



## HANNAH ARENDT IN THE LIGHT OF SAINT AUGUSTINE. FROM POLITICAL ONTO-THEOLOGY TO REPUBLICAN PHENOMENOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

*This article scrutinizes in-depth the theological dimension in Hannah Arendt's political and ethical thought. In addition to the influences she received at a young age from the Catholic theologian Romano Guardini, Hannah Arendt was influenced, through her doctoral dissertation under the supervision of Karl Jaspers, by the philosophical, ontological and theological thought of St. Augustine. Both the fundamental Arendtian concepts of natality and amor mundi, as well as her phenomenological perception of time (i.e. past, present and future) have been influenced, to a great extent (naturally with Martin Heidegger's influences), by the Augustinian thought. Hannah Arendt, as happens in Marx in his reading of Hegel, namely reverses the Augustinian notion of love, formulating a worldly field of love, full of Socratic and Aristotelian references. Actually, St. Augustine's political onto-theology is transformed into a republican phenomenology where the critical stake of the earthly polis is not exhausted in amor Dei but is defined as a worldly freedom or, in other words, the pursue of public happiness in-the-world of the public sphere.*

**Keywords:** Hannah Arendt; St. Augustine; republicanism; amor mundi; caritas;

### 1. THEOLOGY AND POLITICAL REPUBLICANISM IN HANNAH ARENDT

Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott who, along with Judith Chelius Stark, edited the English translation of Arendt's doctoral dissertation on the concept of love in St. Augustine,<sup>1</sup> points out that Arendt must be seen as a thinker with many intellectual faces. In fact, she claims that we should try to comprehend the fruitful Arendtian oeuvre through many readings and interpretations.<sup>2</sup> It is true that Arendt's corpus, largely with the precious help of her student Jerome Kohn, is now before us ready for new and radical readings. It is also true that her political and ethical thought is subject to a new interpretative process, with many re-visions, as in the case of feminism.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it is no coincidence that a huge literature, concerning Arendt and her work, has already been classified under the term of Arendtian Studies. Her *corpus*, as an open text, urges us for new reflections, something that Arendt herself would strongly desire since the Arendtian public sphere is nothing but the common sense and

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott, "What St. Augustine Taught Hannah Arendt about 'how to live in the world': Caritas, natality and the banality of evil", In: Mika Ojakangas (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. Practice, Thought and Judgment*, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Helsinki, 2010, pp. 8-27, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Bonnie Honig (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 1995.



interplay of speeches, doctrines and deeds in-the-world. For Arendt, the earthly world emerges as a fragile web of human relationships. She calls this ontological and phenomenological phenomenon *amor mundi*, by reversing the Augustinian *amor Dei*. The moral and political topos of *amor mundi* is the public sphere itself. Public sphere is considered as a fundamental republican virtue that is always vulnerable before the danger of Totalitarianism.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of world in Arendt's political and ethical thought exists only through a fact that she defines as acting in concert. World is inhabited by human beings as a definitely earthly home.<sup>5</sup> Each time we leave each other, turning our backs to one another, the earthly world, this space 'in between' according to Martin Buber,<sup>6</sup> is totally destroyed and thus is lost beneath the ruins that collapsed before the feet of Benjaminian *Angelus Novus*.<sup>7</sup> Arendt's political phenomenology and whatever is defined today as Arendtian republican humanism<sup>8</sup> has been critically influenced by the strong theological atmosphere of the Weimar culture.<sup>9</sup> Of course, it is not only the hard theological aspects of Heidegger's thought,<sup>10</sup> but also the dominant position of both Protestantism and Catholicism within the ranks of the intellectual scene of Germany during the interwar period. As noted above, Arendt was taught by the Catholic priest Romano Guardini the mutual influence between philosophy and theology through the great figures of Socrates, Augustine and Kierkegaard.<sup>11</sup> James Bernauer S.J. points out that Arendt, through Guardini's lectures at the University of Berlin and later as a student at University of Marburg, within a university context that was dominated by the eminent figures of existential theology, such as the Protestant theologian Rudolf Bultmann, creatively assimilated a series of crucial concepts in her personal intellectual project.<sup>12</sup> Actually, her entire project about *amor mundi* has been affected so much by the philosophical and theological, either Christian or Jewish, environment of Weimar Renaissance.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, Arendt transforms lots of the theological concepts of Christian forgiving or Jewish messianism into a political and ethical theory about a worldly kind of faith, where *amor mundi* is seen, in the final analysis, as the human condition of worldliness.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, New York, 2005, p. 203.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, Harper San Francisco, New York, 1993, p. 343.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*. Volume 4, 1938-1940, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 2006, p. 392.

<sup>8</sup> Michael H. McCarthy, *The Political Humanism of Hannah Arendt*, Lexington Books, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> John Kiess, *Hannah Arendt and Theology*, Bloomsbury, London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger and Theology*, Bloomsbury, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney, 2014 and Judith Wolfe, *Heidegger's Eschatology. Theological Horizons in Martin Heidegger's Early Work*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Young-Bruhl, *Hannah Arendt. For Love of the World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2004, p. 34 and Marcio Gimenes de Paula, "Hannah Arendt: Religion, Politics and the Influence of Kierkegaard", In: Jon Stewart (ed.), *Kierkegaard's Influence in Socio-Political Thought*. Volume 14, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, pp. 29-40.

<sup>12</sup> James Bernauer S.J., "A Catholic Conversation with Hannah Arendt", In: Thomas Michel, S.J. (ed.), *Friends on the Way. Jesuits Encounter Contemporary Judaism*, Fordham University Press, New York, 2007, pp. 142-165.

<sup>13</sup> Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb, *Regions of Sorrow. Anxiety and Messianism in Hannah Arendt and W. H. Auden*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 2003, Daniel Brandes, "On Messianic Strains in Arendt's Theory of Political Action", In: *Journal of Jewish Thought* 1 (2013), pp. 1-23 and Robert A. Krieg, "German Catholic Views of Jesus and Judaism, 1918-1945", In: Kevin P. Spicer (ed.), *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 2007, pp. 50-75.

<sup>14</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1998, p. 7.



James Bernauer S.J. constructively connects Arendt's concept of worldliness with the German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology of hope and responsibility. It is well-known that Bonhoeffer is considered today as a contemporary Christian martyr who resisted Nazism and finally was executed by Hitler's regime. James Bernauer S.J. strongly argues that the Arendtian *amor mundi* is governed by a religious aura.<sup>15</sup> The notion of forgiveness is a typical case of how Hannah Arendt has ontologically and theoretically used a worldview that derives from Jesus's own life,<sup>16</sup> building from the Christology of forgiveness the human condition of a new or second or a political condition of natality.<sup>17</sup> Augustine's influence here is no less than critical. Through forgiving and natality, Arendt perceives public sphere as the field of an earthly immortality. Aristotelian polis is the realization of this unstoppable new beginning. Drawing her inspiration from the Augustinian motto 'Initium ut esset homo creatus est / Man was created to have a beginning' (Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, Book 12, Ch. 20), Arendt builds a republican, political and ethical theory with strong theological origins. It is worth noting that Liisi Keedus, by comparing the parallel intellectual trajectories of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, argues that, in contrast to Strauss, who remained closer to Judaism, Arendt has re-defined the Christian and Christological perspective in a purely political and moral direction for the love of the world.<sup>18</sup>

Arendt's republican onto-theology was also implicitly influenced by Jewish eschatological mysticism. Although Arendt has not been directly influenced by Jewish mysticism, the concept of miracle, as a phenomenological fact, draws its inspiration from both a political reading of Jesus's life and Jewish eschatology as well. In her opinion, miracle is not just an article of faith confession, but, as Gerschom Scholem points out, nearly a public event that is yet to happen in the historical time in the heart of community in a very visible way. Through a comparative approach of Arendt's *The Human Condition*, Sussanah Young-Ah Gottlieb explores in-depth the poetic work of her beloved friend W.H. Auden –, her relationship with Jewish messianism. Now, messianic and eschatological human condition is regarded as a condition of contingency, uncertainty and human fallibility, highlighting in this tragic way the inhumane phenomenon of Totalitarianism in 20<sup>th</sup> century. Benjamin's revolutionary messianism has drastically affected on Arendt's political and ethical thought.<sup>19</sup> It is noteworthy that Danielle Celermajer argues that the influence of Athens on Arendt's thought is not as great as that of Jerusalem, even on concepts such as Augustine's natality, which is traced in the Hebrew Bible and the idea of pure creation.<sup>20</sup> As far as Daniel Brandes is concerned, the concept of miracle in Arendt's thought, as the *locus classicus* of human action, is related not so much to Carl Schmitt's notion of decisionism as to Franz Rosenzweig's messianic political onto-theology. Eventually, Oliver Marchart perceives Arendt's messianism in the sense of a political temporality between past and future; as a chasm; an abyss; a non-time; an eternal present; a todayness; a small break in the heart of

<sup>15</sup> James Bernauer S.J., "Bonhoeffer and Arendt at One Hundred", In: *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 2 (2007), pp. 77-85, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Breidenthal, "Jesus is my Neighbor: Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation", In: *Modern Theology* 14/4 (1998), pp. 489-503.

<sup>17</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 2004, p. 616.

<sup>18</sup> Liisi Keedus, *The Crisis of German Historicism. The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015, p. 13.

<sup>19</sup> Raluca Eddon, 'Arendt, Scholem, Benjamin. Between Revolution and Messianism', In: *European Journal of Political Theory* 5 (2006), pp. 261-269.

<sup>20</sup> Danielle Celermajer, 'Hannah Arendt: Athens or perhaps Jerusalem?', In: *Thesis Eleven* 102 (2010), pp. 24-38.



time; as the crucial moment of the beginning and founding of the political community; this *nunc stans*, i.e. eternity, in the last analysis, as an eternal present.<sup>21</sup>

Consequently, it becomes apparent that Arendt's theological education is a crucial element in the entire formulation and evolution of her political and ethical thought, which is also related to her Jewish backgrounds, but mainly to the Christian influences she has received since her late teens, within the intellectual and academic circles of the Weimar Renaissance. Theology and philosophy, Christianity, existentialism and phenomenology are a common and wider reflexive field upon which the spiritual becoming of European and especially the German interwar era rests.<sup>22</sup> In particular, Augustine stands as a theological hinterland within the Arendtian *corpus*, in which both Jesus Christ and the great Jewish political theologians constitute the two poles of a mental *continuum*, from which Hannah Arendt (with Aristotle's influence) draws the most important conceptual elements of her work.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Arendt's project has very clear theological references, which must always be emphasized, so that her phenomenological and republican theory on worldliness and public sphere to acquire its true metaphysical and onto-theological dimensions.

Both natality and *amor mundi*, now as a worldly love for the neighbor, are the major conceptual innovations that Arendt owes to St. Augustine and those which, ultimately, define and distinguish her, intellectually and politically speaking, from the dark, Heraclitean and maybe pessimistic fatality of Martin Heidegger.<sup>24</sup> Drawing her inspiration both from St. Augustine and Aristotle, Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott underlines that Arendt profoundly explores the critical political and moral question of how we can live in-the-world with security and putting well-being and eudaimonia as a fundamental onto-theological goal. If there is a reliable answer to this crucial question, it can be found in her doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine.<sup>25</sup> The battered text of her dissertation, which she took with her when she fled to the U.S.A. in 1941,<sup>26</sup> dominates in the American phase of her thought.<sup>27</sup> Thereby, it is well known that she further developed the basic Augustinian concepts of natality and *amor mundi* from 1950s onwards, re-formulating her whole phenomenological, moral and republican thought, through Western onto-theology.<sup>28</sup> It is now a common place, that Arendt's anthropology and existentialism take place, as an entire theoretical project, on the

<sup>21</sup> Oliver Marchart, 'Time for a New Beginning. Arendt, Benjamin, and the Messianic Conception of Political Temporality', In: *Redescriptions. Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* 10 (2006), pp. 134-147.

<sup>22</sup> Leonard V. Caplan and Rudy Koshar (eds), *The Weimar Moment. Liberalism, Political Theology, and Law*, Lexington Books, Plymouth, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Spiros Makris, 'Aristotle in Hannah Arendt's Republicanism. From homo faber to homo politicus', In: *Annuaire International Des Droits De L' Homme*, Volume IX, 2015-2016, Issy-les-Moulineaux Cedex, Paris (2017), pp. 535-563.

<sup>24</sup> George Pattison, *Heidegger on Death. A Critical Theological Essay*, Ashgate, Surrey, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Ronald C. Arnett, 'Arendt and Saint Augustine. Identity Otherwise than Convention', In: Calvin L. Troop (ed.), *Augustine for the Philosophers. The Rhetor of Hippo, the Confessions, and the Continentals*, Baylor University Press, Waco, Texas, 2014, pp. 39-57.

<sup>26</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark, 'Rediscovering Hannah Arendt', In: *Hannah Arendt, Love and Saint Augustine*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1996, pp. 111-211, p. 115.

<sup>27</sup> Richard King, *Arendt and America*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1998, Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Penguin Books, Middlesex and New York, 1985, p. 211 and Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Books, London and New York, 2006, pp. 65-66 and pp. 165-166.



constructive crossing field both of political philosophy and theology.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the relationship between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* must always be examined as a single effort where Aristotelian republicanism is coming to touch with Augustinian theology.<sup>30</sup>

Rodrigo Chacón points out that the overseeing of the influence of St. Augustine on Arendt's political and moral thought is not due only to the fact that this text became widely known in the mid-1990s but because the most of the intellectuals that study her work refuse to acknowledge the theological references of her thought.<sup>31</sup> In this sense, we can study Arendt's texts within the context of an explicit theological-political perspective, as in the case of Leo Strauss, who belongs to the intellectual environment of the Weimar Renaissance as well, but, ontologically and ideologically speaking, is conservative and more Platonic than Aristotelian.<sup>32</sup> Rodrigo Chacón explains St. Augustine's influence on Arendt through the liberal, dialectical and existentialist theology of Rudolf Bultmann, who, together with Martin Heidegger at the University of Marburg from 1923 to 1929, have shaped, through a phenomenological deconstruction of Western onto-theology, the reflexive prerequisites of a neo-orthodox conception of the Christological meaning and the related world affairs, where the Being-in-the-world, as the metonymy of human homelessness and anxiety, finally acquires a consciousness of its existence through the Other and the love for the neighbor.<sup>33</sup> Behind this diffusive eschatological sense of a collapsing modernity, excellently outlined in the Origins of Totalitarianism, through the historical crystallization of Totalitarianism on the structural pillars of imperialism, anti-Semitism and racism,<sup>34</sup> Arendt seeks, by building an analogy between the City of God and Rome, which collapsed under its suicidal *libido dominandi*, a way out of the catastrophic and deadly worldlessness that shakes modern humanity.

Augustine's neo-Platonic existentialism of natality (see 'Initium ergo ut esset, creatus est homo') led Arendt, through Martin Heidegger and the Weimar culture, to the earthly political phenomenology of plurality, responsibility and enlarged mentality.<sup>35</sup> Since human is becoming a major issue for himself (see here the Augustinian 'Quaestio mihi factus sum'), it is not the Cartesian, but the reflective consciousness that is being put at the forefront of history. Augustine's theory of temporality, in the eleventh Book of his Confessions,<sup>36</sup> with the precious help of Socrates and Immanuel Kant,<sup>37</sup> is gradually transformed into a political

<sup>29</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, A Harvest Book. Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London, 1978.

<sup>30</sup> Shin Chiba, 'Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship, and Citizenship', In: *The Review of Politics* 57 (1995), pp. 505-536.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London, 1996.

<sup>32</sup> Michael P. Zuckert & Catharine H. Zuckert, *Leo Strauss and the Problem of Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2014, p. 267.

<sup>33</sup> Rodrigo Chacón, 'Hannah Arendt in Weimar Beyond the Theologico-Political Predicament?', In: Leonard V. Caplan and Rudy Koshar (eds), *The Weimar Moment. Liberalism, Political Theology, and Law*, Lexington Books, Plymouth, 2012, pp. 73-107.

<sup>34</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and Brighton, 1992 and Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, Schocken Books, New York, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008 (Translated by Henry Chadwick), p. 221.

<sup>37</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, New York, 2005, p. 5 and Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and Brighton, 1992.



and moral theory of consciousness as understanding.<sup>38</sup> Paraphrasing Augustine, it could be said that Arendt perceives understanding either as a reminder of the past or as a promise of the future. To the extent that the Augustinian present becomes a ‘time-crucible’, i.e. an interpretative and semantic time through remembrance and expectation, Augustine becomes a ‘figure-crucible’ of a kind of conceptual eclecticism, reminding us much of Marx’s close relationship with Hegel. This means that by putting Augustine on his feet, Arendt actually restores the Aristotelian tradition of *vita activa* against the Platonic view of *vita contemplativa*. Thus, ‘with Augustine and against Augustine’, so to speak, Arendt creates another strong reverse within the long tradition of Western political thought, aiming, in terms of modern Jewish mysticism (tikkoun),<sup>39</sup> not only at the restoration of the forgotten philosophical concepts, but much more at the re-construction of the violently broken and brutally disintegrated human relationships after Auschwitz and Shoah. Thus, the political reading of St. Augustine, which was completed in America in the 1950s, clearly shows that Arendt had begun to draw her theoretical attention to the so-called worldly affairs before 1933 and the politicization of her thought through the Jewish Question.<sup>40</sup> Thereby, it can be argued that she became herself a *homo politicus*, through her passionate engagement with Augustine’s thought. This Arendtian onto-theological project was completed in the U.S.A and eventually took the theoretical form of a republican-led and phenomenological-driven political metaphysics of *amor mundi*. Augustine’s figure is catalytic within this entire reflexive political and ethical project.

## 2. ARENDT’S POLITICAL AND ETHICAL READING OF THE AUGUSTINIAN THEOLOGY OF CARITAS

In 2014, under the supervising of Dana R. Villa, a contemporary maître in Arendtian Studies, Sarah Elizabeth Spengeman supported her doctoral thesis on *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* at the University of Notre Dame in U.S.A. A large theoretical circle had been coming to an end. In the beginning of her doctoral dissertation, Sarah Elizabeth Spengeman underlines the strong elective affinity between Augustine and Arendt in the following emphatic and characteristic way: “Arendt’s first study of Augustine in her 1929 dissertation, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, had an enduring and significant influence on the development of her political theory. It was in her dissertation that she first became interested in — the relevance of the other, — or what she would later call the human condition of plurality. Arendt’s concern for human plurality guided her inquiry into the origins of totalitarianism, namely anti-Semitism and imperialism, as well as her analysis of totalitarianism in power. Her first study of Augustine also provided key theoretical resources that she later reappropriated to develop her more mature political theory in *The Human Condition*. There, she drew upon Augustinian resources to develop her concept of the man-made world, labor and work, plurality and natality”.<sup>41</sup> In a sense, Arendt uses these sources as an onto-theological basis for her neo-republican and phenomenological theory of *amor mundi*. To put it differently, by turning Augustine’s Christian transcendental charity into an

<sup>38</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding. Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism 1930-1954*, Schocken Books, New York, 1994 and Hannah Arendt, *Thinking Without a Banister. Essays in Understanding 1953-1975*, Schocken Books, New York, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia. Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriel Piterberg, ‘Zion’s Rebel Daughter. Hannah Arendt on Palestine and Jewish Politics’, In: *New Left Review* 48 (2007), pp. 39-57.



Aristotelian republican-inspired *amor mundi*, i.e. an eternal worldly present between past and future,<sup>42</sup> Arendt gave absolutely new meaning to the *vita activa* in a post-Totalitarian era where, from the very beginning, the emerging mass society established worldlessness and loneliness as a sort of human condition. From this point of view, Arendt's constructive relationship with St. Augustine must be considered as a crucial moment within the long course of Western tradition, which in turn affects the content of the reading of the Arendtian *corpus* itself.

Exploring the philosophical aspects of Arendt's republican thought further, Samuel Moyn namely formulates the position about an Arendtian political theology.<sup>43</sup> It is not by accident that Liisi Keedus, searching for Arendt's profound intellectual influences just from her early teens, refers to the intensely interdisciplinary character of her academic education. Thus, in addition to Rudolf Bultmann's influence, Keedus also points out the case of the theologian Martin Dibelius. Dibelius, a professor at the University of Heidelberg, where Arendt gained her doctorate in August 1929 under the supervision of Karl Jaspers, is perceived as the founder of the so-called form criticism, according to which the Gospels are not historical texts but texts that reflect the word of God within the living environment of the early Christian communities.<sup>44</sup> However, we must not overlook the fact that all this debate is inspired by an interpretive pluralism, to the extent that there are also opposing voices. For example, Nathan Van Camp argues that Arendt should not be seen merely as the antagonist of Carl Schmitt's decisionist political theology, but as a neo-Aristotelian, that is to say a theorist of a strong republican action, where *vita activa* is put, historically and philosophically speaking, against a dominant political technology, that has attempted to subject *homo politicus* to the state of *vita contemplativa*, since Plato.<sup>45</sup> As it is well known, in this purely mechanistic and deterministic dialectic of means / ends, Hannah Arendt, also placed Marx in the context of The Marx Project, concluding that, while intending to release *vita activa* from her deadly embrace with the tradition of *vita contemplativa*, he ultimately contributed to the formation of a new idealistic system that degenerated into Stalinism.<sup>46</sup>

The fruitful interpretative and bibliographical literature of Arendt's intellectual origins no more can challenge Augustinianism in her political and moral thought.<sup>47</sup> Although Sarah Elizabeth Spengeman's doctoral thesis is the first mainstream research on *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, it should be noted that the first academic dissertation on Arendt's Augustinianism was defended in 2005, in Rome, at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, by Stephen Kampowski, who, in a more holistic interpretative horizon, places Augustine's 'Initium ut esset homo creatus est' at the epicenter

<sup>41</sup> Sarah Elizabeth Spengeman, *Saint Augustine and Hannah Arendt on Love of the World: An Investigation into Arendt's Reliance on the Refutation of Augustinian Philosophy*, Dissertation, University of Notre Dame, U.S.A., 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Books, London and New York, 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Moyn, 'Hannah Arendt on the Secular', In: *New German Critique* 35/3 (2008), pp. 71-96.

<sup>44</sup> Liisi Keedus, 'Thinking Beyond Philosophy: Hannah Arendt and the Weimar Hermeneutic Connections', In: *Trames* 18/4 (2014), pp. 307-325.

<sup>45</sup> Nathan Van Camp, 'Hannah Arendt and Political Theology: A Displaced Encounter', In: *Revista Pléyade* 8 (2011), pp. 19-35.

<sup>46</sup> Tama Weisman, *Hannah Arendt and Karl Marx. On Totalitarianism and the Tradition of Western Political Thought*, Lexington Books, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth, UK, 2014.

<sup>47</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott, 'What St. Augustine Taught Hannah Arendt about 'how to live in the world': Caritas, natality and the banality of evil', In: Mika Ojakangas (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. Practice, Thought and Judgment*, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Helsinki, 2010, p. 16.



of her republican and ethical theory. For Kampowski, Arendt constitutes, obviously influenced by Heidegger, a radical hermeneutic of political *praxis* as a new beginning, either from the individual point of view, through the Heideggerian concepts of temporality and facticity, or from the viewpoint of human condition in the sense of human finitude. Human, as a finite and temporal being, formulates his imagination and thus by extension his enlarged mentality through the perspective of the others (this is the Kantian aspect of her thought) and simultaneously builds his memory and so his facticity within the context of *amor mundi*. In this way, Arendt, through the Augustinian notion of natality as a creation *ex nihilo*, according to the Christian theological assumption, restores political action as a new beginning; creative and reflexive; unpredictable and irreversible; a pure event; something like the republican counterpart of the Christian miracle. By doing this, she tries, having plurality and public sphere as conceptual axes, to reverse the tradition of Western political thought towards the direction of a new synthesis between *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*, so that acting is regarded as a creative reflection and thinking as an constitutive activity.<sup>48</sup>

Love and Saint Augustine is being brought to the fore when Arendt prepares *The Human Condition*, essentially, as a politicization of the well-known Augustinian motto 'Initium ut esset homo creatus est'. In this regard, it could be supported that here is taking place the so-called Arendtian political theology. Within a new historical environment, that of postwar mass society, which for Arendt represents a fatal post-Totalitarian threat for the Western democracy, she draws attention to the Augustinian concept of natality in order to underscore the importance of plurality and diversity in the foundation of a public sphere. According to George McKenna, Arendt's doctoral thesis is dominated by three readings of the Augustinian *caritas*. One can trace here the analogies with the Heideggerian notion of *Sorge*.<sup>49</sup> *Caritas I* is the Christian desire for the God. *Caritas II* is the love of the neighbor, while *Caritas III* is the love of human as the offspring of Adam and as an entity that is governed by the feature of original sin. In fact, Arendt attempts to fulfill the Augustinian love for the God through the love for the neighbor in the sense of *amor mundi*. By doing so, she puts *Caritas III* as a fundamental dimension of human condition. Human community is built as a plurality of singularities.<sup>50</sup> Thereby, it could be claimed that the reversed Augustinian natality condenses republican political anthropology of *The Human Condition*. Julia Reinhard Lupton claims that Arendtian natality translates, ontologically and politically speaking, the theological conception of creation into the secular idiom of philosophy. Natality, as human createdness, precisely signals this becoming or potentiality and by extension the enigma of our existence in the world. At the same time, Arendtian natality signifies the element of human event as temporality and historicity and thus it realizes human freedom in the sense of free will or *liberum arbitrium* within the horizon of alterity, plurality and worldliness, *i.e.* public sphere as such.<sup>51</sup>

This element of the human event and so of the human miracle of natality is also another powerful argument in favor of an Arendtian political theology not in the sense of

<sup>48</sup> Livio Melina, 'Foreword', In: Stephen Kampowski (ed.), *Arendt, Augustine and the New Beginning. The Action Theory and Moral Thought of Hannah Arendt in the Light of Her Dissertation on St. Augustine*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Michigan, 2008, pp. xi-xiv, p. xiii.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Schalow and Alfred Denker, *Historical Dictionary of Heidegger's Philosophy*, The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, UK, 2010, pp. 78-79.

<sup>50</sup> George McKenna, 'Augustine Revised', In: *First Things* 72 (1997), pp. 43-47.

<sup>51</sup> Julia Richard Lupton, 'Hannah Arendt's Renaissance: Remarks on Natality', In: *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 7/2 (2006), pp. 7-18.





essentialism, since Arendt does not refer to human condition in the meaning of a specific human nature, but in the sense of a quasi-transcendence of worldliness (or ontological immanence), which is quite proportional to Emmanuel Levinas's notion of exteriority.<sup>52</sup> For Hannah Arendt, human dwells in-the-world and so completes it through the human condition of *amor mundi*, but, in the final analysis, he does not come from this world. Consequently, within the element of *creatio ex nihilo* always is latent the element of a kind of a divine presence as an out-worldly reference system, which in Arendt's republican reading acquires the characteristic of a Messianic and miraculous political temporality of *nunc aeternum* à la Walter Benjamin.<sup>53</sup> It is worth noting here that in St. Augustine the present, as a continuously escaping fluid period between the past and the future, finally represents what Arendt defines as *nunc stans*: this eternal Now; or a *nunc aeternitatis*; or a worldly model of temporality; or, in other words, an appropriate metaphor for the divine eternity itself. Within this eternal worldly temporality, she puts the relevant concepts of remembrance, expectation, Christian and Jewish repentance/teshuvah,<sup>54</sup> forgiveness and mutual promise, giving all of them jointly an Aristotelian and republican perspective.<sup>55</sup>

Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin marks the beginning of Arendt's long academic career, which, however, was interrupted violently in Nazi Germany in 1933, and was continued until her early death in 1975 in the U.S.A. Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin, within a hostile atmosphere, not only to any Jew, but also to every democratic citizen, does not simply provokes Arendt's psychological and mental awareness to answer the crucial question of how to live in the world, but, much more than this, transforms the Augustinian desire for the God and the neighbor (*Caritas I and II*) into the love for the world (*Caritas III or amor mundi*).<sup>56</sup> Through the buttered pages of her doctoral dissertation, Arendt followed a course of a long and painful exile, a hermeneutic of distance (*une herméneutique de la distance*), according to Enzo Traverso,<sup>57</sup> that transformed her from a marginal *persona* into a woman of the world (*feminini generis*) and in turn, into one of the most significant thinkers within the Western canon of political and ethical thought.<sup>58</sup> According to Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft, Arendt, by adapting the model of German *Bildung* to the treasure of American republicanism,<sup>59</sup> managed to redevelop the profile of the modern philosopher as a *homo universalis* into a model of an intellectual of the public sphere, who fights, even through the daily press, for the values and principles of republic. Hence, her entire life must be considered as a high standard

<sup>52</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquene University Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2007 (Translated by Alphonso Lingis).

<sup>53</sup> Oliver Marchart, 'Time for a New Beginning. Arendt, Benjamin, and the Messianic Conception of Political Temporality', In: *Redescriptions. Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History* 10 (2006), pp.134-147.

<sup>54</sup> Anya Topolski, *Arendt, Levinas and the Politics of Relationality*, Rowman & Littlefield International, London and New York, 2015, p. 84.

<sup>55</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, A Harvest Book. Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London, 1978, p. 202.

<sup>56</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott, "What St. Augustine Taught Hannah Arendt about 'how to live in the world': *Caritas*, natality and the banality of evil", In: Mika Ojakangas (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. Practice, Thought and Judgment*, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Helsinki, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>57</sup> Enzo Traverso, *L'histoire comme champ de bataille. Interpréter les violences du xx siècle*, La Découverte, Paris, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt. For Love of the World*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Penguin Books, Middlesex and New York, 1985, p. 215.



on how a contemporary citizen should think, behave and act; in other words, as the Weberian ideal type of a democratic citizenship.<sup>60</sup>

It can be strongly argued that her masterpiece *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, such as St. Augustine's *City of God* concerning ancient Rome,<sup>61</sup> summarizes the suffering and calamities of the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly within the European context, by scrutinizing the ideological and political worldviews of imperialism, anti-Semitism and Totalitarianism.<sup>62</sup> Although she was, philosophically and ontologically speaking, sceptical about modernity,<sup>63</sup> Arendt never abandoned the republican virtue of the public sphere, attempting, through her oeuvre, to inspire us with the love for democracy in the sense of public happiness and, more generally, with the love for the world in the meaning of *amor mundi*.<sup>64</sup> In fact, exactly the same rationale was served by St. Augustine, who attributed Roman decline not to the laws and institutions of ancient Rome but to the passion of *libido dominandi*.<sup>65</sup> In the reissue of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in 1958, just the same year as *The Human Condition* was released, Hannah Arendt, at the end of her book, as a conclusion, places a chapter under the eloquent title *Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government*,<sup>66</sup> in which St. Augustine's theory of *initium* is projected within the republican and democratic post-war American context as the promise of new politics itself.<sup>67</sup>

Both the Augustinian concepts of natality and *initium* signify for Arendt the ontological, phenomenological and ethical dimensions of political *praxis*. More specifically, natality does not symbolize the political *praxis* of new foundation as a new rule, *i.e.* in the sense of a new type of political leadership (*ἀρχεῖν*), but in the meaning of a genuine political beginning (*ἀρχή*). Thus, every end within Tradition leads to a new beginning.<sup>68</sup> Augustine's *initium* as natality denotes human diversity and so human contingency in the Kantian sense of absolute good and absolute evil. To put it differently, *initium* as natality indicates the transformative, even in a catastrophic way, power of human freedom.<sup>69</sup> Although the Arendtian key-concepts of natality, plurality, community *etc.* emerge under the spell of her American experience, it is absolutely clear that she builds her neo-Aristotelian republican and ethical theory in light of Love and Augustine by translating the ontological and theological category of *caritas* into the political term of *amor mundi*. Even though the entire project manifests a Heideggerian approach of St. Augustine, it is entirely apparent that her republican and ethical theory regarding public sphere as a passionate love for the world and

<sup>60</sup> Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft, *Thinking in Public: Strauss, Levinas, Arendt*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2016, p. 2 and p. 153.

<sup>61</sup> Spiros Makris, 'Political Onto-Theologies or towards a Political Metaphysics. Some Critical Analogies from Plato to Jürgen Moltmann', In: *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science* 5/3 (2019), pp. 84-109.

<sup>62</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 2004.

<sup>63</sup> Liisi Keedus, *The Crisis of German Historicism. The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Penguin Books, Middlesex and New York, 1985, p. 115.

<sup>65</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott, 'What St. Augustine Taught Hannah Arendt about 'how to live in the world': Caritas, natality and the banality of evil', In: Mika Ojakangas (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. Practice, Thought and Judgment*, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Helsinki, 2010, p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 2004, p. 593 and p. 616.

<sup>67</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, New York, 2005.

<sup>68</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Books, London and New York, 2006, p. 164.

<sup>69</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic*, A Harvest Book. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc. New York, 1972, p. 103.



by extension as a fiery desire for a new political beginning display the strong Augustinian flavor of her philosophical thought on the whole.<sup>70</sup>

Through the onto-theological work of St. Augustine, Hannah Arendt meets the Christian existentialism of Søren Kierkegaard.<sup>71</sup> More than this, the Augustinian spirit of confession before God provides Arendt with the ontological idea of a public sphere where the individual becomes a responsible citizen before its human fellows.<sup>72</sup> The pessimistic atmosphere of the Weimar era, an era full of human angst and existential anxiety, is transformed by her, with the precious assistance of St. Augustine's concept of love, into a republican awareness for worldliness and since the end of WWII for the advent of postwar phenomenon of mass society and conformism. Both of them connote the alienating power of Totalitarianism.<sup>73</sup> To put it in a nutshell, through St. Augustine's onto-theological thought, Hannah Arendt constructively overcomes Edmund Husserl's pure phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's formalist existentialism and by doing this, she actually redefines human's love both for the neighbor and the world. Human is again put as *Quaestio* at the epicenter of contemporary political theory, via the onto-theological and thus conceptual framework of Augustinian terms of *caritas* and natality. From this point of view, it is no coincidence that we speak more and more of an Arendtian political theology.<sup>74</sup>

Hannah Arendt rewrites St. Augustine's onto-theological thought within the historical horizon of an entirely transitional epoch, as obviously was also the Augustinian era, where that eternal Now, *i.e. nunc stans*, prevails between past and future.<sup>75</sup> In the position of Heideggerian Dasein, she places the Augustinian Creator, while in the position of Heideggerian mortality she places the Augustinian concept of natality in the sense of *initium*.<sup>76</sup> For Arendt, new beginning suggests a religious, philosophical, political and ethical rupture with Tradition or, more correctly, a rediscovery of the long past. This intellectual and conceptual rediscovery, including St. Augustine himself, is taking place within the context of a long journey towards the emergence of another Tradition; in fact, an anti-Tradition; where the crucial issue, as in the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida,<sup>77</sup> is not the phenomenological reduction of things per se, but first and foremost our relationship with our neighbor; or our relationship with the Other.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott, "What St. Augustine Taught Hannah Arendt about 'how to live in the world': Caritas, natality and the banality of evil", In: Mika Ojakangas (ed.), Hannah Arendt. Practice, Thought and Judgment, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Helsinki, 2010, pp. 9-10.

<sup>71</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding. Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism 1930-1954*, Schocken Books, New York, 1994, pp. 44-49.

<sup>72</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding. Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism 1930-1954*, Schocken Books, New York, 1994, pp. 24-27.

<sup>73</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, Penguin Books, London and New York, 2006, p. 194.

<sup>74</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott, "What St. Augustine Taught Hannah Arendt about 'how to live in the world': Caritas, natality and the banality of evil", In: Mika Ojakangas (ed.), Hannah Arendt. Practice, Thought and Judgment, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Helsinki, 2010, p. 11.

<sup>75</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, A Harvest Book. Harcourt Brace & Company, San Diego, New York, London, 1978, pp. 202-213.

<sup>76</sup> Johanna Vecchiarelli Scott, "What St. Augustine Taught Hannah Arendt about 'how to live in the world': Caritas, natality and the banality of evil", In: Mika Ojakangas (ed.), Hannah Arendt. Practice, Thought and Judgment, Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Helsinki, 2010, pp. 12-16.

<sup>77</sup> Spiros Makris, 'Emmanuel Levinas on Hospitality. Ethical and Political Aspects', In: *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science*, 2/2 (2018), pp. 79-96.

<sup>78</sup> Spiros Makris, 'Politics, Ethics and Strangers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Fifteen critical reflections on Jacques Derrida's concept of hos(ti)pitality', In: *Theoria & Praxis. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Thought*, 5/1 (2017), pp. 1-21 and Spiros Makris, 'Public sphere as "ultimum refugium"'. The philosophical, political and



The republican way that Arendt reads St. Augustine places her in the field of *vita activa*, away from the intellectual spell of the pure *vita contemplativa*. In the most of her life, especially in her American years, Arendt played the critical role of a public intellectual at the epicenter of the public sphere, by expressing a public speech full of passion for political freedom and public happiness.<sup>79</sup> More specifically, since 1941, in the United States of America, Arendt established herself in the public space as a radical intellectual figure who shifted the focus of contemporary political and ethical theory to the issue of Nazi extermination camps and in particular to the issues of guilt and personal responsibility.<sup>80</sup> St. Augustine's *initium* as natality,<sup>81</sup> in the face of absolute evil, is transformed into a *Quaestio* for the human itself ('quaestio mihi factus sum'), no longer in the abstract sense, but now in the meaning of thoughtlessness, that is, the inability of each individual to wield his or her moral judgment; to reflect on his or her position in-the-world; in particular, to understand the importance and consequences of his or her habits, actions and behaviors upon the others.<sup>82</sup> The evil, then, comes out of a certain inability to think broadly or to imagine the position of Other in-the-world (see some of Arendt's relative concepts as enlarged thought, representative thinking, imagination *etc.*).<sup>83</sup>

In pure Augustinian terms, radical evil is provoked by our inability to consciously perform the onto-theology of love in-the-world (*ordo amoris*); a worldly love, which transforms the divine creation into a new beginning (*initium*) of my equal relationship with the others in front of God. However, this Arendtian consciousness is not an instrumental process of means and ends. Human free will is constantly tested by intense dilemmas, where radical good and radical evil confront each other, shaking the ontological basis of the individual. Therefore, the absurdist, or sometimes heroic, action of choice in Søren Kierkegaard's theology is not a product of a cool Cartesian will.<sup>84</sup> Instead of it, every human decision is tested, almost tragically, by a feeling of aporia and undecidability,<sup>85</sup> where judgment and understanding are taking place as a single action of courage. "Courage", Arendt writes, "is the earliest of all political virtues, and even today it is still one of the few cardinal virtues of politics, because only by stepping out of our private existence and the familial relationships to which our lives are tied can we make our way into the common public world that is our truly political space".<sup>86</sup> Thereby, to sum up, Arendt perceives St. Augustine and his existential onto-theology as an actual performance of courage in the public sphere, by transforming *amor Dei* into *amor mundi* under a bright light of visibility, where

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ethical theory of Hannah Arendt', In: *International Journal of Theology, Philosophy and Science*, 3/4 (2019), pp. 77-92.

<sup>79</sup> Richard King, *Arendt and America*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2015, p. 125 and Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft, *Thinking in Public: Strauss, Levinas, Arendt*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2016, p. 205.

<sup>80</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, Schocken Books, New York, 2003.

<sup>81</sup> Patricia Bowen-Moore, *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality*, The Macmillan Press Ltd., Hampshire and London, 1989.

<sup>82</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Books, New York and London, 2006, p. 280.

<sup>83</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and Brighton, 1992, p. 43, p. 79 and p. 106.

<sup>84</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding. Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism 1930-1954*, Schocken Books, New York, 1994, p. 44.

<sup>85</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Aporias*, Stanford California Press, Stanford, California, 1993 (Translated by Thomas Dutoit).

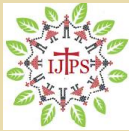
<sup>86</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics*, Schocken Books, New York, 2005, p. 122.



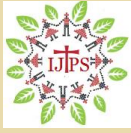
the life of the mind is actually the life of a person who speaks, acts and judges responsibly and having as a human measure the common good.

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