian community to be joined together as one body at the table. The emphasis has less to do with individual penitence, and more to do with cultivating an interrelatedness that lives out the kind of love of which Christ is the exemplar.

testimony against themselves, because they strive for division; whereas the bread betokens unity...you are there on the table; you are there in the chalice. You are this body with us, for, collectively, we are this body. We drink the same chalice because we live the same life.”<sup>322</sup>

Augustine asserts that Christ is present amongst his followers at the Eucharist in the same way they are present with Christ in his suffering and death, but the continuity of Christ’s divinity and humanity will only be fully revealed when Christ returns to judge the world. For the disciples, the celebration of the Eucharist is an act of remembrance that testifies to the unbroken relationship between Christ and his community of followers, yet the celebration itself anticipates what is yet to come for Christ himself states that he will not partake of the bread or wine until the fullness of the Kingdom arrives.<sup>323</sup> Remembering Christ in this way is not an invitation for his disciples to reflect on his absence, but points instead to the reality of Christ’s living body made manifest by the fellowship of believers. When Christ refers to the coming fullness of God’s Kingdom at the last supper, he does not mean to suggest that the relatedness between himself and his disciples varies by degrees in such a way that he will become more present in the world and to his followers at the final judgement than he was throughout his ministry. Augustine is clear that the final judgement will reveal Christ’s divine nature in full, but this revealing does not overcome a weakness of Christ’s humanity by making his divinity visible. For

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<sup>322</sup> *Sermon 6*, trans. Michael Denis, (2).

<sup>323</sup> Luke 22: 14-20.

Augustine, the suffering servanthood of Christ conceals his divine nature in a way that does not contradict it, and so the power that Christ possesses is as unchanging as his corporeal union with his disciples. This continuity is important, for if Augustine means for us to understand Christ's humanity and divinity as consistent aspects of his being then his appearance at the final judgement cannot correct an imperfection in his form or rearticulate the manner in which his disciples relate to him as his body. Rather, this will be a time when Christ, revealed in divine glory, takes his rightful place as the head of his body of believers and leads them into the kingdom of God. Breidenthal frames it this way:

Augustine identifies the divine form of Jesus with his appearance as the "head" or "principle" informing the community of believers. Thus his manifestation as divine Word is at the same time the manifestation of the church as his body.<sup>324</sup>

The question Breidenthal is interested here concerns whether Augustine means for us to understand Christ's humanity, which is his visible form up until the point of judgement, as something that is set aside once judgement has been passed. The divine form that Christ assumes when he leads his followers into the kingdom of God, then, would essentially replace his humanity thus ending any hypostatic union of natures. According to Breidenthal, this question needs to be framed with a clear understanding of what Augustine is not saying here. When Christ's divinity becomes plainly visible to those who love him, this does not signify a 'passing away' of his humanity whereby a dominant divine nature causes the other to diminish. Rather,

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<sup>324</sup> Breidenthal, "Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation," p. 496.

Augustine indicates that the bond between the Father and the Son, manifested by the union between Christ's divinity and humanity, is not mutable or subject to conditionality. When Christ himself leads his followers, those who constitute his body, into the kingdom of God, Augustine seems to take this literally; the community of believers are the human form of Christ who is their head. Thus, the servant form of Christ does not simply vanish, but remains visibly present within this fellowship. Breidenthal states that, "for Augustine, the act whereby the divine Word has joined itself to our humanity is irrevocable."<sup>325</sup>

There are two 'modes' in which the union of Christ's divine and human natures is manifested, Breidenthal states, but it should not be understood that the visibility of one form is simply the 'mirror image' or 'reversal' of the other. The first mode corresponds to the visible humanity of Christ, and for Augustine, this in the mode that lasts throughout the duration of Christ's ministry on earth - including the post-resurrection period prior to the ascension. The second mode makes visible Christ's divinity, though Augustine purposefully limits his discussion concerning the Christ's precise visible shape because, as Breidenthal notes, no one has ever seen God.<sup>326</sup> What is important here is that the manifestation of form, from a visible

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid., p. 497.

<sup>326</sup> Augustine states, "Neither God the Father, nor His Word, nor His Spirit, which is the one God, is in any way changeable with regard to that which He is, and that by which He is what He is, and, therefore, He is still less visible. There are indeed some things which are changeable but not visible, as our thoughts, our memories, our wills, and every incorporeal creature, but nothing is visible that is not at the same time changeable. Wherefore the substance, or to speak more precisely, the essence of God, wherein we understand according to our own limited measure and in however small a degree, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can in no way be visible in itself, since it is in no way changeable" (*De Trinitate*, Book III, ch. 10, (21).

humanity to a visible divinity, is not indicative of a movement whereby the former mode overshadows the latter. “Rather,” Breidenthal claims, “Augustine seems to say that the human form is projected outward, as it were, becoming identified with the community of believers who now make their appearance as the body of Christ.”<sup>327</sup> By revealing his divinity and ‘showing himself to those who love him’, Augustine is suggesting that Christ does not withdraw from his humanity, but is, in a way, intentionally revealing the existing connection between his divinity and the corporeal reality of his followers in its fullest sense – this is the community of believers that now forms his body of which he is the head. Thus, Breidenthal writes that Augustine understands the corporeality of Christ’s body literally, that is, the community of Christ’s followers become his physical body, “the human flesh and the human soul, the *human form* of the divine Word.”<sup>328</sup> Put simply, by ‘projecting’ his humanity outwardly, Christ becomes radically identified with his followers and is revealed to be at once the church and the Word.<sup>329</sup> This is more than simply saying

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<sup>327</sup> Ibid., p. 497.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., p. 497.

<sup>329</sup> Christ’s conversation with Paul in Acts 9:4 frames Augustine’s understanding of the relationship between Christ and his community of believers. In *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine suggests that Christ’s confrontation with Paul on the road to Damascus points to the enduring connectivity between Christ in heaven and his followers on earth. For John Rettig, the connection between Christ and his Church here is best described as a ‘mystical’ connection, though this connection ‘effects mankind’s divine destiny’ (see *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, trans. John Rettig, Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995, pp. 97-120). Christ’s familiarity with the persecution of his followers is more than a distanced witnessing, but is, instead, experiential. According to Augustine’s reading, though Christ ‘sits at the right hand of the Father’, on earth he ‘hungers, thirsts, and is a stranger’. Augustine interprets Christ’s interaction with Paul as something more than a sympathetic understanding of the suffering the Christian community endures as a result of Paul’s persecution, rather, Christ suffers as his followers suffer because of his enduring humanity. However, as Gregory asserts, Breidenthal’s reading of Augustine relies on this continuity between the two natures of Christ so that a love of God and a love of the neighbour can coincide precisely because of the everlasting congruence of Christ’s humanity and divinity. For Breidenthal, “a

that the community of Christ's followers is 'like' a body, or functionally 'resembles' the movement and connectivity of a body. The intimacy with which each member of Christ's community is related to one another is grounded upon the intimate relation between Christ's humanity and divinity. Christ, as the head of his body, does not separate himself from the body though he ascends to the Father, Augustine explains, instead, by commending his body to his followers, Christ does not fully depart the world but is scattered throughout it in the form of the physical bodies that constitute his Church.<sup>330</sup> "Extend love through the whole world if you wish to love Christ, because Christ's members lie throughout the whole world," Augustine writes, "if you love apart, you have been divided, you are not in the Body. If you are not in the Body, you are not under the Head."<sup>331</sup> In this way, the function of the body of Christ, his community of followers, is to be a witness to the presence of Christ within the world. "Therefore," Augustine writes, "the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of heaven."<sup>332</sup>

### **Part C. The Christian Church as Witness to the Humanity and Divinity of Christ**

The emerging kingdom of Christ is marked by expressions of neighbourly love that are contrary to the love commended by the world. For Augustine, the church is a witness to Christ because of this love, but the source of this love does not then belong to the church independently of God though Christ ascends to the Father.

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response to Jesus," Gregory states, "always involves a response to God and neighbour" (*Politics and the Order of Love*, p. 240).

<sup>330</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 10, (9).

<sup>331</sup> *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 10, (8).

<sup>332</sup> *City of God*, Book XX, (9).

Rather, as Augustine asserts, just as Christ is eternally present within his community of followers, so too does God remain love's eternal and proper source. "There is no need, therefore, brothers, that your heart be enlarged by us," Augustine argues, "ask and receive from God that you love one another. You should love all men, even your personal enemies, not because they are brothers but in order that they may be brothers, in order that you may always burn with brotherly love, whether for one already become a brother or for an enemy so that by loving he may become a brother."<sup>333</sup> The capacity of the church to function as both body and witness relies on the presence of Christ, and though the orientation of the Church's radical love is at odds with worldly love, Augustine is clear that the space established by the Church within the world is not an expression of escapism but reflects the Christian responsibility to engage the world in love. Put differently, for Christ's followers to properly live as his Church, they must love properly and extend this love hospitably and indiscriminately just as God first loved the world through Christ.<sup>334</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>333</sup> *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 10, 7, (3).

<sup>334</sup> Although we cannot sufficiently address Augustine's treatment of Church dynamics here, it should be acknowledged that Augustine is clear that proper love amidst Christ's followers readily engages the problem of heresy. Heretics are "expelled by the truth," Augustine writes in *Tractate 23*, 6, (4), but the stress Augustine places upon the rejection of heretics from the body of Christ seems to imply that those who disagree with the church concerning the truth of God are expelled by nothing else but this truth, which, as I read it, is a way of saying that Augustine denies any impetus for judgment that is apart from God's truth. Only God knows the elect, thus, "because the Churches are also full of those who will be separated by winnowing, as on the threshing floor," Augustine writes, "the glory of this house does not yet appear as fully as it will in time to come, when everyone who is there will be there forever" (*City of God*, Book XVIII, ch. 48). The connection between God's love and the judgment of those who stand apart from God's truth is important for Augustine precisely because both belong to God alone. The Church, as Christ's body, acknowledges that the divine source of love and the divine source of judgment are both rooted in God. Ecclesial discipline, then, is not an invitation for the body of Christ to seek its perfection on its own terms, for this is an entirely separate movement from Christ's call to love unconditionally. Rather, as Augustine argues, "if the ark symbolized the Church, you see, of course, that it is necessary for the Church in this flood of the world to contain each kind,



catholic unity Augustine wishes to establish is different than the sort of communal cohesion or political body formed within a competitive worldly framework, which is to say that the Church does not reinforce exclusivity, but loves unconditionally by welcoming all into Christ's body. The body, then, does not strive to love and serve itself in such a way that Christians attend only to the needs of other Christians. Rather, because Christ is the exemplar of self-sacrificial love, the Church must model this love by extending it beyond itself to the neighbour. Augustine states:

You say, then, that you love Christ – keep his commandment and love your brother! But if you do not love your brother, how do you love him whose commandment you scorn? Brothers, I do not weary of speaking about the love in the name of Christ. The more intense desire you, too, have for this thing, the more we hope that [love] itself grows in you and casts fear out, in order that pure fear abiding forever may remain. Let us endure the world, let us endure tribulations, let us endure the scandals of temptations. Let us not depart from the way, let us hold fast to the unity of the Church, let us hold fast to Christ, let us hold fast to love. Let us not be torn apart from the members of his Bride, let us not be torn apart from the faith, so that we may glory in his presence.<sup>335</sup>

Augustine seems to indicate that for the Church to love properly it must love itself properly, that is, if its members are to remain unified in love without being 'torn apart from the faith', then their love should reflect the same love Christ extends to the world. In essence, Augustine seems to indicate that self-love and love of God coalesce in Christ. O'Donovan states it this way:

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both raven and the dove. Who are the ravens? They who seek the things that are their own. Who are the doves? They who seek the things that are Christ's" (*Tractate* 6, 2, (4).

<sup>335</sup> *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 9, 11, (2).

Love is the force which draws every part to its completeness in the whole, and the self-love of the whole is that state of achieved cohesion in which there is no more separateness of division left in the universe. Mutual love stands to this achieved self-love as the many 'sons of God' stand to the Son. In some moods, Augustine was capable of hinting at an extraordinarily collectivist Christology. In a phrase which has become almost as popular a tag as the notorious *totus Christus, caput et corpus*, he speaks of one who loves God's sons becoming a member of God's Son, joined in love in the structure of Christ's body.<sup>336</sup>

We need to be clear about what O'Donovan is not saying about Christ's relationship with the Church, and, in turn, the Church's presence in the world. The idea of a 'collectivist' Christology does not mean that mutual love of this kind bespeaks a redirection of love away from one another toward Christ. The point here is that proper self-love and our love for one another becomes possible precisely because it is *not* simply a redirection away from the neighbour towards God. The unity established within the body of Christ is dependent on the love Christ exemplifies, but unity based on Christian love acknowledges the singular uniqueness of each member as something more than a means of seeking God. We do not simply regard the use value in one another when we choose to love the neighbour; rather, those who are a part of Christ's body delight in the neighbour because they are creatures of God. Our recognition of one another as God's children is a movement of properly oriented love, which is why when we love the neighbour we do not love for the

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<sup>336</sup> O'Donovan, *The Problem of Self-Love in St. Augustine*, p. 132. Augustine states: "And since [Christ] is the Head, we the members, the Son of God is one. Therefore, he who loves the sons of God loves the Son of God, and he who loves the Son of God loves the Father. No one can love the Father unless he should love the Son, and he who loves the Son love also the sons of God. What sons of God? The members of the Son of God. And by loving he also himself becomes a member and by love comes to be situated in the structure of the Body of Christ, and there will be one Christ loving himself. For when the members love one another, the Body loves itself (*Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 10, 3).

exclusive reason of communing with God at the expense of our singularity; rather, authentic love of the neighbour is neither prior nor secondary to our love of God. Our delight in one another actively seeks to attend to the claims of the neighbour, and so the difference between a love redirected and an attentive love concerns false ordering; that is, Augustine does not suggest that our love of God prioritizes itself over the neighbour so that one is eclipsed by the other. Instead, the enjoyment of the neighbour is made possible by virtue of the love of God and the created world he has authored.<sup>337</sup> O'Donovan writes:

The church's active life is based on delight at what God has done. Delight is not a matter of contemplation and reflection only, but of active celebration; yet the activity is founded on something *there*, the handiwork of God, and is not simply self-generated. When we care for our neighbour's welfare, it is because we are delighted by our neighbour: by the sheer facticity of this other human that God has made; by the fact that God has given, and vindicated, a determination

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<sup>337</sup> Though Augustine contrasts properly oriented love against sinful vice, we need not interpret this as a competitive relationship between loving the neighbour and loving God. In chapter 10 of *Christian Education*, Augustine defines charity as, "a motion of the soul whose soul purpose is the enjoy God for His own sake and one's self and one's neighbour for the sake of God. Lust, on the other hand, is a motion of the soul bent upon enjoying one's self, one's neighbour, and any creature without reference to God" (*Christian Instruction*, 10, (16)). The soul that loves God moves in a way that reflects this love, and so this statement initially seems to suggest that the otherness of the neighbour is lost in light of an overarching commitment to God. Augustine's account of lust in this passage, however, seems to shift the emphasis of his consideration of proper love whereby he does not negate the neighbour, but joins love of God and love of neighbour in a way that resists the temptation of sinful objectivity. Augustine argues that love oriented away from God is sin, thus love of the neighbour occurring apart from a love of God bespeaks a lustful conditionality, that is, enjoyment of this kind is motivated by a desire to possess those things that we love selfishly. Lust places conditions upon its object, which is something other than the self-sacrificial love Christ calls us to imitate. While loving the neighbour for the sake of God infinitely expands our capacity to love unconditionally, lust problematically transforms the neighbour into the object of our desire. A love of God enables us to love the neighbour freely as part of the same movement, which is different than the negation of the neighbour's individuality by focusing entirely on God. To be sure, this does not eliminate the tension found throughout Augustine's writing as he shifts between collectivist/individualist ideas, but the weight Augustine places on the detrimental effects of sin in comparison with a love oriented towards God properly locates our love for the neighbour in light of our sinfulness. This is different than neighbour love redirected.

of our neighbour to health, rationality and relationship...at the heart of making and doing there lies discernment of what the world is and is meant for. Activity is responsive; otherwise it becomes tyrannous and destructive.<sup>338</sup>

In this sense, the responsive activity of the Church requires the presence of the neighbour, which is something Arendt would agree with in part, yet O'Donovan's claim is that our encounter with the neighbour is more than recognition of sheer alterity. Because Christian love is continually occupied with the needs of the other, Arendt argues that until the infinite claim of the neighbour can fully satisfied, true political life cannot be realized. This means that although Augustine anticipates the possibility of authentic political life, this life must be postponed until the fullness of God's Kingdom. If the Church is characterized by its commitment to the neighbour's need, Arendt's criticism rightly challenges Augustine to provide suitable means to account for the scope of this claim.

The life of the Church imitates the love Christ exemplified through his death and resurrection, yet as we have seen, action predicated upon a response to an existing claim conflicts with Arendt's central argument that authentic political action cannot exist within spaces that have been conditioned. This point, however, is not

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<sup>338</sup> O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, p. 183. O'Donovan argues that the origins of the Church are rooted in the 'Christ-event', and so he is critical of doctrines which point to the Church's presence in Israel prior to Pentecost – a problematic claim O'Donovan accuses Augustine of subscribing to. While it is true that the Church represents the fulfilment of promises made to Israel, O'Donovan recognizes two fundamental errors inherent in this doctrine that require attention. The first error, O'Donovan states, concerns the Church's attempt to 'sufficiently account' for Israel's continued presence in the world. By doing this, the Church, "instead of wrestling with Israel for its own fulfilment, turns its back on Israel as a displaced irrelevance." The second problem concerns a negation of Pentecostal authorisation whereby the Church does not understand itself as Israel's hope for freedom in the way Christ proclaimed, but prolongs the 'ancient faithfulness' of Israel, though this hope is misdirected (O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations*, p. 162).

entirely unfamiliar to Augustine, who asserts that Christian love must avoid preferentially selecting or dominating the object of its love. Put simply, when the Church selectively determines whom it will love without availing itself to the neighbour's claim, the movement of this love can only be tyrannical in nature, that is, by preferentially choosing and controlling the object of its love, the Church becomes the origin of love's movement. Thus, while Arendt and Augustine seem to agree that the terms of human interaction cannot be dictated by individual desire if meaningful political activity is to occur, Arendt's contention is that the self-sacrificial nature of Christian love goes too far by problematically framing human interaction within the infinite claim of the neighbour. Arendt's treatment of Christian love does not negate the pursuit of political happiness, but she limits its capacity to function within a worldly realm that is ultimately unsuitable for its actualization. This is chiefly because the claim of Christ absorbs all neighbour love into itself, while the infinite claim of the neighbour cannot be satisfied without access to an infinite abundance of resources. Arendt's critical analysis of Augustine concludes that Christian love of the neighbour defeats itself precisely at the point when God becomes our neighbour, yet for Augustine, this is the moment when neighbour love and forgiveness becomes possible. If, as Augustine suggests, Christ is always at once both divine and human, and if Christ's self-sacrificial servanthood can rightly be understood as the exemplar of how Christians are to love and forgive, then we need to approach Augustine's account of neighbour love not in terms of its deficiency, but of its relation to the infinitely abundant divine power of Christ. The fundamental difference between

Arendt and Augustine, then, concerns the power Christ possesses which is the basis for the enactment of Christian love and forgiveness. The capacity to meet the needs of the neighbour and forgive their trespasses can be actualized because Christ comes in abundance, so the turn here, for Augustine, is that because the love made manifest in Christ's servanthood is divinely inexhaustible, authentic political life need not be postponed until the fullness of God's Kingdom satisfies all claims – all claims have already been satisfied by Christ. Augustine's account of neighbour love, of *caritas*, is a different political principle than Arendt recognized it to be, yet at its source, the movement of this love is what will allow Augustine to anticipate the fullness of God's Kingdom while recognizing the signs present within this reality.

This is where Christian forgiveness is brought into focus, for it is by Christ's abundance of love that our capacity to forgive as God forgives is made possible. The posture of prayer taken up by the *civitas Dei* is a readiness to forgive all, even one's enemies, so that this fellowship may be mutually enjoyed. "Love your enemies," Augustine writes, "in such a way that you desire them to be brothers; love your enemies in such a way that they are called into your fellowship. For in such a way did he love who, hanging on a cross, said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"<sup>339</sup> Arendt mischaracterizes neighbour love by focussing on the infinite claim of Christ that stands in between a direct political relationship with our neighbours, yet Augustine's account of the Incarnation responds to this challenge by pointing to Christ's radical surplus of love that answers this infinite claim. We

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<sup>339</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 1, 9, (1).

forgive, then, because it makes possible the fellowship enjoyed by Christ's followers just as it is witness to the restorative work of God that is already present in the world. Just as God forgives and brings us into a right relation with him, Augustine suggests, so also does forgiving one another after Christ's example lead us into right relation with each other. This restored fellowship is an expression of the divine peace that has not reached its eschatological fullness, yet is already present in this reality, including as a political action. "This peace the Heavenly City possesses in faith while on its pilgrimage, and by this faith it live righteously, directing toward the attainment of that peace every good act which it performs either for God, or – since the city's life is inevitably a social one – for neighbour."<sup>340</sup> Augustine is clear that the active life of Christ's followers constitutes a political engagement that is at once an anticipation and participation of the fullness of God's kingdom. The completeness of the neighbour's being is as present within this reality as it is in the next, which is why the fellowship and sociality Augustine refers to corresponds to both God and neighbour distinctly. In Christ's love, we encounter the neighbour as a person, which means that the love of Christ does not overwhelm our capacity to encounter one another as distinct beings, but empowers us to view the other in fullness. Forgiveness, then, is recognition that even in our sinful conditionality, we may encounter one another in the fellowship of God. As Breidenthal writes, "to cling to faith in Christ is to cling to the faith that the infinite debt has been absorbed by Christ. The apostolic power to heal and to exorcise is a way of talking about a

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<sup>340</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIX Ch. 17.

surplus of grace that enables political interaction – the anticipation of the *politeuma* that awaits us in heaven.”<sup>341</sup>

This chapter has argued that Augustine’s account of forgiveness rests largely on his confession that Jesus Christ is both fully God and fully human. The implications of this confession mean that there is an ontological reordering of the way God relates to humankind and the way human beings relate to one another. That God has drawn radically near is political – it is political because it has altered the way human beings interact with one another. In both his divinity and humanity, Christ becomes the exemplar of love and the basis of Christian fellowship. As the head of the Christian church, Christ binds his faithful together in community as witnesses of his presence within the world. It is through Christ’s divinity and humanity that perfect neighbour love is characterized, and so Christ does not stand in between neighbours, but sets the standard for accepting the totality of the neighbour’s being. The Christian is able to know God because they know Christ, and they are able to know their neighbour because Christ has become their neighbour. The final chapter will examine Arendt’s misreading of Augustine’s account of Christian love that must be reconsidered in light of Augustine’s own appeal for Christian political life within this world. By examining how forgiveness as the enactment of neighbour love can be treated as a viable political principle for Christian community, we find that Augustine not only calls for a political life sanctified by Christ, but that the emergence of this political culture is inherent to the

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<sup>341</sup> Breidenthal, *Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation*, p. 499



life of Christian community as it struggles to enact Christ's call to love and forgive the neighbour within this worldly reality.

#### **Chapter 4: The Political Authenticity of Christian Forgiveness: An Augustinian Response to Arendt**

The objectives for this chapter build on the discussion of Christ's divine and human nature in that the radical nearness of the Incarnation has set the example of how Christians are to relate to one another politically, and it will be argued that Christian community is grounded on Christ's example of forgiveness. For Augustine, contra Arendt, the divine abundant love of Jesus Christ guarantees our capacity to sufficiently meet the claim of the neighbour as it grounds our capacity to forgive. Christians can follow the example of Christ only because his radical abundance has been extended to them in love. While love estranges Christian community from the world in Arendt's estimation, it is the force that connects Christian community to God, to each other, and to the coming perfection of political life exemplified by Christ. By affirming an Augustinian account of authentic Christian political life, we can loose the restrictions Arendt's conceptualization of political life has placed on Christian theological accounts of political forgiveness. In order to accomplish this, this chapter will engage Breidenthal's 1991 dissertation on the concept of freedom in Arendt as a way of addressing Arendt's argument for a distinct separation between the freedom necessary to sustain authentic political life and the political restrictions she argues are inherent within a Christian political theology. Put briefly, Breidenthal argues that Christianity can expect more from the political realm than what Arendt allows. That is, Christian theology must understand political life as an intermingling of righteousness and sin, Breidenthal argues, and while Arendt

understands authentic politics as *amor mundi*, Christians must understand authentic politics as an expression of their love of God and neighbour. While Breidenthal's analysis of Arendt says relatively little about the relationship between political life and forgiveness, his unique analysis of Arendt's own dissertation presents several important challenges to Arendt's reading of Augustine that are worth mentioning. In this way, Breidenthal's text situates the objectives of this dissertation amongst modern reconstructions of Augustinianism, and by framing Breidenthal's work alongside the discussion on political forgiveness taken up by this chapter, we see how forgiveness is critical in the shaping of Christian political culture.

### **Part A. Arendt and the Worldly Estrangement of Christian Community**

As we have seen throughout her work, Arendt repeatedly returns to what she conceives to be the basis of authentic political life: a space within the world where humankind can freely interact with one another as political equals. The necessity for forgiveness, Arendt claims, corresponds to the inherent risk posed by the freedom to act spontaneously, that is, forgiveness functions as the remedy to overcome transgressions because it itself is a part of action. Arendt distinguishes political forgiveness from the Christian account of forgiveness both in terms of its religious origin and its relationship to love. What this means is that Arendt attributes the discovery of the political relevance of forgiveness to Jesus of Nazareth, which, she asserts, is an historical claim without any religious connotation. The separation of Jesus' historicity from his divine claim is part of the essential difference between

Arendt's account of forgiveness and Augustine's theological articulation of love's relationship with forgiveness. Following her argument in *The Human Condition*, the Christian assumption that only love can forgive because only love is fully receptive to the neighbour's being is quickly dismissed by Arendt, who argues that if this assumption were true, then forgiveness would be beyond the scope of her account of authentic political life. In short, Arendt maintains that if forgiveness is a movement of love, as Augustine claims, then its political relevance is suitable only when contextualized by its eschatological end, that is, forgiveness based on neighbour love is oriented toward the coming fellowship of believers within the complete fullness of God's kingdom. In this way, Christian forgiveness has no worldly value, according to Arendt, because it is grounded in love of neighbour, and because love is inherently otherworldly, forgiveness, as an enactment of love, shares this 'otherworldly' character. This is also the basis for Arendt's critical reading of Augustine's account of the appearance of Jesus-as-neighbour that she takes up in *Love and Saint Augustine*. The development and maturation of Augustine's account of neighbour love, according to Arendt, fails to provide a space in which the neighbour can be regarded as a complete person. Arendt suggests that the Incarnation draws all neighbour love to itself, thereby rendering our love for the neighbour provisional at best. It is here, however, that Augustine allows us to consider the divine abundance of the love of Christ in a way that draws us to the fullness of the neighbour's being. Jesus Christ, as neighbour and exemplar of forgiveness, gives us the means to meet the neighbour as persons because he is at once both divine and human. In this way,

the abundant love of Christ does not come to subvert political life, but to fulfil it. Christian love for the neighbour is about working to actualize life in the kingdom of God on earth, which places this understanding of neighbour in contrast with the political quietness characterized by Arendt's understanding of Christian community. Christian forgiveness, because it is a movement of love, is equally active in terms of the restorative work it seeks to accomplish. If politics depends upon surplus, as Arendt maintains, then Augustine's account of the Incarnation is not at cross-purposes with the political. The active, abundant love of Christ answers the neighbour's claim as it works through forgiveness to establish the political fellowship of those faithful to God. We must look closely, then, at how Christian community is meant to navigate the sinful conditionality of the world in order to determine how, for Augustine, the capacity to love and forgive bears witness to the reality that the political life which awaits the faithful in heaven is present in the witness of Christian community here on earth.

We know that Arendt's central criticism of Augustinian political theology pertains directly to the seemingly isolating and otherworldly quality of the Christian community and neighbour love. Arendt stresses that the political life of the Christian community cannot be actualized here on earth, but must wait until the fullness of God's kingdom arrives. This otherworldly quality directly shapes the Christian command to love the neighbour, and so, according to Arendt, the enactment of neighbour love is always at odds with authentic political life. As a

political virtue, Arendt argues that loving one's neighbour jeopardizes the sheer political relatedness of those who appear within the public realm, and this, as we have seen, is because love collapses the necessary distance established by the world that exists between political actors. Moreover, given that God himself has become our neighbour and redirects all love back to him, Arendt claims that even the possibility of loving the neighbour is defeated by its very source such that loving the neighbour is always provisional and only occurs as an enactment of a love of Christ.

We also know, according to Arendt, that the world is to be loved because it affords the possibility of political life insofar as it distinguishes meaningful action from other aspects of human life that are properly relegated to separate, private spaces.<sup>342</sup> That is, the world becomes central to political life in the way it draws political actors together, creates a space in which appearance is possible, and, ultimately, stands against the impermanence of humankind's mortal condition. Political life depends upon public appearances, which, in turn, makes human life relevant. Arendt seeks to contrast the importance of public life with a philosophic heritage, beginning with the Plato, which negates the significance of the world as the

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<sup>342</sup> Arendt argues that the emergence of private life within the public realm has, in part, lead to an inability to properly distinguish the truly political from the social. According to Arendt, equality has become the hallmark of society such that the assertion of individual distinction is now a matter of private interest (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 41). Social equality affirms the importance of quantifiable and predictable patterns within human society, which, in turn, justifies the use of social and economic terminology as the dominant lexicon. At its core, this is the replacement of action for shared behaviour, and the corollary of this move has lead to a refined science of statistical analysis that undergirds modern social economics. This shift has been detrimental to authentic political life, Arendt asserts, where exceptional moments that were once valued are now anomalies amidst the meaninglessness of human social affairs. The problem Arendt identifies concerns how the meaning of human interaction is, as she says, "disclosed not in everyday life but in rare deeds, just as the significance of a historical period shows itself only in the few events that illuminate it" (p. 42).

space in which human beings make their appearance. “This hierarchy has recently been challenged in a way that seems to me highly significant,” Arendt writes, “could it not be that appearances are not there for the sake of the life process but, on the contrary, that the life process is there for the sake of appearances?”<sup>343</sup> Appearance is directly related to the assertion of individual identity for Arendt, and so to be known apart from the animalistic desires inherent within our biological nature requires us to step outside of the social realm. Through political action, we intentionally locate ourselves within the world in a way that celebrates the freedom established by it. Thus, Arendt’s contention with an Augustinian political theology is rooted in her understanding of Christianity’s intentional negation of the world for the promise of the coming Kingdom of God. For Augustine, Arendt says, worldly life is something to be overcome, and so the life of the Christian community within the world, as a mutable and finite reality, corresponds to humankind’s own sinful nature. That is, since Arendt argues that an earthly immortality can only be achieved through the endeavours and activity of humankind, Augustine’s claim that all things fashioned by mortal hands are simply extensions of humankind’s corruption can only be competitively related to the significance Arendt places on worldliness.

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<sup>343</sup> Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, p. 26. What we need to hold in common, Arendt asserts, is the world itself. This is what binds us to those who have come before and those who will follow. It is what endures beyond the limits of our own lives by offering a space in which action can be immortalized. Christianity understands the world differently, not as a common good but as something to be overcome.

For Arendt, Christian love is not merely non-political; it is anti-political because its commitment to self-sacrificially attend to the neighbour directs the entirety of its attention away from the political act of self-disclosure. Augustine writes in the *Confessions* that the happiest life of the Christian reflects a willingness to love as God loves, which, for Arendt, means that individual identity risks being overwhelmed through our imitative enactment of this love. “That is the authentic happy life,” Augustine writes, “to set one’s joy on you, grounded in you and caused by you.”<sup>344</sup> Christian love is premised on the renunciation of one’s own life for the sake of God, and so Arendt’s reference to Augustine’s self-renunciation becomes the foundation for her critique of his otherworldliness. Augustine states that, “my groaning is witness that I am displeased with myself. You are radiant and give delight and are so an object of love and longing that I am ashamed of myself and reject myself.”<sup>345</sup> The distinction between *cupiditas* and *caritas*, according to Augustine, is the distinction between love that clings too tightly to mundane earthly objects and love that attends self-sacrificially to the need of the neighbour. Put simply, rightly ordered love is love oriented in accordance with the divine love of God. Augustine’s rejection of himself is not a turning from his being, but a reorientation of being in light of God’s love for him. In this way, the radiance of God’s love does not eclipse Augustine’s being, but illuminates it. What Augustine rejects is the delight found in oneself apart from the love of God, that is, he cautions

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<sup>344</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, Book X, xxii, (32).

<sup>345</sup> Ibid., Book X, ii, (2).



against delight rooted in the sinful conditionality of the world that stands in contrast with the forgiveness and restorative work God seeks to accomplish in it. When we love we must make the distinction between *cupiditas* and *caritas*, which, Augustine writes, does not mean it is preferable to cease loving in order to escape this risk. Augustine states, “Are you told to love nothing? God forbid! If you love nothing, you will be idle, dead, miserable, and detestable men. Love, then, but be careful what you love. Love of God and of our neighbour is called charity; love of the world and of these passing things is called lust.”<sup>346</sup> Without love we are lifeless, and so Augustine encourages love, yet he is clear that righteous love depends upon how our love aligns with the love of God. The image Augustine offers us here contrasts idleness and movement with a reflection on the active nature of love. If the weight of our love prompts its movement, our activity must inevitably correspond to the object of our love. In this way, righteous love actively seeks after righteousness, just as sinful action is indicative of corrupt love. For Arendt, loving one’s neighbour requires all of our attention and resources, which means that the enactment of Christian love implies that neighbour love frustrates what Arendt understands as meaningful political activity, which is the kind of activity that allows human beings to fashion a home for themselves in the world. Augustine’s account of neighbour love as activity, then, becomes an issue for Arendt because it narrows the realm of human interaction and activity to include only the lover and beloved. So while Christian love demands an encounter with the neighbour insofar as the new social life ushered

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<sup>346</sup> *Commentaries on the Psalms*, 31, 5.

in by Christ becomes an important defence against the world, Arendt argues, communal ties that are based on worldly estrangement possesses meaning only in an eschatological context when God's kingdom can be experienced in its fullness. The earthly life for Christian community, in Arendt's terms, can be characterized by a posture of defence and isolation, and she would contend that Augustine's articulation of *caritas* simply reinforces these limitations rather than suggests the possibility of God's sanctification of political life within this reality.

For Augustine, "self-discovery and discovery of God coincide," Arendt claims, "because by withdrawing into myself I have ceased to belong to the world."<sup>347</sup> The contrast we find in Arendt turns on this sense of self-discovery where human individuality can only be authentically realized by appearing within the world amidst other political actors. Arendt's claim is that the relevance of the world does not arise from anything beyond itself to which meaning might be attributed. Rather, it is this appearance of sheer human individuality that makes the space in which this revealing occurs significant. For the Christian, on the other hand, Arendt contends that, "the world is relevant, not because the Christian still lives in it, to a certain extent by mistake, but on the ground of constant tie to the past and thereby to original kinship, which consists of an equal share in original sin and thus death."<sup>348</sup> In this sense, the world acts as a constant reminder of the danger of our sinful condition, and so the obligation to attend to the neighbour arises in part from this

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<sup>347</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 25.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

recognition. This means that although Christian interrelatedness is not a matter of course, their common effort to strive against the world binds them together as members of a shared faith, as the body of Christ. Membership within Christ's body is not an acknowledgement or expression of authentic individuality, Arendt suggests, but reflects only the connection to one another in Christ. The indirect nature of this interrelatedness bespeaks a shared condition of sin from which the Christian cannot fully escape within earthly life, and so when we confront the neighbour we are, in actuality, confronting our common sinfulness. Arendt's point is that by recognizing the sinfulness in the other, we premise our love for the neighbour in part upon a consideration of our own peril. "This thought is constantly awake from the past," Arendt writes, "from the descent from Adam, in this life which is seen as an enduring trial."<sup>349</sup> Conceptualized in this way, loving the neighbour is a reflection of the Christian desire to draw closer to the love of Christ that redeems humanity's sinful Adamic origin, but the unity of Christian community does not firstly originate from a shared faith in Christ, Arendt writes, it is found in a common past.<sup>350</sup>

The human world makes the neighbour relevant, Arendt suggests, and this is because humanity's common sinfulness is the historic basis for the interdependency amongst those who abide within the earthly city. The new sociality of Christian community, however, is defined by its struggle against the world, and this struggle is comprehensible by first belonging to the world. This is a matter of course, Arendt

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

says, for we are first bound together by sin before we can turn from the world towards God, and though the Christian community forsakes the earthly city they continue to live in the world, which means that throughout the duration of their earthly lives they must confront the reality of their own sinful condition in light of the temptations the world presents to them. Arendt's point here is that, "the human world takes on the singular relevance of its own past. Its own past lives on in the world, and both the fight against the world and the concern with it are comprehensible only by this fact of belonging to the world."<sup>351</sup> Before Christ, the kinship of all people was established by a common Adamic history, yet this sinful past is a constitutive part of the state of grace. God's grace reveals our sinful equality, and though Christ's appearance redeems our common sinful past, only this common past can make Christian faith a common faith.<sup>352</sup> For Arendt, we love the neighbour who stands before us as a reminder both of our own sinfulness and the grace God extends to us through Christ.<sup>353</sup> The duty to attend to the neighbour is an acknowledgement of the way the history of the world explicitly reveals our common sinfulness, and so the task of the Christian, as Arendt understands it, is to attend to the neighbour in such a way that the explicitness of their own sinful being is revealed to them.<sup>354</sup> This is why Arendt argues that "the binding power of the common faith in Christ is secondary," for the acknowledgement of sin precedes the

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<sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

movement from the world into Christian community.<sup>355</sup> Once the explicit sinfulness of the individual is acknowledged, faith in Christ establishes a new sociality that is, essentially, a common defence against the world. 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 ('brother' for neighbour and 'brotherly love' are found throughout Augustine's writings). Out of this explicit tie of brotherliness 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.<sup>356</sup>

Arendt's argument traces the historical roots of sin, and by doing so she establishes a link between the Christian obligation to attend to the neighbour and a common past. According to Arendt, this link crucially determines *caritas* in a way that challenges Augustine's articulation. *Caritas* becomes a corollary of an Adamic legacy whereby the constant peril we face when we encounter the neighbour drives us to love. "Thus," Arendt argues, "love rests on the common knowledge of a common danger."<sup>357</sup> As we reflect upon the constant danger of our sinful condition, we learn to relate to the neighbour in love because we share the same peril, yet this love is a reflection only of a new equality that has taken the place of our common historicity. That is, to love the neighbour as one who is like us in our peril means that we cannot choose whom we love precisely because the neighbour is always present before us as our equal.<sup>358</sup> Since mutual love of this kind is always redirected towards Christ,

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid., p. 111. Arendt makes the point that belonging to one another in Christian community no longer rests upon a common history but by the imitation of one another in love. When we love we

neighbour love is only an impetus for a love of God. Arendt claims that *caritas* may be necessary to bind a community together, but it is only necessary for a community that defends itself against the world until God's Kingdom arrives in full. As the body of Christ, moreover, the love that binds members together within this fellowship dissolves individuality, that is, the entire being of the believer is found in the connection between all of the members of Christ's body.<sup>359</sup> Membership in this sense is unrelated to worldly political unity primarily because it lacks choice, Arendt writes, which is to say that because the members of Christ's body are already equal, they are also already present before any choice can be made. Love extends to everyone who is a part of Christ's body. Yet Arendt links membership and isolation closely together, for it is in the body of Christ where love joins members to the point of forgetting individuality, but it is also love that thrusts the neighbour into sheer isolation before God. Love turns to the individual, not to humankind, Arendt argues, so although there is membership within Christ's body, the believer relates in love to the individual who has been separated from the rest of humankind.<sup>360</sup> The important difference here, according to Arendt, is that the believer does not respond to the individuality of the neighbour as such, but the divine grace of God at work within them. The unity of Christian community, Arendt argues, is a relatedness

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imitate Christ, and so the importance of making this love visible concerns the very possibility of its imitation. Augustine states: "Did Jesus intend to say this: that whatever good things we do should hide from the eyes of men and fear for them to be seen? If you fear spectators, you will not have imitators; therefore, you ought to be seen. But you ought not to do good things for the purpose of being seen" (*Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, 8, 2).

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

grounded on the mutual love of the grace of God at work in each neighbour, and because this community has set itself against the world in defence, she concludes that authentic political life is antithetical to a life governed “by the principle of charity and nothing else.”<sup>361</sup>

While Arendt’s critical reading of Augustine provides us with an important challenge to the possibility of a political theology that affirms neighbour love and forgiveness as underlying principles of Christian community, the basis of Arendt’s central claims are difficult to uphold given the evidence she provides. To be sure, Arendt rightly points out that, for Augustine, *caritas* is dependent upon a confession of faith in Christ. This means that the enactment of neighbour love is part of a movement of love oriented towards God, but it also requires the Christian to attend to the neighbour’s infinite claim before they can cultivate strictly political relationships. However, Arendt wrongly assumes that Augustine provides no ground for the claim of the neighbour to be properly addressed. It is as if, as Breidenthal has argued, Arendt assumes that, “Christian charity has no surplus to bring to the work of neighbouring.”<sup>362</sup> Arendt affirms that political life is an indispensable part of human happiness, and that this claim is not competitively related to the eschatological hope of the Church. That is, Christian political life seeks its ultimate actualization when the Kingdom of God appears in full, which, for Arendt, also bespeaks an insufficiency with the present sinful conditions of the

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<sup>361</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 54.

<sup>362</sup> Breidenthal, *Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation*, p. 499.

world to properly allow for a redeemed politic. On this point, however, Arendt wrongly concludes that Augustine's account of the life of the Church requires estrangement from the world, or that neighbour love is inherently isolating.<sup>363</sup> Arendt mistakenly assumes that the sense of estrangement found in Augustine is premised upon a renunciation of worldly life that is an inherent quality of all Christian social interaction. Arendt is certainly right to suggest that Augustine condemns all worldly relationships that divert love away from God. This move, however, problematically assumes that Augustine leaves no room for a Christian political life that is something other than sinful worldliness or total estrangement. "The question," Breidenthal suggests, "is whether there is for Augustine any middle ground between inauthentic worldliness and absolute isolation."<sup>364</sup> For Breidenthal, there is little within Arendt's critique of Augustine that substantiates her claim of Christian otherworldliness, which is to say that while Arendt connects the irrelevance of the *Civitas Dei* with a provisional expression of neighbour love, the importance of the city within the development of Augustine's theology prompts us to consider how political life is manifested within Christian community. "If we are not ready to do this," Breidenthal writes, "then we must be able to demonstrate positively that for Augustine the soul's return to God is of such a nature that it

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<sup>363</sup> Arendt properly interprets Augustine's account of neighbour love as a moment of mutual self-recognition based on a shared history of sin. However, as Dean Hammer notes, "for Augustine, our inherent corruption always requires a transcendent third through which we recognize ourselves as sharing a fate with others. Arendt never lost sight of the importance of this meditation, but she never resolved its nature, either. Arendt could not seek recourse in an Augustinian God" (Hammer, 'Freedom and Fatefulness: Augustine, Arendt and the Journey of Memory' in *Theory, Culture & Society* 2000, Vol.17 (2), p. 97).

<sup>364</sup> Breidenthal, *The Concept of Freedom in Hannah Arendt: A Christian Assessment*, unpublished PhD dissertation, 1991, p. 269.



precludes any kind of political life. And it is precisely such a demonstration which is lacking in Arendt's analysis."<sup>365</sup>

As we have seen, the Church's defence against the encroachment of worldly values and interrelatedness is hallmarked by a kind of isolation which Arendt argues is informed both by a love of God and recognition of our historic sinfulness. Entering into God's presence is the highest expression of human individuality precisely because it is only before God that the full reality of our being can be understood. For Augustine, God is the source of each and every individual, Arendt writes, and so the question about being is also at once at question about the source of being. Augustine discovered that by turning towards God in love, the world became a desert in which one cannot make a proper home. Our belonging to the world by generation is overcome by isolating ourselves from humankind, Arendt argues, which is to say that by recognizing God as the source of our being we then discover our individuality. In the same way, the neighbour enters our field of vision only indirectly as a way for us to love God. In fact, we cast the neighbour into isolation when we love God through them, and so individuality of this kind corresponds with our appearance before God rather than our appearance before one another as distinct human beings. Thus, indirect love, Arendt writes, "allows each to grasp the other's whole being which lies in God's presence...the individual as such can only be grasped in the isolation in which the believer stands before God."<sup>366</sup> Isolation of this

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

<sup>366</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 111.

kind, however, limits the breadth and purpose of Augustine's usage of the term. Setting oneself apart from the world is certainly a common theme found throughout Augustine's writing; however, Arendt problematically seizes these moments as evidence of Augustine's total rejection of worldly life. Augustine's point is not to flee from the world, but to establish the important link between self-renunciation and love of God. Arendt's exegesis of tractate LXV of Augustine's *Tractates on the Gospel of John* provides us with an example of the difference between rightly ordered love and worldly estrangement. Augustine writes:

Love itself is our death to the world, and our life with God. For if it is death when the soul leaves the body, how is it not death when our love goes forth from the world? Therefore, love is as strong as death.<sup>367</sup>

Arendt uses this passage to support her argument that humankind's discovery of their Being requires that they cast off all that belonged to them as a specific individuals.<sup>368</sup> In this way, love of God overcomes boastful and competitive worldly relatedness such that every human being who loves God becomes an explicit assimilation to God.<sup>369</sup> Put differently, this is a movement whereby the self is rejected in order to live in accord with God. To be sure, Arendt rightly observes that Augustine is unwilling to allow any form of human pride to shape or direct our love for God, yet self-renunciation is not an invitation for total worldly estrangement.

Following the excerpt Arendt cites, Augustine continues by describing the important

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<sup>367</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* LXV, I.

<sup>368</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 79.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

interrelatedness between those who have chosen to love God and those who remain bound in sin. Augustine states:

And what does [God] love in them except health, which he desires, of course, to restore, not the disease, which he comes to drive out? So therefore let us also love one another, so that, as far as possible, by the concern of our love, we may draw one another to having God in us. He himself, who said, 'as I have loved you, that you also love one another,' gives this love to us. Therefore he loved us for this purpose, that we also should love one another, conferring this on us by loving us, that we should be bound together with each other by mutual love and, with members fastened together by so sweet a chain, we may be the body of so great a Head.<sup>370</sup>

What we find here is Augustine's effort to relate properly oriented love with a redeemed interrelatedness, which is to say that there is little indication within this passage that suggests authentic love of God is meant to isolate individuals. Whereas Arendt's interpretation places significant weight on our separation from the world of appearance and speech, Augustine points towards the health of the Christian community that has set itself apart from the corruption of sin by orienting its love differently. Indeed, death to the world is life for Augustine, but death in this sense corresponds to those aspects of our being which prevent us from entering into a right relationship with God and with the neighbour. It does not follow for Augustine that a renunciation of worldly love is also at once the cessation of appearing within it. This would then mean that our capacity to be a witness to God's love within the world is overcome at its very source. Thus, if loving the neighbour requires

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<sup>370</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* LVX, 2, (2).

interaction with those around us, then following God rightly occurs within community rather than in sheer isolation from the world.

### **Part B. Human Individuality and Christian Community: Thomas Breidenthal, Augustine, and Authentic Political Self-disclosure**

Arendt argues that the actualization of *caritas* occurs when we turn from what properly belongs to us as worldly creatures toward God who is the source of our being. This is a choice made in light of the grace God extends to us, which means that by choosing God we have renounced those sinful aspects of ourselves that are brought to light within God's presence.<sup>371</sup> Arendt refers to Augustine's own declaration of self-renunciation as a way of affirming the correlation she seeks to establish between the rejection of self and estrangement from the world. "When man sets up the world anew by his love of the world," Arendt writes, "he simultaneously sets himself up as one who belongs to the world. Similarly, by loving God man belongs to God, his creator."<sup>372</sup> Loving apart from God is the basis of covetousness Arendt claims, which leads her to her conclusion that Augustine's rejection of self, which is a rejection of improperly oriented love, constitutes a complete turning away from the world in which this love is located. While we can agree with Arendt that Augustine rightly correlates love of God with self-renunciation, this does not then invite us to assume that Augustine means for us to abandon the public realm altogether. As Breidenthal notes, a life following God

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<sup>371</sup> *Confessions*, X, ii, (2).

<sup>372</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 81.

involves a reorientation of self-understanding whereby those aspects of our being that were once celebrated are now scorned as sinful pride. However, it is far from certain, Breidenthal writes, “that such a life entails renunciation of a life of speech and witness among other speakers and witnesses. Indeed, when it is restored to its original context, Arendt’s quotation from Augustine suggests quite the opposite.”<sup>373</sup> Breidenthal turns to the passage that immediately precedes the section cited by Arendt as a way of framing her misinterpretation of Augustine’s intended point.

Augustine writes:

‘Behold, you have loved the truth,’ for he who ‘does the truth comes to the light.’ This I desire to do, in my heart before you in confession, but before many witnesses with my pen.<sup>374</sup>

We become increasingly like God through self-rejection, Augustine claims, but what he is specifically rejecting here are the aspects of his being that move in a different direction than a love of God. That is to say, Augustine rejects himself as something that deserves to be celebrated of its own merit. According to Arendt, Augustine chooses his own being in God, but she mistakenly suggests that this movement signifies a retreat from the world and from public witness. Self-rejection in the sense Augustine uses it corresponds with his desire to be known both by God and the ‘witnesses’ to whom he writes. In a sense, then, self-rejection is also a form of self-disclosure that is based upon a turning away from improper self-love toward a ‘truer’ appearance before God. Breidenthal’s point is that, “Augustine’s renunciation

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<sup>373</sup> Breidenthal, *The Concept of Freedom in Hannah Arendt*, p. 270.

<sup>374</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, X, i.

of himself is a coming out into the open, the beginning of a willingness truly to be known.”<sup>375</sup> We can see within the passages immediately following his statement on self-renunciation how Augustine addresses his struggle to be known and found within God’s presence. On this point, Arendt rightly claims that, “it is only here, in his chosen love of the Creator, that the creature sees his limitations and his utter inadequacy.”<sup>376</sup> Augustine argues that true appearance is revealed before God in confession, and so Arendt’s observation here is not initially a departure from Augustine’s intended point. Indeed, Augustine states, “Before you, then, Lord, what I am is manifest.”<sup>377</sup> Yet this is a twofold move for Augustine whereby the sinfulness that is laid bare before God is contrasted with the possibility to turn away from this sinfulness through God’s grace. This grace is a gift extended to us by God, and it is only by this gift, Augustine writes, that he can find pleasure in God or himself.<sup>378</sup> Thus, on the condition that the appearance is true, which is to say that the appearance before God is marked by the rejection of sinful pleasure and desire, making oneself known to God and to others is less about worldly estrangement and more about proper affirmation of the realm of public appearance. This is because it is within the public realm where one may testify to the transformative power of God’s grace and redemption. Augustine writes:

The heart is aroused in the love of your mercy and the sweetness of your grace, by which every weak person is given power, while

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<sup>375</sup> Breidenthal, *The Concept of Freedom in Hannah Arendt*, p. 271.

<sup>376</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 80.

<sup>377</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, X, ii, (2).

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, X, ii, (2).

dependence upon grace produces awareness of one's own weakness. Good people are delighted to hear about the past sins of those who have now shed them. The pleasure is not in evils as such, but that though they were so once, they are not like that now.<sup>379</sup>

The grace of God is proclaimed when one turns away from their sinfulness, Augustine claims, and it is clear throughout his writing that Christian witness necessarily occurs within a plurality. The correlation Augustine establishes between forgiveness, appearance, witness, and discipleship is centred on self-disclosure, which means that loving one another also concerns our recognition and understanding of the other. How Christians encourage and admonish behaviour, then, is dependent on more than the provisional love Arendt refers to. "A brotherly person rejoices on my account when he approves me," Augustine states, "but when he disapproves, he grieves on my behalf. Whether he approves or disapproves, he is loving me. To such people I will reveal myself."<sup>380</sup> Self-disclosure in this sense concerns the recognition of our inadequacy that is brought to light by entering into God's presence, yet Augustine extends the scope of this disclosure to include those who have also willingly turned from the world to enter into Christian community. What is made manifest before God in terms of our distinct identity, therefore, is also made manifest before those who also have chosen to love as God loves.

The central focus of Breidenthal's dissertation concerns his critical assessment of Arendt's concept of freedom in light of her reading of Augustine's political theology. Put simply, Arendt claims that although Augustine discovered the

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., X, iii, (4).

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., X, iv, (5).

political interconnectedness of all human beings, he abandons the sheer groundlessness upon which this discovery was made in favour of the otherworldly happiness he finds in God. In the end, Arendt finds Augustine to be problematically and ‘quintessentially’ Christian in his thinking, and so Breidenthal tasks himself with revisiting this exchange in order to uncover what is essentially the theological nature of Arendt’s account as he points to the possibility of reading Augustine in a way that reflects Arendt’s indebtedness to him. Most importantly, Breidenthal endeavours to establish a connection between theology and a philosophy of freedom by exemplifying how choosing God, as understood within the context of Christian political theology, is not as explicitly otherworldly as Arendt purports it to be. The proximity between *amor mundi* and love of God and neighbour is closer than Arendt allows, and so what we find within Arendt’s critique of Augustine is more of a caricaturizing of Augustine’s ‘otherworldliness’ than a just assessment of his political theology. Breidenthal concludes that there is no element of action that can be rightly set apart from the context of the world or the political nature of humankind, and so he challenges us to rethink Christianity’s theological contribution to the discussion Arendt raises within her critique of love and authentic political life by pointing to a Christian understanding of politics that finds its highest expression as love of God and neighbour. For the moment, however, we need only look briefly at Breidenthal’s account of Arendt’s debate with Augustine as it pertains to love of God and estrangement from the world. Arendt refers to two passages taken from *The City of God* that correspond with Augustine’s struggle to make himself known to



God. The claim Arendt makes concerns the truth of Augustine's creatureliness that is discovered in isolation before God. In book XIV, Augustine states:

Thus, when a man lives according to man and not according to God, he resembles the devil. For even an angel should have lived not according to self, but according to God, if he was to abide in the truth and utter God's truth rather than his own lie.<sup>381</sup>

Seeking the meaning and truth of ones being requires us to deny the world that sinfully obscures this truth from us. For Augustine, the truth of our existence can be discovered only through *caritas*, Arendt argues, and so the reconciliation between the creature and the Creator can be characterized as a renunciation of the will that is 'born in love'. Only in love can one renounce their will, Arendt states, which means that when we love God, we abandon our will and in so doing we deny the free will that would otherwise give our being-of-the-world significance. Put differently, the meaning Augustine discovers by choosing to become a stranger within the world is also a rejection of the meaning the world gives those who move freely within it according to their will. For Arendt, this is precisely what Augustine means when he correlates love of God and love of the neighbour. Self-denial finds its fullest expression in our attitude toward the world, Arendt writes, which is to say that Augustine loves the world because it is God's good creation and not a product of humankind's own design. Loving the world as God does is about loving what God has created precisely because it is God's. In the same way, therefore, the neighbour enters our field of vision because they are God's good creation, but in order to

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<sup>381</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIV, 4, (1).

understand their creatureliness we must narrow our gaze so as to view them as they stand before God. Arendt repeatedly argues that Augustine's understanding of the truth of his being is best expressed within the isolating presence of God, yet there is little here to suggest that the differences between living according to self and according to God constitutes a denial of the world in its entirety. Whereas Arendt attributes the truth of God to be estrangement from the world, Augustine's intended point stresses the importance he places upon God as the measure of truth rather than himself or anything that stands apart from God. The difference here is significant for if we are to understand loving God as the movement which compels us to forgive the neighbour, then living according to God can be viewed as a way of drawing us into authentic community rather than isolating us from it. Breidenthal puts it this way:

The point of this passage, rather, is simply that God (not humankind) must be the criterion of truth. Arendt's unspoken assumption is that the truth of which God is the criterion is world-denying. But if, as might fairly be argued, God's truth impels us toward rather than away from relationship with the neighbour, then to live according to God should issue not in isolation but in community.<sup>382</sup>

Arendt will argue that Augustine makes a desert of the world in his struggle to make himself known to God, which means that neighbour love is also to be understood as a movement into isolation. This is because Arendt wrongly assumes Augustine's search for truth requires an abandonment of the world altogether. There is nothing within the context of this passage that suggests Augustine means to estrange the

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<sup>382</sup> Breidenthal, *The Concept of Freedom in Hannah Arendt*, p. 271.

neighbour from the world. If we continue on with Augustine's passage, we find that his point is indeed far simpler than Arendt makes it out to be. Man himself is not a lie, Augustine writes, "for his Author and Creator is God, who is by no means the Author and Creator of falsehood. Rather, it is because man was created righteous, to live according to His Maker and not according to himself, doing his Maker's will and not his own: falsehood consists in not living in the way for which he was created."<sup>383</sup> Augustine's further reference to Corinthians 3:3 seems to be more about contrasting living according to the 'flesh' from living according to God. Paul is able to admonish the church in Corinth because he recognizes the division, envying, and strife that are the hallmarks of those who live according to selfish interest. It follows, then, that by living according to the purpose for which we were created, which, according to Augustine, is to live according to God, such a community would indeed be inimical to its sinful counterpart. The difference between these two communities, then, does not concern engagement or withdrawal from the world in the way Arendt suggests, but corresponds more closely with Augustine's account of love's orientation. Augustine forsakes the world only in the sense that he denies those fleshly impulses that would otherwise cause him to turn from God. This is not a departure from the world as Arendt understands it but is an explicit engagement with worldly life that is informed by being in a right relationship with God and neighbour.

It is worth noting that while Augustine's reading of 1 Corinthians 2:11-14 clarifies the discrepancies between Paul's usage of 'flesh' and 'animal', the

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<sup>383</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV, 4.

correlation of these descriptive terms reveals the continued interrelatedness of these communities. Paul states:

For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is of God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God. And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things for those that are spiritual. Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God's spirit, for they are foolishness to them.<sup>384</sup>

The spiritual distinction between knowing what is human and knowing what is God's is a matter of source. That is, Paul argues that those who belong to the world will, in their correlative wisdom, recognize their own because they share the same spirit, while those who have received the Spirit of God are enabled to understand those gifts that God gives freely which are beyond human wisdom. Spiritual orientation, then, sets God's wisdom apart from the wisdom of the world, but this is not a withholding. God gives us his wisdom through his Spirit, and so Paul challenges all worldly wisdom that confidently dismisses the unfamiliar language of God's Spirit as foolishness. Arendt uses Paul's delineation of these spiritual communities to contextualize their attitude toward the world. Those who live according to the 'flesh' embrace the wisdom of the world, while those who abide according God's Spirit respond to a new word. For Arendt, this duality is not simply a matter of spiritual disposition, but translates into either a commitment to the world or an estrangement from it. What is clear, however, is that Paul's separation

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<sup>384</sup> 1 Corinthians 2: 11-14.

of worldly spirituality from Godly spirituality is not premised in a way that invites Arendt's assertion. The vanity of living according to the world and living according to God's truth are certainly discordant, yet the world is not at stake when Paul separates worldly from Godly spirituality. To be sure, although Paul is clear that he cannot speak to worldly beings as he does to fellow spiritual beings, this passage points to his enduring efforts to interact with those who belong to the world despite their differing attitudes towards worldly life.<sup>385</sup> Here, Paul offers an example of interrelatedness that bespeaks the insufficiency of Arendt's utilization of this passage to shore up her argument concerning the isolating effects of Godly spirituality. Isolation prevents the kind of interaction Paul argues is required between Christians and non-believers, and so the point Augustine makes when he refers to Paul's passage is part of a broader discussion of authentic community rather than ones separation from it.

In what is perhaps his strongest criticism of Arendt's argument against Augustine's otherworldliness, Breidenthal evaluates how Arendt's citation of Book V of *The City of God* fails to support her claim that Augustine's rejection of political glory is at the same time a rejection of the pursuit of individuality. Put briefly, the

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<sup>385</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 states: "And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?" The precise boundaries that are required by the sheer isolation Arendt refers to when entering into the presence of God seem to be far more fluid according to Paul's account. The spiritual infancy Paul refers to demands an interaction between those who love God and those who are learning to love God precisely because of their inclination to behave as though they still belong to the world. Living according to God, then, cannot issue in isolation, as Breidenthal observes, but must be manifested in community.

relevance of the world finds its highest expression in the immortalization of great deeds and words, and so Arendt glorifies the world precisely because it is the proper home of political action. Appearing within the public realm is the actualization of individuality, which is why Arendt takes seriously Augustine's condemnation of worldly valuation. To negate the significance of public appearance is tantamount to the renunciation of the world in its entirety, yet the movement Augustine makes is suggestive of a renunciation of political glory that include only those public gestures that place too much weight on their own significance. Arendt argues that 'being out of the world' destroys individualization, and she bolsters her claim by referring to Augustine's account of Roman vanity taken from *The City of God*. "But take away their boasting," Augustine writes, "and what are all men, after all, but men?"<sup>386</sup> Arendt uses this passage as a way of highlighting the correlation between the worldly actualization of individuality and the possibility of authoring great deeds. By leaving the world, Arendt states, individualization is destroyed, and by destroying individualization the possibility of claiming authorship over great deeds ceases with it.<sup>387</sup> There is much at stake here for Arendt, but Breidenthal rightly addresses the insufficiency of Arendt's attempt to link Augustine's rejection of political glory with a rejection of individuality as such. Arendt is right to point out

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<sup>386</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, V, 17. It should be noted that Breidenthal's dissertation mistakenly attributes this passage to Book XXII, 2.

<sup>387</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 79. Breidenthal's translation uses the term 'outward show' rather than the term 'boasting', as is found in Scott and Stark's translation of Arendt's dissertation. Functionally, the differentiation between these terms does not change the meaning behind Arendt's discussion of worldliness and individualization. Worldly public displays of greatness require the possibility of authentic comparison, thus without individuality, Arendt makes the case that this kind of comparison becomes impossible by 'being out of the world'.

that Augustine leaves no room for boasting over great deeds, yet there is little here to suggest that he means to abandon human individuality along with it. As Breidenthal asserts, “it is equally plausible that Augustine debunks a world of semblances and vainglory in order to assert the reality of a better world in which authentic individuality may be found.”<sup>388</sup>

The final passages within book XXII of *The City of God* offer a sense of Augustine’s imaginative account of the shape eschatological sociality will take. For Breidenthal, Augustine’s description of work within God’s Kingdom is indicative of an important distinction that both Arendt and Augustine make. “For I do not know how else we might occupy ourselves, in a condition where we will neither cease from work through idleness nor be driven to it by need.”<sup>389</sup> As we know, Arendt’s delineation of work occurs in light of her understanding of political activity, and although work necessarily provides the capacity for humankind to fabricate a home for themselves within the world, it is neither free nor an end in itself. In other words, work cannot be likened to sheer political action and must remain distinguished from it. The eternal city of God Augustine envisions also contrasts required work, or labour, from the activity of praising God that unifies the entirety of humankind. This is the correlation Breidenthal makes between Arendt’s *amor mundi* and Augustine’s love of God. Citing Augustine’s account of eschatological free

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<sup>388</sup> Breidenthal, *The Concept of Freedom in Hannah Arendt*, p. 273.

<sup>389</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, XXII, 30.

will, Breidenthal likens the focal point of Arendt's orientation to Augustine's, but whereas Arendt looks to the world, Augustine looks to God. Augustine states:

Also, they will then no longer be able to take delight in sin. This does not mean, however, that they will have no free will. On the contrary, it will be all the more free, because set free from delight in sinning to take constant delight in not sinning...in the Heavenly City, then, there will be freedom of will: one freedom for all, and indivisible in each.<sup>390</sup>

The greatest expression of freedom for Augustine is the unified praise of God where all human will is bound together by partaking in this singular activity. The hidden harmony of the body will be revealed within this city, and so the corporeal imagery Augustine employs here is at once is both unifying and distinguishing. That is, every will that abides within God's City is oriented entirely toward God, yet this unity is not homogeneous. "Just as, in the body," Augustine writes, "the finger does not wish to be the eye, since both members are contained within the ordered composition of the whole body."<sup>391</sup> What we can gather from this passage, then, is that the indivisibility of Augustine's unified body has not relinquished the individuality of its composite members in the way Arendt suggests. The citizens of God's City are grounded in the equality that is established through mutual praise of God, just as the citizens of the world are equalized through their natality, but both share a commonality with one another in terms of the completely free movement of individual will. "In other words," Breidenthal states, "all wills will be one in their love of God, just as in Arendt all wills, inasmuch as they are free, direct themselves

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., XXII, 30.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., XXII, 30.



toward the world.”<sup>392</sup> Indeed, as Breidenthal’s dissertation helpfully elucidates, there is more of a middle ground that can be located in Augustine’s discussion of neighbour love that allows for Christian political life, and this is premised not only on the worldly locality of neighbour love which demands the context of plurality, but we can rightly conclude that Augustine’s imaginative account of the eschatological fulfilment of political life neither dissolves nor makes irrelevant the capacity for individuals to move in concert or overwhelms the achievement of distinction through independent meritorious activity.

In the same way, the life of the eschatological Christian political body does not lie in suspended animation until the fullness of God’s Kingdom is realized, and so we must look to the ways Augustine accounts for authentic Christian political life within our current context. If loving the neighbour finds its fullest expression in the unified praise of God within his City, we must then examine Augustine’s account of *caritas* as it relates to both the incarnate Christ who is the first fruit of this City, and to its function as the guiding political principle of Christian community. Arendt’s critical reading of Augustinian neighbour love rests on her contention that by loving the

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<sup>392</sup> Breidenthal, *The Concept of Freedom in Hannah Arendt*, p. 348. There may, in fact, be an even deeper connection between Augustine’s account here and Arendt’s praise of meritorious political activity. Augustine states, “What degrees of honour and glory will there be then, proportioned to the various degrees of merit? Who can speak of them, or even imagine them? It is not to be doubted, however, that there will be such degrees” (XXII, 30). Although Augustine is firm in his rejection of worldly vainglory, the possibility of independent action is not only actualized within God’s City, it finds its proper home here. Breidenthal makes the argument that although Arendt collapses Augustinian individuality into an otherworldly expression of unified praise, corporate worship of this kind is not overwhelmed by its universality. Distinctive action sets members apart from one another without compromising the integrity of the body’s unity. It is, perhaps, the fullest expression of authentic political life.

neighbour, Augustine commits himself to being infinitely attentive to the neighbour's needs. The reason for this, as we have seen, is Arendt's concern for an infinite debt that cannot be ultimately addressed by the resources made available to us within this reality. Perhaps in the fullness of God's Kingdom will requirement and need be sufficiently addressed, but within the context of the world, there simply is not enough. Thus, political life is suspended because the correlative freedom of the public realm disappears in light of the neighbour's claim over us.

Moreover, the magnitude of the neighbour's need is only compounded by the appearance of the incarnate God who comes as our neighbour. For Arendt, the critical issue with this movement relates to the fact that the source of Christian love is also at once our neighbour, and so the greatness of Christ's claim as our neighbour consequently outweighs all other claims such that when we love the neighbour we do so only as a way of loving Christ. Arendt's misreading here, however, assumes that the Church's dependency on Christ in faith is premised upon a deficiency that invariably belongs to human neighbourliness rather than the gifted provision of Christ's divine abundance. The important difference here concerns how Christian love encounters the needs of the neighbour. Whereas Arendt characterizes our encounter with the neighbour as an expression of infinite debt and our insufficiency to properly attend to their need, Augustine's account invites us to consider our relationship with the neighbour in light of the divine surplus of Christ which allows the Church to fulfil this debt as it anticipates the eschatological fullness of political

life that is yet to come. We cannot conclude with Arendt that Augustine means for us to understand that authentic political life is only located beyond our world and our mortality, for Christ represents the in-breaking of God's Kingdom within this worldly reality. Rather, Augustine seriously considers how the life of the Church is to reflect its presence within a fallen world, yet, at the same, remain grounded in the divine promise of God's Kingdom yet to come. It is an anticipatory enactment of love that regards each neighbour as the potential beginning of an authentic political relationship. As Breidenthal states, "because the church's Lord gives the gift of power to repair and enjoy the relation of neighbour to neighbour, the principle of charity does not function to freeze the church in an attitude of attention to the stranger."<sup>393</sup>

At the conclusion of his dissertation, Breidenthal notes, "there is therefore no sin which is not, in some way, political, and certainly no crime which, by virtue of its thoughtlessness or inhumanity, lies beyond the reach of political analysis."<sup>394</sup> Breidenthal is referring to Arendt's claim that 'great evil' can be bracketed out of political life because there is no political recourse for sheer thoughtlessness (the banal evil of Adolph Eichmann is a good example of this). While it may be true that no action stands outside human political nature, suggesting that all sin is accessible to our political analysis may be saying too much. Here is the issue: while Breidenthal rightly points to the limited expectations Christian theology places on

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<sup>393</sup> Breidenthal, *Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation*, p. 500.

<sup>394</sup> Breidenthal, *The concept of freedom in Hannah Arendt*, p. 302.

worldly political life because of sin, he does not say if or how the constraints of sin also extend to the analysis of human action at this point. Augustine's image of God's faithful "patiently awaiting until 'righteousness shall return unto judgement'" may be helpful here.<sup>395</sup> The anticipation of the eschatological perfection of God's kingdom does not draw the Christian away from the world as Arendt suggests, but it does remind them that they should be wary of addressing the sins of others with a confidence that only belongs to the fullness of this coming divine reality. Instead, the Christian response to sin in this world must follow the example of Christ's divine forgiveness. This is not to say that great evil is beyond the reach of political analysis; rather, our political analysis of great evil must be part of the movement of forgiveness.

### **Part C. On Christian Community and the Political Relevance of Forgiveness**

As we have seen, Arendt's critical reading of Augustinian neighbour love relies on her assumption that the claim of the neighbour is greater than our capacity to satisfy it, and so the common bond of love that unifies Christian community only serves to direct attention away from the public world toward this claim. Arendt argues that the claim the neighbour makes reveals a deficiency, that is, under the condition of sin, the need for salvation grounds the claim of the neighbour in a way that bespeaks this need. The presence of suffering, the poor, the prisoner, and the widow are tangible scriptural images of the needs that demand our attention, yet

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<sup>395</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book I, preface.

these images are expressions of the singular claim our neighbour has on our love. Christian unity is shaped by *caritas*, and Arendt rightly argues that Augustine seeks to ground all human relatedness upon loving one another in this way. Neighbour love, then, is not bound exclusively to Christian community, but is meant to extend beyond these parameters into the broader world.<sup>396</sup> Arendt frames the movement of neighbour love as a politically subversive principle that is meant to direct attention away from a shared worldliness, that is, her general assumption is that the politically quiet nature of Christian community bespeaks their commitment to prioritize a love of the neighbour over the sheer freedom and political relatedness that belongs to the public realm. While Augustine is clear that the commitment to attend to the neighbour follows the example of Christ, neighbour love should not be understood as a political principle premised upon social disengagement. Conversely, when Augustine extends this principle to the entirety of the world it is precisely because the whole of humanity is meant to bear witness to God's love through the enactment of neighbour love and forgiveness. Arendt maintains that love of this kind collapses political spaces as it turns our attention away from the world toward the unending need of those around us, yet it is at this point where the relevance of neighbour love as a Christian political principle can be recognized. Augustine

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<sup>396</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 53. Arendt argues that for Augustine, the function of *caritas* is to unify Christian community through a profound disinterest in the world, but this political principle, while incapable of establishing any sort of enduring political realm, is meant to inform all human relationships. *Caritas* gathers human beings together by overcoming the tangible relatedness that the world offers, and while Arendt is right to conclude that Augustine means to extend neighbour beyond the boundaries of Christian community, she is mistaken in her assumption that Christian neighbour love is motivated by their 'loss of interest' in the world rather than by a desire to imitate the love of Christ.

repeatedly asserts that the exemplar of neighbour love and forgiveness is Christ, and so Arendt rightly argues that Christian community is unified by mutual imitation of this love.<sup>397</sup> Yet if Christ's love extends to all, it follows that the imitation of this love prevents preferentially selecting whom we will attend to. Arendt is right to suggest that for Augustine the neighbour is always already before us. The ceaseless commitment to attend to the needs of the neighbour is competitively related to the sheer freedom of political life, Arendt argues, and so Augustine's response to the claim of the neighbour, as a political principle, must be something more than a revealing of our neighbour's need and our inability to sufficiently address it. Put differently, if political life is premised upon the freedom to interact with one another without conditionality, and if the scope of neighbour love is also without condition, then the imitation of Christ's love must be greater than our lack. Here we see how Arendt's misreading of Augustine lies in her assumption that Christ appears without a surplus of love, and that by loving the neighbour within this earthly reality, Christians must postpone authentic political interaction until Christ returns to renew all things in full. It is also at this point that the question of forgiveness comes into full view, and this is because, as an enactment of neighbour love, forgiveness is a witness to the abundance of Christ's love and the authentic political interaction already present within Christian community in this reality. By establishing the continuity between Christ's humanity and divinity, and by illuminating the abundant power of Christ's suffering servanthood, Augustine is able to respond to Arendt's

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<sup>397</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 110.

claim that Christ's appearance only functions to step in between an actual encounter with the neighbour. Forgiveness is a part of the divine restorative work accomplished by Christ through his death and resurrection and it actively works to establish God's kingdom on earth by building and restoring Christian fellowship. Augustine's understanding of forgiveness stands in contrast with Arendt's articulation of the political relevance of forgiveness primarily because forgiveness, in the sense Augustine conceptualizes it, is first and foremost a movement of love. Arendt's critical assessment of the Christian claim that only love can forgive is a misreading of how the appearance of Christ, as the exemplar of love and forgiveness, reconciles the world back to himself. God's restorative work is not, as Arendt claims, about the estrangement of Christian community from the world. Forgiveness is active both in terms of God's forgiveness for the world and the forgiveness we are to offer one another, that is, forgiveness is not a negation of the world, but is an active witness concerning the world's transformation in light of the fullness of God's kingdom yet to come. Augustine frames it this way:

Observe why Christ admonished us to love our enemies. Was it that they should always remain enemies? If he admonished you for this reason, that they should remain enemies, you hate, you do not love. Observe how he himself loved, that is, that he was unwilling that they should remain so persecuted. He said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Those whom he wished to be forgiven he wished be changed; those whom he wished to be changed he deigned to make brothers from enemies, and he truly made them so.<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, Tractate 8, 10, (3).

Forgiveness is active because it is transformative, or, put differently, forgiveness actively seeks to restore and transform relations in order to establish fellowship where there was once enmity. Augustine is clear that the transformative work that occurs within this reality is not the complete work that has yet to be fulfilled by God, but it does participate in it as a witness. “Therefore,” Augustine writes, “we began to be healed by faith; but our health will be perfected when this corruptibility will put on incorruption and this mortality immortality. But this is hope, not yet reality. But he who rejoices in hope will also take hold of reality.”<sup>399</sup> The difference here is a matter of fulfilment and not a matter of deficiency, which is to say that Christ’s appearance in the world is not somehow diminished in relation to his anticipated appearance at the coming perfection of his kingdom. The love and forgiveness Christ offers us now witnesses to the perfected fellowship of God’s kingdom yet to come, though this does not mean that Christ who has already come will be different upon his return. In this way, there is no distinct break for Augustine between this present reality and perfection, but he is clear that those who recognize the signs of God’s coming kingdom will ‘take hold’ of this reality in a way that brings enemies into fellowship with them. The political relevance of forgiveness is that by forgiving we embrace this reality in the hope that God will soon complete the restorative work begun through the forgiveness and love of Christ.

Arendt’s reading of the Adamic origins of the human world found throughout Augustine’s writing rightly differentiates between the sinfulness of this world and

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<sup>399</sup> Ibid., Tractate 8, 13.



the righteousness of the Christian community reconciled to God. The thematic contrast between the *civitas terrena* and the *civitas Dei* we find in Augustine, Arendt suggests, is the basis of the estrangement of God's faithful from the sinfulness of humankind. Here, Arendt's account of the sinfulness of the strictly human world rightly points to Augustine's caution against loving what belongs to the world in sin, yet we are called to love the world after Christ in a way that seems to establish more of a continuity between heaven and earth than Arendt allows. That is, the Incarnation, for Augustine, allows us to approach the world in its sinfulness by loving and forgiving after Christ. According to Augustine, Christians are to not to love the world in its sinfulness because they no longer belong to it, yet they are to love the world, Augustine writes, "which God reconciles to himself in Christ, and which is saved through Christ, and for which all sin forgiven through Christ, [and] has been chosen apart from the hostile, damned, contaminated world. For indeed out of that lump, which totally perished in Adam, were formed vessels of mercy in which is found the world that belongs to reconciliation; and this the world hates, the one that out of the same lump belongs to the vessels of wrath that have been made for perdition."<sup>400</sup> While Arendt's point is that the past Adamic origin of humanity establishes the binding 'togetherness' that constitutes the political world, Augustine argues that the true world, the world reconciled to God, is taken from the same world constituted by the sinfulness of humankind. The sinful world is the basis for humankind's 'togetherness' in Adam, Arendt claims, yet Augustine does not suggest

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<sup>400</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 87, 3.

that this same world is entirely abolished through the reconciliatory work of Christ. “Man’s origin,” Arendt states, “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.”<sup>401</sup> Arendt is correct to suggest that generation and not creation defines the history of human sinfulness for Augustine, yet out of the same world in which humankind has its sinful origin emerges God’s redemption. The love of Christ redeems humanity from its Adamic origins, Augustine suggests, and because the mercy of God appears from that which ‘perished in Adam’, there is an important continuity with the broken world God restores to himself through the forgiveness Christ offers. Certainly there is a crucial difference between Christ and Adam in terms of how they love the world, which is obvious throughout Arendt’s critique of Augustine, yet to be set apart from the world, or ‘chosen apart from the contaminated world’, is less of a movement of worldly estrangement than it is a commentary on recognizing the orientation of God’s love within it. In terms of rightly oriented love, Augustine states, “we are both prohibited from loving in it what itself loves in itself, and we are commanded to love in it what it itself hates in itself, namely, the handiwork of God and the various comforts of his goodness.”<sup>402</sup> Arendt would argue that love in this sense cannot appreciate the fullness of the neighbour’s being because the Christian is only loving the neighbour on account of ‘the handiwork of God’ at work within them. However, it is precisely the ‘handiwork of God’ that brings the neighbour into

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<sup>401</sup> Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, p. 104.

<sup>402</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 87, 4.

a position for the Christian to love their entire being. “[The Adamic world] hates what it was made to be by the goodness of God,” Augustine argues, which is a way of saying that by being reconciled to God, the world and everything in it is restored to that which God intended it to be.<sup>403</sup> The potential of the world to become what God intended it to be does not disappear with humanity’s Adamic origin, that is, what ‘perishes in Adam’ is not God’s divine purpose for the world, but this movement can be understood as a shift in love’s orientation away from a proper love of God. This is the reason why ‘the world that belongs to reconciliation’ can be born from ‘the contaminated world’ through the forgiveness Christ offers. Because God reconciles the sinful world to himself through the forgiveness of Christ, rightly oriented love re-establishes the fullness of being that God intended for humankind in their individuality, which, in turn, allows us to ‘love our enemies’ though “they are the world, which hates us.”<sup>404</sup>

There is a continuity between this present worldly reality and the coming fullness of God’s kingdom that corresponds with the Christian enactment of forgiveness, Augustine suggests, and though he is clear that this continuity between earthly and heavenly life established by forgiveness of sins has reference ‘chiefly to the future judgement’, Augustine’s point is that Christian forgiveness makes visible the connection between God’s kingdom already present within earthly Christian community. The peace of God that ‘passes all understanding’ is the hallmark of

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid., Tractate 87, 4.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., Tractate 87, 4.

those who abide in heaven, Augustine writes, yet “the angels are at peace with us even now, whenever our sins are forgiven. Consequently, in the order of the creed, forgiveness of sins finds its place just after the mention of the Holy Church. It is through this that the Church on earth stands; it is through this that what had been lost and found is not lost.”<sup>405</sup> The forgiveness that is extended to the neighbour follows the example of Christ, which is the reason Matthew 6:12 figures so prominently throughout Augustine’s discussion of forgiveness. The church, as Christ’s body, continues to act as a witness of Christ’s forgiveness, and it is this forgiveness that carries the church through its life in the world until the day of God’s divine judgement. So although forgiveness has its reference in the future perfection of God’s kingdom, the need for continued forgiveness amongst God’s faithful is made manifest by the sinful condition of their present reality. “And because even walking in [Christ] they are not without sins that creep up on them from the weaknesses of their life,” Augustine writes, “he has given them salutary remedies of alms by which their prayer might be aided, where he taught them to say, ‘Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.’ The church is engaged in this blessed hope during this troublesome life.”<sup>406</sup> Augustine claims that there are essentially two causes that correspond to the sinfulness of humankind. “Either through not yet seeing what we ought to do,” Augustine writes, “or through not doing what we have already seen ought to be done; the first of these evils is ignorance, the second is weakness.”<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> Augustine, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, Ch. 17, (64).

<sup>406</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 124, 5.

<sup>407</sup> Augustine, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, Ch. 22, (81).

Humankind's sinful conditionality will continually trouble those Christians living in the world because, although they are redeemed in full by the love of Christ, the possibility of sin persists in this reality. Here we see some resonance between Augustine's desire to experience God's divine peace on earth and Arendt's own concern for the freedom to interact politically without suffering the damaging effects of harmful actions. In one sense, forgiveness, for both Augustine and Arendt, accomplishes the task of overcoming the limitations imposed by human ignorance, that is, both Arendt and Augustine acknowledge that forgiveness addresses the problem of not knowing what we do when we act. The movement of love that guides Augustine's understanding of forgiveness, however, defines the separation between his own account and Arendt's. The light of the Lord removes our ignorance, Augustine states, and his salvation removes our weakness. Christian community is called to forgive not simply to restore an earthly peace, or the continued possibility of interacting meaningfully, but by forgiving one another in love, this community testifies to the perfection of their weakness in Christ and the coming divine peace of God. Augustine writes:

And this is why it is said to the good who are advancing and living by faith in the pilgrimage, 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the Law of Christ.' Elsewhere, it is said, 'Warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man.' And, in another place, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.' And elsewhere, 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.' And in the Gospel, 'If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him

alone.' ...It is for this reason that we are so often taught to forgive one another and to devote such care to the preservation of peace, without which no one will be able to see God.<sup>408</sup>

Arendt and Augustine are in agreement in terms of the restorative nature of forgiveness, which is to say that by forgiving we re-establish the possibility of relating to one another without the burden of past transgressions. Augustine describes this as the 'preservation of peace', yet, in contrast with Arendt, peace in this sense is only comprehensible by contextualizing it in light of God's divine peace that is to come in fullness. Forgiveness within Christian community on earth works to establish fellowship that is defined by God's peace, and it is in this way, Augustine writes, "that citizens of the City of God are healed while they are pilgrims on this earth, as they sigh for the peace of their heavenly country."<sup>409</sup> In this sense, forgiveness shapes the life of the church through their pilgrimage on earth, but forgiveness is also what makes God visible to those who have not yet entered into this fellowship. The important difference between Arendt and Augustine's political communities, then, rests on the visible presence of God at work in the life of Christ's followers that is witness to the coming fullness of God's kingdom.

We need to be clear about what Augustine is not saying here. The peace experienced within a forgiving Christian community is not the perfection of God's peace found in heaven. Augustine does not invite us to rush into a political relationship that is not continually aware of its sinful worldly context. The

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<sup>408</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XV, Ch. 6.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

forgiveness and 'healing' experienced within Christian community at present points to the eschatological perfection of God's kingdom yet to come, yet forgiveness, as a movement of rightly ordered love, acts as a constraint against the false understanding that God's divine forgiveness is an allowance to act in whatever way pleases us. Augustine cautions against fostering an over-zealous hope in God's forgiveness that stands in contrast to a proper orientation of love that follows Christ's example. What matters, then, is forgiveness that corresponds with loving rightly. "Who is deceived by hoping," Augustine writes, "He who says, God is good, God is merciful; let me do as I please, what I feel like; let me relax the reins of my desires; let me fulfil the cravings of my soul."<sup>410</sup> This is a misunderstanding of the redemptive work of Christ, Augustine warns, for God's promise of forgiveness is transformative, which means that forgiving rightly changes our relationship to both God and neighbour in a way that reflects Christ's treatment of the world. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and indignation, and clamor, and reviling be removed from you, along with all the malice. On the contrary, be kind to one another, and merciful, generously forgiving one another, as also God in Christ has generously forgiven you. Be ye, therefore, imitators of God, as very dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and delivered himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God to ascend in fragrant odour."<sup>411</sup> Forgiveness in this sense demands a response, that is, Christ's forgiveness does not leave room for idleness on our part. Forgiveness is

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<sup>410</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 33, 8.

<sup>411</sup> Augustine, *De vita christiana*, Ch. 10.

active and follows God's active presence in the world, so by imitating Christ in the way we love and forgive our neighbour Augustine is suggesting that the fellowship that we establish amongst Christ's followers is premised on an active love that at once reveals God to the world and offers a glimpse of the world that is to come.

Augustine's exegesis of the Lord's Prayer taken from Matthew 6: 9-13 establishes the clear relationship between the temporality of our present reality and the eternality of God's coming kingdom. There are seven petitions within the prayer Christ teaches his followers, Augustine states, and of these seven petitions, four are directed toward eternal goods and the remaining three are directed toward temporal goods. Augustine does not distinguish between these petitions as a way of delineating a disruption between what is temporal and eternal, but to draw attention to the relationship between temporal enactments of love and eternal enactments of love. It is worth citing Augustine at length:

For in saying: 'Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven...we ask for blessings that are to be retained forever; they indeed begin in this life and are increased in us as we progress, but in their perfection, which is to be looked for in another life, they will be forevermore. But when we say: 'Give us our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,' who does not see that this pertains to the needs of the present life? In that eternal life, where we all hope to be, the making hallowed of His name, His kingdom, and His will in spirit and body, will be perfected and will abide everlastingly. But daily bread is so called because it is necessary in this life, in whatever amount the soul or body demands, whether we interpret the world in reference to the spirit, or to the flesh, or in both senses. Also the forgiveness we ask for has reference to this life, in which sin is committed; likewise with the temptations which allure and drive us to sin; and likewise finally with the evil from which we



desire to be delivered. But none of these is to be found in the other life.<sup>412</sup>

For Augustine, the evident distinction between our present life on earth and the life to come chiefly concerns our sinfulness. While on earth, the fellowship of God's faithful endure the same temptations experienced by those who do not love God, but because the appearance of Christ has forgiven humankind from their sinful past, this fellowship lives in the hope of their salvation that is and is yet to come. So while the fulfilment of God's kingdom points to a reality in which the temptation of sin is no longer present, the power to resist sin on earth is already guaranteed by Christ.

What is necessary in this life, Augustine concludes, are those things that direct us to the eternality of God's coming kingdom, and the prayer Christ teaches his disciples stresses the visible continuity between these realities. 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven', which, for Augustine, means that God's faithful need not postpone their coming eschatological fellowship, but can already participate in that life which has yet to be perfected. This is the political function of forgiveness for Augustine's Christian community in its clearest articulation; the forgiveness Christ exemplifies, and the forgiveness Christ instructs his followers to pray for, has reference to this worldly life so that humankind may be restored into right relation with God, but also so that the forgiveness extended to the neighbour in love establishes authentic fellowship that will be perfected when God's kingdom is perfected. What we find in Augustine is not an image of Christian community that seeks to estrange itself from worldly life altogether, as Arendt maintains, nor do we find a Christ who stands in

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<sup>412</sup> Augustine, *Faith, Hope and Charity*, Ch. 30, (115).

the way of meaningful political interaction. We find, rather, a community that has oriented its love towards God, and by forgiving one another as an enactment of this love, Augustine claims, the perfected political life that God's faithful anticipate is made visible even now in this reality. Augustine writes:

And if he for whom we have nothing to forgive forgives us, how much more ought we to forgive one another who cannot live here without sin! For what does the Lord seem to signify in this depth of mystery when he says, 'For I have given you an example, that, as I have done to you, so also should you do,' except what the Apostle says most clearly, 'forgiving one another, if anyone has a grievance against anyone, even as the Lord has forgiven us, so also you'? And so, let us forgive one another our sins and let us pray, one for the other, for our sins and thus in a way wash one another's feet. It is our part, by his gift, to apply the ministry of love and humility. It is his to hear and to cleanse us through Christ and in Christ from all stain of sins, so that what we also forgive others, that is, what we loose on earth, may be loosed in heaven.<sup>413</sup>

The appearance of Christ as the exemplar of neighbour love and forgiveness establishes the continuity between the eschatological fellowship within God's perfected kingdom and the life of Christian community on earth. For Augustine, the love and humility that hallmark the fellowship of God's faithful springs directly from the love Christ gifts to the entirety of creation. This, again, is a sign of the divine abundance Christ promises to his followers, and so when we forgive as Christ forgives and love as Christ loves, Augustine suggests, we do so not out of our deficit, but out of Christ's infinite surplus. To be sure, Christ's command to forgive one another cautions those who would prematurely celebrate the fullness of political life

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<sup>413</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 58, 5, (3).

in God's kingdom by reminding us of existent worldly temptations, but, at the same time, because Christ has appeared as neighbour, and because he has taught us how to forgive one another, the peaceful fellowship that rightly belongs within God's perfected kingdom is now made visible by Christian community as its witness. The political relevance of forgiveness for Christian community lies precisely in this witness.

In summation, this chapter has argued that the political authenticity of Christian community is found in the orientation of its love, and although Arendt is critical of the political relevance of all love besides *amor mundi*, it is through the abundant love of Christ that Christians experience political life within this worldly reality. To be sure, the sinful conditionality of humankind constrains the movement of properly oriented love, and here both Arendt and Augustine share the same concern for properly oriented love, yet loving after Christ's divine love is the basis for confronting the neighbour in the fullness of their being. Jesus is the measure of proper political human interaction, and so an Augustinian account of Christian community focuses on how the divine abundance of Christ's love grounds the Christian's capacity to love the neighbour and to restore relationships through forgiveness. Forgiveness guides Christian community toward the coming fullness of God's kingdom because it restores fractured human interrelatedness to right relations with God and with one another, and because Arendt's critical reading of Augustine fails to connect Christian political life with worldly estrangement, we can

take the role of forgiveness within Christian political life seriously. The forgiveness Jesus exemplifies shapes our political appearance before one another as it establishes continuity between our present reality and God's coming Kingdom. In this way, Christians need not postpone political life until the divine fullness of God's kingdom is perfected, but already participate in God's coming kingdom because they follow Christ's example of forgiveness.

## Conclusion

### A. Overview

Arendt's account of authentic political life and her critical reading of Christian otherworldliness present an important challenge to modern readings of Augustinian neighbour love and forgiveness, yet this dissertation has argued that these Augustinian themes are what characterize and illuminate the political relevance of forgiveness within Christian community. Forgiveness understood in this way reimagines the role of Christian community as witness, that is, the enactment of forgiveness within Christian community witnesses to the fullness of political life in God within this worldly reality. The constraint of sin frames the political commitments of Christian community, but the radical nearness of the Incarnation makes worldly political life possible in light of Arendt's work on the politics of forgiveness and the limitations she places on Augustine's account of Christian neighbour love. Rather, the intentions of putting Augustine in conversation with Arendt were to expand the conceptual space in which an Augustinian theological imagination could broaden our contemporary discussions of political forgiveness as it pertains to the authenticity of Christian political life. Christian forgiveness need not be understood as politically irrelevant because it is grounded in love; rather, because forgiveness of this kind is informed by divine love, it anticipates the coming eschatological fullness of the kingdom of God already present within this world through Christ. Forgiveness is about restoring relationships to right order, and because Christ is the example of human forgiveness, the restorative work that will

be fulfilled in the perfection of God's kingdom to come is already made accessible within Christian community. To be sure, this dissertation does not claim to settle the debate over the historical origins of forgiveness, nor does it offer a definitive account of how Augustine would have responded to modern articulations of political forgiveness as they are applied practically. Rather, by looking to Augustine's account of rightly ordered Christian neighbour love and forgiveness, we find that these themes provide a way of thinking about the worldly presence of Christian community that stands in contrast with Arendt's image of Christian 'otherworldliness'.

As we have seen, Arendt and Augustine's contributions to contemporary discussions of forgiveness have received mixed receptions. Theorists like MacLachlan, Griswold, and Konstan have each responded to Arendt's articulation of forgiveness and political action by either drawing attention to the inconsistencies within Arendt's historical argumentation, or arguing for the possibility of using Arendt's formation of forgiveness to bolster our modern conceptualizations. For MacLachlan, Arendt sets the tone for a multidisciplinary approach to understanding forgiveness that does not separate the interpersonal from the broader political realm. Arendt's discussion of forgiveness and respect, MacLachlan argues, helps explain the sufficiency of the 'personal' aspect of the political to encourage decisions to forgive within public life. Conversely, both Griswold and Konstan object to Arendt's historical claim that Jesus discovered the political value of forgiveness.

While Griswold claims that the complex origins of forgiveness merits an analysis of the constitutive elements of Aristotelian virtue as a means of establishing a moral ground for our modern understanding of the term, Konstan's point is that there is no resonance between our moral understanding of forgiveness and the reconciliatory strategies we find throughout Greek and Roman classic narratives as well as Judeo-Christian scripture. These observations, we have seen, do not sufficiently address the important political dynamic Arendt's understanding of forgiveness draws out.

Arendt's account of action and authentic political space help shed some light on the political necessity of forgiveness as it relates to unpredictability of action and the overcoming of vengeance. While Arendt dislodges the idea of forgiveness from the moral grounding it inherited from the religious context in which Jesus first identified it, it is within the same movement that Arendt also critiques the place of love within public life. Arendt's 1929 dissertation provides a critical argument against Augustinian neighbour love, and, taken together with her broader account of the anti-political nature of love, Arendt leaves little room for the possibility of a political rendering of Christian forgiveness – at least not within present worldly reality. Arendt argues that Jesus's appearance as neighbour draws all love into himself thereby rendering all other human relationships occasions to love God, yet Augustine is able to help settle the question of identity and individuality, as well as provide a ground for the Christian capacity to attend to the neighbour's infinite need of love through Christ. The work of Gregory and of Breidenthal helps situate

contemporary Augustinianism within this debate, and we find that an Augustinian reading of the Incarnation reveals how the infinite abundance of the divine love of Christ provides the resources to love the neighbour directly without negating their distinctness. By pointing to the abundance of Christ's divine love, we also see how the example of Jesus's forgiveness participates in emergence of God's kingdom within this reality. Christian community need not postpone authentic political participation until the afterlife, and yet Augustine cautions against overconfidently relying upon a worldly politic in which God merely becomes a 'superfluous placeholder'.<sup>414</sup> Forgiveness is political for Christian community because in forgiving one another, Christian political community witnesses to the fullness of political life of God's kingdom to come as it already participates in this restorative work on earth within this reality.

Here is how the objectives of this dissertation fit into the broader debates concerning an Augustinian account of political forgiveness and authentic Christian political life. The introduction outlined how the current debates over the merits of political forgiveness have largely ignored the contributions of an Augustinian political imagination. Generally, we have seen in the work of theorists like MacLachlan, Griswold, Konstan, Derrida, and Kristeva various considerations of the origins of forgiveness, the dynamics of modern philosophic conceptualizations of the term, and the moral suitability of applying forgiveness to political situations. The work of Hannah Arendt is important here because she at once affirms the political

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<sup>414</sup> Paul Doerksen, *Beyond Suspicion*, (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), p. 213.



relevance of forgiveness while challenging the Christian theological connection Augustine establishes between forgiveness and love. An Augustinian theological imagination responds to Arendt's critical account of love by showing how the Incarnation is the example human political interaction. Christ as neighbour makes comprehensible forgiveness as a political enactment of love, and the worldly life of Christian community witnesses to this enactment.

The first chapter dealt primarily with Arendt's view of the constituent elements of political life and her critique of Augustinian neighbour love. In order to determine why forgiveness is political for Arendt, we first established the context in which forgiveness receives its meaning. Arendt's argument maintains that political life is based on the freedom to appear before one another in speech and deed without condition – whether moral, social, or otherwise. This is what also establishes human identity, yet the spontaneous nature of political action is problematic because its consequences are unforeseen. Arendt argues that forgiveness, as action, redeems political life from the unending cycle of retribution and vengeance - which is the death of the public realm. While Arendt grounds her understanding of forgiveness on the example of Jesus of Nazareth, she distinguishes the divine claim of Christ from Jesus as an historical figure. In this way, Arendt makes the important move to disassociate political forgiveness from any particular theological claim. Centring the debate on Christian political forgiveness within the parameters of Arendt's conversation with Augustine provides a new and different

way of considering how we think about the authenticity of Christian political life and the fundamental relationship that exists between divine love and forgiveness. Augustine provides a critical alternative voice to this debate.

The second chapter then turned to Arendt's assessment of Augustine's concept of Christian neighbour love in her dissertation. Arendt concludes that Christian love cannot affirm the neighbour as a distinct being because love of this kind is always directed towards God. Love is anti-political for Arendt because it collapses the space in which political action occurs, and the Christian preoccupation with the claim of love issued by the neighbour effectively limits their appearance within the world. We can never love the neighbour for his or her own sake, and so Christian forgiveness makes a mockery of authentic individual identity. The second chapter established that there are those, like Arendt, who have taken up the discussion of love within political life in order to outline certain parameters. That is, Arendt sets authentic political activity apart from Christian neighbour love as a way of affirming the world. For Arendt, we can only understand the appearance of Christ as neighbour as the force behind Christianity's worldly estrangement. This is where we begin to see how an Augustinian theological imagination re-evaluates Arendt's claims in new ways. Addressing Arendt's political marginalization of Christian community through a discussion of political forgiveness opens new ground for modern Augustinianism, and this is accomplished by using Augustine's account of

Christ's divine and human nature to trace the ontological reorientation of God's relation to humankind and humankind's relation to one another.

The discussion in chapters three and four offered an Augustinian account of the twofold nature of Christ and the political authenticity of Christian community as a way of challenging Arendt's assumptions about the appearance of Christ as neighbour. For Augustine, human interrelatedness is transformed because Christ is both fully human and fully divine. What is important to this discussion is that Christ's enactment of self-emptying love reconfigures the way Christians think about forgiveness and political action. Christ does not come to direct our attention away from the neighbour, as Arendt claims, but to illuminate the fullness of the neighbour's being. The forgiveness Christ exemplifies allows the Christian to participate in the restorative work of God within the world. The act of restoring relationships through forgiveness is political, and so Christ does not draw radically near to estrange Christian community from the world, but to exemplify how human beings should forgive one another within properly oriented political life. Christian community need not isolate itself on its pilgrimage, nor should it refrain from contributing meaningfully to worldly political life. These chapters demonstrate, rather, that a reimagined Augustinian political theology reveals how the pilgrimage of the Christian church, as the body of Christ on earth, is hallmarked by the forgiveness they extend to others in order that the continuity between worldly life and the fullness of Kingdom life to come is made visible.

## **B: Final Observations**

We have seen that Arendt dismisses Augustine's account of neighbour love as otherworldly, and, in the same way, she dismisses the Christian assumption that 'only love can forgive' because it lies beyond the appropriate boundaries of a strictly political account of forgiveness. This is the reason why Arendt will acknowledge the miraculous nature of forgiveness, but will not attribute this nature to any divine source behind its discovery and actualization. "Action is, in fact, the one miracle-working faculty of man," Arendt writes, "as Jesus of Nazareth, whose insights into this faculty can be compared in their originality and unprecedentedness with Socrates' insights into the possibilities of thought, must have known very well when he likened the power to forgive to the more general power of performing miracles, putting both on the same level and within the reach of man."<sup>415</sup> Here, in one sense, Arendt and Augustine are not in disagreement. For Arendt, Jesus recognized the political relevance of forgiveness to actively interrupt the natural cycles of vengeance in order to maintain authentic political spaces and relationships, yet Arendt's understanding of the miraculous, in this sense, is not an explicitly divine movement that enters into the realm of human affairs. Rather, as a human capacity, forgiveness originates from within the world that belongs to humankind, and so although the insight Jesus offers is 'unprecedented', it bears no connection to his divine claims. For Augustine, on the other hand, the appearance of Jesus Christ, in his divinity and humanity, is the miracle that places the power to forgive within the

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<sup>415</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 246.

reach of humankind. It is because of Jesus Christ's appearance as our neighbour, and by becoming the exemplar of forgiveness, that human kind, in turn, can forgive one another. The point of disagreement between Arendt and Augustine is, of course, Augustine's confession that Christ's love is divine and that authentic forgiveness is that which follows Christ's divine example. "Just as that one did not look after his own interest but ours, in that as the Word he became flesh and lived among us, and he assumed our sins, although he was without sin, so also should we, in imitation of him, willingly bear one another's burdens."<sup>416</sup> Love of this kind undermines the freedom of political action because the infinite need of the neighbour demands our constant attention, Arendt argues, and so although the discovery of the political relevance of forgiveness can be attributed to Jesus, Arendt sets aside Christ's divine claim that rests at the centre of Augustine's Christology. It is the divine claim of Jesus Christ that guides Augustine's discussion of forgiveness and makes possible political life within Christian community here on earth. This political community is a witness, Augustine argues, to the coming fullness of God's kingdom. The appearance of Christ as neighbour, then, answers the infinite claim of neighbour love through his divine abundance, and by exemplifying how forgiveness enables humankind to enter into right relation with God, Christ is also the exemplar of how forgiveness works to establish right relations amongst neighbours. Here is where the conceptual space for Augustine's account of Christian political life and forgiveness may be opened up. As a witness, the enactment of Christian forgiveness points to the fullness of God's

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<sup>416</sup> Augustine, *Eighty Three Different Questions*, Question 71, (3).

redemptive work that is yet to come, but is already made visible through the love of Jesus Christ within this reality.<sup>417</sup> Arendt's critical reading of Augustinian neighbour love, in the end, misreads the continuity Augustine establishes between Christ's appearance and God's kingdom yet to come. That is, while Arendt suggests that political life for the Christian community must await this fullness, that it must await until the neighbour's claim can be met sufficiently by the divine eschatological perfection of love, Augustine provides us with an account of neighbour love that meets this claim by referring to Christ's divine abundance in a way that allows the Christian community to begin to be fully receptive of the neighbour here on earth. Within this claim, however, Augustine cautions us against all love that directs us away from the love of Christ so that we would not, in our love and forgiveness of others, shape these interactions after our own selfish preferences. "So then," Augustine writes, "men are driven back from their native country by the contrary breezes of bad habits, as it were, and eagerly seek after inferior and less estimable things than the One which they acknowledge is better and more excellent."<sup>418</sup> Christian community is called to live, even now, as citizens of God's coming kingdom, Augustine states, and so this present life may be considered "a sort of traveling or sailing to our own country. We are not brought closer to Him who is everywhere present by moving from place to place, but by a holy desire and lofty morals."<sup>419</sup> The Christian loves and forgives the neighbour because of what the neighbour is already

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<sup>417</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 2, 8, (2).

<sup>418</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Instruction*, Chapter 10, (10).

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 10, (10).

becoming, which is to say, the Christian does not love the neighbour simply as an occasion to love Christ, but is able to love the totality of the neighbour within the knowledge of their sinful conditionality because Christ's own love has made this possible. How we move through this life, Augustine claims, and how we choose to love and forgive, is directly connected to the fullness of life that the Christian community anticipates and which Christ extends freely to us at present. Christian desires need to be continually focused on the example that Christ provides his followers, Augustine claims, for though the restoration of creation has begun in Christ, humankind must yet be continually be mindful of their sinful conditionality. For Augustine, forgiveness recognizes this earthly sinful conditionality just as it participates in the continuity of love established by God between heaven and earth. Augustine writes:

And let the Christian not disdain to do what Christ did. For when the body is bent to the brother's feet, the affectation of humility is itself stirred in the very heart or if it was already there, is strengthened. But, apart from this moral meaning, we recall that we made known the depth of this deed of the Lord in this way, that, by washing the feet of his already washed and cleansed disciples, the Lord signified, on account of the human affectations in which we are involved on earth, that, however much progress we have made in the attainment of justice, we may know that we are not without sin; and he now and again washes this way by interceding for us when we pray that the Father who is in heaven forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.<sup>420</sup>

Forgiveness, Augustine argues, is about rightly ordered love, and the humility exemplified by Christ is instructive in terms of how his followers are to understand

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<sup>420</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 58, 4, (2).

their relationship with the neighbour and the world, that is, forgiveness is not an expression of moral superiority, but a way entering into authentic political relations with one another because of Christ's divine example.

On this point, Jennifer Wright Knust's important critique makes the argument that unconditional Christian forgiveness is, in actuality, far more revealing of our underlying *ressentiment* than it serves to welcome victim and offender into right relationship. Knust bases her argument in part on her reading of Irenaeus of Lyon who, she claims, understood forgiveness simply as the postponement of God's divine wrath. Knust writes:

Perhaps God, as the absolute sovereign from whom and through whom all grace and forgiveness must abound, is able to offer the sort of unequivocal forgiveness that Irenaeus and other Christians have sometimes recommended, but human beings seem far less capable of overlooking offenses and extending forgiveness, even when God's love is the topic and forgiveness the (purported) goal. Thus Irenaeus brings up Christ's prayer not so that he can lovingly welcome and forgive those who have injured him, but so that he can demonstrate just how wrong and objectionable they actually are.<sup>421</sup>

The forgiveness Christ offers at the moment of his death, the forgiveness of those who do not know what they are doing, is the 'warrant for God's violence', Knust writes, and so Christian forgiveness is framed not as a radical invitation into authentic community as much as it is the temporary deferral of the coming eternal punishment that awaits those who have wrongfully persecuted Christ and his followers. This means, as Knust's account suggests, "that in the larger context of

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<sup>421</sup> Jennifer Wright Knust, 'Jesus' Conditional Forgiveness' in *Ancient Forgiveness*, eds. Charles L. Griswold & David Konstan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 177.



Luke-Acts, Jesus' statement serves as a reaffirmation of [Christ's] power, justifying the divine punishment meted out to his enemies at a later time."<sup>422</sup> The problem Knust identifies lies in what she understands to be the sheer unconditional nature of Christian forgiveness, which, she argues, negates the hostility and resentment that form our reality. At first glance, there are aspects of Knust's argument that

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid., footnote on p. 180. Edith Wyschogrod's reading of Derrida's account of forgiveness offers an alternative consideration of the tension presented by unconditional forgiveness. Put briefly, for Derrida, the problem of unconditional forgiveness, understood as a gift that demands no return, turns on the reality that forgiveness as gift becomes a relation of power, that is, by being conscious of our forgiveness we enter into an economy of exchange that destroys forgiveness altogether. There can be no such thing as gift *qua* gift, Derrida argues. Yet, according to Wyschogrod, Derrida "cannot avoid acknowledging the necessity for conditional, political-juridical and psychological forgiveness" (Wyschogrod, "Repentance and Forgiveness: The Undoing of Time" in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 60, No. 1/3, (Dec., 2006), p. 159. In her conclusion, Wyschogrod turns to Emmanuel Levinas as a way of responding to Derrida's concern. According to Wyschogrod, the relationship Levinas draws between transcendence and human experience, described as the trace, may allow us to conceptualize the possibility of an ethic because this trace disrupts the present. The importance here is found in the notion of 'disruption' or the possibility of being able to consider a wrongdoing in the present and be reminded that we could have acted differently – which is something other than simply dragging past wrongs into the present. If forgiveness is impossible, as Derrida maintains, there is little motivation to change the way we act, but by considering the trace left by our past selves, our present experience may be disrupted causing us to act differently. "In the absence of the trace," Wyschogrod writes, "the ethical import of that which had been done would otherwise disappear to be replaced by a spurious primordial innocence and a loss of the sense that I, more than anyone, am responsible for all the others" (Wyschogrod, p. 167).

A consideration of Augustine's conceptualization of the radical interruption of Christ's incarnation may be worthwhile here. The notion of the trace, which, in this context, is the disruption of experience, is the force that motivates transformation. Put differently, Wyschogrod argues that the ethical implications of the trace lie precisely in the fact that when we confront the disruption caused by the trace, we are reminded that we could have acted differently. Alternatively, the appearance of Christ, for Augustine, is the radical interruption that sets the example for how we are to live amongst one another. Forgiveness, which, for the Christian, is impossible on our own terms, is made possible through the love of Christ, and it is by confronting Christ's love for us that we are made aware of our sinfulness. This stands in contrast with the transcendent movement of the trace, which, as a part of our human existence, places the ethical weight on our capacity to consider how our past wrongs have caused harm in the hope that we will modify our present actions. In short, for Wyschogrod, there is ethical weight to sin. Yet Augustine argues that it is Christ who enables us to live differently by drawing radically near to us and becoming the exemplar of love and forgiveness. Though there are significant contextual differences here, Augustine cannot agree that sin motivates change. Even when sin is understood as part of the transcendent traces of ourselves that challenge us to act differently, authentic transformation is a matter of rightly orienting our love. Our confrontation with the divine love of Christ, Augustine claims, grounds the possibility of forgiveness and the reorientation of our love. In effect, there is enough conceptual space here to think of the appearance of Christ as the 'exit...from the aporetic structure of forgiveness' that Wyschogrod concludes does not exist.

Augustine might resonate with, that is, Augustine would be wary of any form of forgiveness that was not restorative, and he would not support an understanding of forgiveness that was not commensurate with properly oriented love. In this sense, Augustine is clear about the context in which forgiveness authentically occurs, yet the appeal to Christ's divine love and forgiveness cannot only be a way of demanding 'divinely initiated destruction', as Knust claims. Christian forgiveness is an enactment of rightly ordered love, Augustine notes, and it would be hard to imagine that Augustine would be sympathetic to an account of forgiveness based only on the Christian's underlying resentment. Augustine reminds Christ's followers that they are to forgive in a spirit of humility, a spirit that does not harbour resentment but genuinely seeks to restore relations just as God restores creation to himself through Jesus Christ. This is where Augustinian themes of forgiveness helpfully offer an alternative to Knust's interpretation. Whereas Knust rightfully draws our attention to the pitfalls of forgiveness that run at cross purposes to the self-sacrificial example of Jesus Christ, and here she references German theologian Siegfried Leffler who reconciled love of God with the murder of Jews during the period of the Third Reich, Augustine's call to follow Christ's example is not based on the resources humankind possesses apart from God.<sup>423</sup> If, as Arendt maintained, Jesus Christ appears as our neighbour with an infinite debt of love, then Knust is right to be sceptical of humankind's imitation of Christ's forgiveness. That is, if humankind must rely on its own resources to follow Christ's divine example, then Knust's concern about the

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

authenticity of unconditional love and forgiveness is not misplaced. What we find in Augustine, however, is an account of forgiveness that at once cautions against moral superiority, wrongfully oriented love, and vengeful anger as it relies upon the divine abundance of Christ to make possible our capacity to forgive. Breidenthal's central point on this issue addresses the tension Knust identifies. Because Christ has sanctified humankind's relation to one another as neighbours, Breidenthal writes, we must now ask how Augustine challenges us to "hear that Jesus has cancelled the debts we owe one another without abusing the good news – using it to turn away from one another rather than turn toward one another in confidence and hope."<sup>424</sup> The difference here is a matter of sufficiency where Christ's divine resources must account for humanity's deficiency. Following Breidenthal's reading of Augustine, we see that not only has Christ provided the means for us to answer the neighbour's claim of love, but that this answer is also properly constrained by our worldly context, which is to say that proper love is not the 'abuse of good news'. Augustine, then, provides us with a way of thinking about Christ's example of forgiveness without glossing over the reality of our sinful conditionality, for although justice may be attained through the enactment of righteous love and forgiveness, Augustine writes, Christian community must continually be aware and endure the shortcomings of a world that has not yet experienced the perfection of God's redemptive love.

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<sup>424</sup> Breidenthal, 'Jesus Is My Neighbor: Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation' in *Modern Theology*, 14:4 October, 1998, p. 500.

For readers of Augustine, the question of political forgiveness does not belong to the philosopher or political theorist alone. Rather, this multi-disciplinary intersection presents a promising site of engagement with Augustine's theological account of forgiveness and neighbour love. While Augustine cannot expect to fulfil the political vision Arendt advocates, he does not call for the postponement of political life until God's kingdom arrives. To be sure, Augustine is unwilling to take shortcuts in order to experience the joy of God's kingdom prematurely, yet Christ's appearance allows Christian community to transform their political imagination already. Because of Christ's divine abundance, and because he is the exemplar of forgiveness, life within Christian community is at once the enactment and witness of God's restorative love that is already breaking into this reality. While this project does not seek to engage the specific terms, applications, or categories of political forgiveness outside of the conversation between Arendt and Augustine, we must consider how the relevance of Christian neighbour love and forgiveness has too often been overlooked or misread. As we have seen, Arendt's significance lies not only in her profound articulation of the shape of authentic political life, but also in her important critique of Augustinian neighbour love and the contextual limits she places on political forgiveness. Many of Arendt's concerns, in fact, are not incongruous with Augustine's own account, and this is especially so when we consider how both Augustine and Arendt draw significant attention to inappropriate enactments of love that destroy authentic political life. What we find within Augustine's text is the conceptual space to evaluate Arendt's claims, and it is

possible to conclude that the Augustinian themes of Christian forgiveness function to restore and sustain authentic political relationships on earth. As O'Donovan argues, Arendt's critique of Christianity often draws more attention to the weaknesses of her particular theological sensibilities than it serves to actually effectively critique Christian political imagination. Arendt continually addresses the importance of political freedom that makes it possible for action and speech to reveal our distinct identities, but Arendt's perception of political freedom seems to "depend on the eschatological transformation of politics by the Christ-event."<sup>425</sup> O'Donovan suggests that it is difficult to understand political authority as conferring freedom, as Arendt maintains, "unless we have first learned to think in terms of a rule that is salvific."<sup>426</sup> Here, again, we see the important continuity between heaven and earth that can be drawn from Augustine's commentary on Christian love and forgiveness. While Arendt's appeal to political freedom may resonate more closely with Christian eschatology than she would admit, this freedom, which is founded on Christ's divine love, allows us to participate freely in political life. O'Donovan rightly makes the point here that freedom, understood within the context of Christ's incarnation, "is perfected in the act of representation."<sup>427</sup> That is to say, Christ is always amongst those whom he represents, and he is continuously present throughout the "whole drama of the coming, the conflict and the triumph of the Kingdom of Christ."<sup>428</sup>

Christ does not appear simply to take the place of his followers, but to be co-present

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<sup>425</sup> Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of Nations*, p. 127.

<sup>426</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 127.

with them, O'Donovan writes, which means that the political relevance of Christian community lies in its witness of God's coming kingdom because Christ is present within this community. O'Donovan writes:

It is not, as is often suggested, that Christian political order is a *project* of the church's mission, either as an end in itself or as a means to the further missionary end. The church's one project is to witness to the Kingdom of God. Christendom is *response* to mission, and as such a sign that God has blessed it. It is constituted not by the church's seizing alien power, but by alien power's becoming attentive to the church.<sup>429</sup>

This sense of being co-present grounds much of what Augustine meant when he imagined the political shape of Christian community, a political community that points to the coming perfection of God's Kingdom. Christ, as our neighbour, does not redirect our love because he stands in the place of another; rather, we are capable of loving rightly because Christ has come to be co-present with us. The forgiveness Christ extends to us makes it possible to be co-present with him, and though, at present, Christian community must endure evil, Augustine writes that this life is not to be regretted. This worldly life, Augustine states, is the school of eternity, where Christian political community is called to love and forgive without grasping after the world as something they alone can perfect.<sup>430</sup> Here, Arendt rightly asks how we are to understand love's relation to authentic political life, and we find in Augustine an apprehension about love that is not inconsistent with the hope he places in God's coming kingdom. In this sense, Augustine's understanding of forgiveness and

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>430</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book I, ch. 29.

neighbour love challenges our expectations of political life on earth, that is, Christ calls us to forgive because our sinful conditionality has not yet been fully redeemed, and so we must temper our expectations with the knowledge of our present sinful weakness. At the same time, however, we are to abide in this conditionality knowing that because of forgiveness, as a movement of rightly ordered love, how we love and forgive witnesses to the perfection of God's kingdom yet to come. Because Christ has become our neighbour, and because he has shown us how to love and forgive, Christian political life reveals how quickly we are liable to turn to sinful love as it reveals how the power of Christ's love and forgiveness restores us.

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