

FINDING A HOME IN THE WORLD: HANNAH ARENDT AND THE PRINCIPLES OF
POLITICAL LOVE

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ABSTRACT

Christopher Martin Caver: Finding a Home in the World: Hannah Arendt and the Principles of Political Love
(Under the direction of Stephen Leonard)

This dissertation seeks to understand and clarify Hannah Arendt's concept of *amor mundi*, a love of the world, and the way it fits into her corpus and into contemporary theoretical understandings of love's relationship to politics. I argue that this concept fundamentally animates Arendt's political thought and, as such, is an under-examined area of scholarship. Furthermore, I argue that it has important normative implications for politics: in our political ideals, our institutional practices, and the sorts of judgments we make about political action. However, I also argue that this concept and Arendt's pluralistic ideals more broadly are limited in terms of the way their aestheticization of politics can render the marginalization faced by some citizens more difficult to address. I offer an interpretation of the work of James Baldwin in order to reevaluate, through the lens of race, the difficult yet important ways a love of the world might be negotiated in contexts of racial hierarchy.

Chapter 1 lays out the plan of the dissertation and situates its contribution to debates within and around scholarship on Arendt and love. Chapter 2 sets out to lay a groundwork for understanding the way that Arendt approaches the concept of a public world, both its centrality to her political thought and the threats it faces in modern times. Chapter 3 then explicates what a love of the world meant for Arendt: its theoretical precursors and influences, its role in responding to modern threats to the world, and some of the ways Arendt saw it exemplified.

Chapter 4 takes on a particularly interesting test of Arendt's approach, by placing it in dialogue with the work of James Baldwin. In so doing I address the significant similarities and productive differences between the two writers on the topic of love, and offer a reading of Baldwin that critically extends Arendt's approach. In Chapter 5 I then use this reading to continue the contrast I draw between Arendt and Baldwin by applying it to three manifestations of political love that Arendt highlights: in teaching, in protest, and in grassroots councils. Finally, in Chapter 6 I summarize my findings and discuss their implications for contemporary politics and what else—besides a love of the world—might be necessary for political freedom.

To Barbara Ann Van Sant Caver

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PREFACE

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You've seen the refugees going nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

— Adam Zagajewski, “Try to Praise the Mutilated World”

One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites—polar opposites—so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love... What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.

— Martin Luther King Jr., “Where Do We Go From Here?”

Politicized invocations of love have become rather commonplace across the terrain of contemporary politics. It is perhaps not surprising that such sentiments should surface now at

what by all accounts is a critical juncture in our democracy. Not perhaps since the Civil Rights Movement have we seen such contentious mass politics and deep political cleavages, and not since then perhaps have invocations of love been so politically prevalent, an appeal we seem to fall back upon when conventional politics has failed. The most memorable slogan from Hillary Clinton's unsuccessful presidential run was the consistent refrain "Love trumps hate."

Organizations like the Human Rights Campaign use the invocation "Love is love" to mobilize for same-sex and transgender rights. Newer organizations with names like #LoveArmy and The Revolutionary Love Project are springing up to channel this emotion towards new political platforms and new movement dynamics. More often than not, these invocations summon a love of others, channeling love's potential to rid our politics of fear, hatred, and oppression. Their message is clear: we need more love in our politics. We need it to ward off the disgusting violence and rhetoric we steadily witness. We need it to overcome the divisions that prevent the progress of justice. And we need it to transform and humanize the way political power is deployed.

This is the context in which I submit this study, one that examines the role of love in politics. While I refuse to deny the rising tide of hatred, bigotry, and xenophobia that has been unleashed in the past few years, nor can I refuse to question, both theoretically and practically, the varied invocations of love that see it as an antidote to the hatred we see exemplified more and more. What has become clearer than ever in researching this question is that love and politics do not necessarily fit neatly together. Indeed, politics may hijack love, invoking its sentiments to mobilize citizens around a cause or candidate that feigns a "love" that is inauthentic or morally suspect. Likewise, love may hijack politics, sweeping up honest debate in the imperatives of compassion, patriotism, or shared identity.

It may seem curious, then, that I turn to the work of Hannah Arendt, primarily known as a theorist of classical republican freedom, to help examine these questions. However, her work—particularly her writings on love, which I study in detail here—is an important resource in making sense of our current moment. Her consistent disdain for invocations of love in politics represent an attempt to articulate the way love has too often meant either political sterility or anti-political hysteria. Moreover, she balances this disdain, crucially, with an alternative vision of political love: what she calls *amor mundi*, a love of the world. Interpreting this often overlooked yet bedrock concept and the dynamic role it plays in Arendt’s political thought has certainly not been easy, but I am hopeful that my efforts in at least this task would meet with her approval. My other main task almost certainly would not, and that task lies in considering the flaws and blind spots presented by Arendt’s emphasis on the world as a space of appearances.

I have taken the work of James Baldwin as a guide in this part of my endeavor. Reading his work, it became clear to me that he was a kindred spirit of Arendt’s, yet one almost completely divorced from her fears of love’s political abuses. Moreover, he provides an analysis of racism that helps get at the heart of what is so frustrating about reforms that focus primarily on political institutions and not emotions and tastes. For me he is a thinker, then, who helps to provide a way of reconciling Arendt’s vision of a love of the world with the extant oppressions and hatreds that compel us so urgently to reach out for a love that is equally fierce and final. With Baldwin as a guide, I attempt to extend and deepen Arendt’s concept and to think of how it may be deployed in contemporary politics. The result of my argument, I hope, is an intersectionalist approach to love’s importance in helping citizens reckon with the world, a love that arms them with the courage and imagination to act and to build up a space of freedom that is more accessible and equitable to all.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>BPF</i>	Arendt, <i>Between Past and Future</i> .
<i>CE</i>	Baldwin, <i>Collected Essays</i> .
<i>CR</i>	Arendt, <i>Crises of the Republic</i> .
<i>EIJ</i>	Arendt, <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i> .
<i>EIU</i>	Arendt, <i>Essays in Understanding</i> .
<i>HC</i>	Arendt, <i>The Human Condition</i> .
<i>JW</i>	Arendt, <i>The Jewish Writings</i> .
<i>LKPP</i>	Arendt, <i>Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy</i> .
<i>LOM</i>	Arendt, <i>Life of the Mind</i> .
<i>LS</i>	Arendt, <i>Love and St. Augustine</i> .
<i>MDT</i>	Arendt, <i>Men in Dark Times</i> .
<i>OR</i>	Arendt, <i>On Revolution</i> .
<i>OT</i>	Arendt, <i>The Origins of Totalitarianism</i> .
<i>RJ</i>	Arendt, <i>Responsibility and Judgment</i> .
<i>RV</i>	Arendt, <i>Rahel Varnhagen</i> .
<i>TPP</i>	Arendt, <i>The Promise of Politics</i> .

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Question of Love and Politics

This project is a critical reconstruction, analysis, and application of Hannah Arendt's concept of *amor mundi*, a "love of the world." The role that love plays in political life was a theme of Arendt's work from her dissertation to her last published works. Her political thought, seen through the lens of the anti-political status of conventional forms of love, represents a search for new sources of meaning in a modern political environment where, as she argued, once-unquestioned notions of tradition, religion, and authority had vanished. In this light, it might not be so surprising that she turned to Augustine of Hippo, one of Christianity's most venerated thinkers on love and politics, as an early and influential interlocutor. For her, Augustine, whom she often referred to as "my old friend," was a philosopher who attempted to theorize a new beginning out of the ruination of the Roman political world. The reckoning she achieves with his ideas on love and politics form a central axis around which her own ideas revolve.¹ It is this sustained reckoning with love as a primarily Christian moral concept, yet one reimagined in service of a political concept of the world, that deserves to be more fully investigated and reckoned with in turn in order to further complicate and assess our own contemporary notions of love and politics.

Conventional accounts of politics and political deliberation (notably those of John Rawls

¹ Cf. Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott, "'A Detour Through Pietism': Hannah Arendt on St. Augustine's Philosophy of Freedom," *Polity* 20, no. 1 (1988): 395, n. 2.

and Jürgen Habermas) continue to exert significant influence on political theory, particularly in their emphasis on the rationality and instrumental reason of political participants and the priority of abstract individual rights to any account of human flourishing.² More recently, however, these accounts of politics have been forced to acknowledge that a primarily rationalist account is one that, as Sharon Krause argues, “not only generates a motivational deficit but misrepresents the normative grounds of moral and political judgment.”³ As a result—and with influences ranging from feminist theories of care and solidarity, to Christian ethics, to deconstructive critiques—a new scholarship around the role of emotion, affect, and love in the realm political arena has come to the fore.⁴ In many ways this elevation of love as a value that underwrites equal political equality has even come to characterize much of contemporary politics, where both policies and the people affected by them are often politicized in relation to love.⁵

Hannah Arendt’s work challenges these opposing assumptions of politics as rooted in either rationalist or sentimentalist psychology. As a result, her intervention into the question of

² Cf. T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); David Shmiltz, *The Elements of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Anna Stilz, *Liberal Loyalty: Freedom, Obligation, and the State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

³ Sharon Krause, *Civil Passions: Moral Sentiment and Democratic Deliberation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 16.

⁴ Cf. Krause, *Civil Passions*; James Martel, *Love Is a Sweet Chain: Desire, Autonomy, and Friendship in Liberal Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Paul Kahn, *Putting Liberalism in Its Place* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Martha Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁵ Consider, for instance, the way opposition to any number of socially progressive policies (health care, minimum wage increases, marriage equality, immigration, etc.) is so easily characterized as “uncaring” or “unloving” of those policies’ beneficiaries. Consider as well the way that social conservatives characterize the Left as people who “hate” America, the military, religion, the traditional family, hard work, or any number of other constructs.

love's relationship to politics is important and unique. Instead of starting from ideas about humanity's basic *nature*, she proceeds from phenomenological distinctions about humanity's basic *conditions* in the world. For example, she distinguishes politics, which she argues is phenomenologically conditioned by plurality and persuasion, from rulership, conditioned by sovereignty and obedience.⁶ Similarly, she distinguishes political opinion, which is conditioned by the inability of individuals to fully apprehend the totality of the world, from truth, which is experienced as incontrovertible and "domineering" over political debate.⁷ These phenomenological distinctions become especially salient when examined through an analysis of their relationship to love. This is because, for Arendt, love is experienced in a variety of ways relative to specific objects and contexts: for instance, as a principle of loving freedom versus one that prioritizes security, as the pleasure of acting in pluralistic, public spaces versus the warmth experienced among one's own people, and as the desire for a politically organized world versus the dream of absolute perfection.

As I hope to show in this dissertation, these different registers in which Arendt speaks about love reflect her views on the proper objects of love's desire, the proper contexts for its invocation, and ultimately the conditions in which love is compatible with freedom. In turn, a central (and under-explored) axis of her thought becomes clearer. This is because, as I attempt to show, her approach to politics is ultimately premised on a love whose object is the public space of politics and whose context is the pursuit of public freedom. This approach is one that represents a distinct departure from contemporary politics, and to attend to its implications—the

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 222 (hereafter cited in text as *HC*).

⁷ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 237 (hereafter cited in text as *BPF*).

way that it troubles (and may be troubled by) contemporary accounts—is an important and fruitful task for political theory.

The most basic definition that Arendt gives of love is that it is a “binding force.”⁸ In this sense, love is simply an attraction between two things: namely, a lover and a beloved.⁹ On Arendt’s account, this force is often mistaken for the political power generated by people acting together. The binding force love represents is, in most contexts, antithetical to the pluralistic freedom and persuasion of politics. However, when the object of love is not some other (either an individual, group, or deity), when it is instead the space of shared politics itself, then love can take on political significance as it binds us to the political promises we make, commits us to living with one another in freedom, and helps us accept and care for the world in its contingency. It is in this way, through a “love of the world,” that Arendt proposes a vision of politics. It is a vision that is rooted not in the art of governance, but in the experience of freedom: of unrehearsed, principled speech and action among those we hold to be equal.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Life of the Mind* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1981), 145 (hereafter cited in text as *LOM*). Here she writes, “there is no stronger binding force than the love with which the lovers love each other (‘marvelously glued together’).” This is echoed in *The Human Condition* at 242.

⁹ Much more could be said about the reflections Arendt makes on the internal mental faculty of the Will and its relationship to love. However, to do so would probably take my project too far afield. For instance, Arendt argues that both Augustine and Duns Scotus theorize the Will as a faculty that enables action by transforming into love. Augustine’s will transforms into a love that binds the will to its object, while Scotus’ will transforms into a love that rejoices in the “sheer activity” of its willing (*LOM*, 145). Arendt herself calls this reading she gives of Augustine and Duns Scotus nothing less than the “speculative conditions for a philosophy of freedom” (*LOM*, 146). In sum, what she finds in Augustine and even more so in Scotus is an idea of the Will not as a source not of sovereign domination, but as an integral faculty for fitting the mind into a world of freedom, much as she claims the faculty of judgment fits our public actions into a world of freedom.

The Roots of Arendt's Political Form of Love

Hannah Arendt saw the topic of love as it relates to politics, both its dangers and its delights, primarily through the experience of her own Jewish heritage, the heritage of what she called a “pariah people.” In the first work she completed after her dissertation, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*, she directly confronts one aspect of this question: namely, whether the bonds of love can somehow manage to stand in for political relations built on public institutions and mutual respect. Varnhagen, whom Arendt called “my closest friend, though she had been dead for some hundred years,” was an Enlightenment-era Jew who attempted to gain a semblance of freedom through love, both in the form of social esteem and assimilative marriage.¹⁰ Varnhagen’s error, according to Arendt, was that she confused the freedom and reality of a public world with high society, with social recognition. Essentially she kept betraying her desire to distinguish herself from others, to attain a form of public, political freedom, in a social context where only a semblance of freedom existed, one that would require her, as a Jew, to follow a path of sublimation. As Arendt puts it, “...assimilation by marriage could succeed. But not when a woman acted as Rahel...by [unconsciously] transmuting the attempt to assimilate ... into a love affair.”¹¹ (177).

The lesson Arendt draws is that social affection and personal esteem are never a substitute for political standing. In every attempt to assimilate, Varnhagen acted not as a convert wife, but as someone who craved public engagement and discourse, as someone who craved to be loved not as a fascinating object, but as an equal human individual. Prussian society rejected

¹⁰ Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 56.

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1974), 164 (hereafter cited in text as *RV*).

her, Arendt writes, because it “had never of its own accord granted her—as a Jew—the most elementary, most important and minimum concession: equal human rights.” Varnhagen’s love affairs were foiled, because Jewish social oppression made her love forever misplaced, thus keeping her socially outcast and by extension further removed from any political relevance or salience. Ultimately Arendt faults Varnhagen’s inability to reach out for solidarity with others in her situation, instead of seeing her situation as a uniquely “personal misfortune” (*RV*, 177). Instead of attempting to critique society or organize her peers, Varnhagen escaped into a marriage of convenience, and her uncanny ability for self-disclosure, “for feeling out the general human lot in the most personal details,” colluded with social oppression to keep her isolated as a pariah from the world (*RV*, 177).¹² Only late in life did she ultimately renounce this desire for full assimilation, and become, as Arendt calls her in “We Refugees,” a “conscious pariah.”¹³

This approach to love and politics, filtered as it is through Arendt’s own experiences as a Jew, continues in other essays such as “The Jew as Pariah” (*JW*, 275). Here Arendt argues that the reason Jewish outsiders, represented by figures like poet Heinrich Heine and actor Charlie Chaplin, gained popular acclaim was because their representations of innocent love and natural pleasures, “that *joie de vivre* which one finds everywhere in children and in the common people,” was the same as the love shared among common folk (*JW*, 278–79). It was, she says, “their kind of love—however rare it may be” (*JW*, 287). The problems she associated with Varnhagen, however, continue to pertain here in these illustrations, as the connections forged are

¹² As LaFay succinctly puts it, “What Rahel failed to realize was that individual freedom would always be limited by political freedom, that she could not win her own freedom through privilege, but only through joining with others to change the external context in which such freedom might be enjoyed.” See Marilyn LaFay, *Hannah Arendt and the Specter of Totalitarianism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 59.

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 274 (hereafter cited in text as *JW*).

ephemeral, never resulting in any political organization or political standing.

This is why, for example, she endorses the role of the “conscious pariah,” an attempt to engage in politics as an outsider who has been denied access, one who she says becomes “perforce a rebel” (*JW*, 284). She contrasts the “conscious pariah” to the representations of Apollonian delight and common amusements she associates with Heine and Chaplin and also to the lonely attempt at assimilation she saw depicted in Franz Kafka’s novel, *The Castle*. By her estimation, the “conscious pariah” was one who recognized the reality of being an outcast and, instead of attempting to overcome it through social assimilation or escapism, tried to organize others *as outcasts* to achieve a share of the reality afforded by political life. In other words, instead of paths guided by “love”—of individual others, of life, of the natural world’s simple beauties—Arendt argued that Jews should engage heroically in the type of action she thought everyone must learn, namely, the world-building political action that she thought was necessary to revive and reinvigorate the public world.

Sometimes her admonishments prove too much, cutting against the common ideas about love and group solidarity that we take for granted still today. The sentiments Arendt expresses in “We Refugees,” for instance, foreshadow the criticisms she raises of her fellow Jews in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that would prove so incredibly explosive (*JW*, 264). In that essay she seems to blame suicides among Jewish refugees on both their overvaluation of the social esteem (which they thought had been earned through their social assimilation) and their inability to cope with the uncertainty of their position as Jews, a people whose rights she thought could only be enacted through organized struggle. As she puts it, “Instead of fighting ... refugees have got used to wishing death to friends or relatives; if somebody dies, we cheerfully imagine all the trouble he has been saved. Finally, many of us end up by wishing that we, too, could be saved some

trouble, and act accordingly” (*JW*, 266). She links these reflections to her own experience at the concentration camp at Gurs, France, where she argues that she and her fellow refugees became the first voluntary prisoners (“*prisonniers volontaires*”) the world had ever seen (*JW*, 270). She concludes from these reflections that the only alternative to political equality is combat or emigration, not the contingent social esteem of “saviors” and “protectors.”

In other words, Arendt saw the importance that is given to social affections—the desire to maintain a modicum of social standing and to secure one’s personal life—as an impediment to political solidarity among Jewish people. When this social affection was withdrawn, she argued that many Jews were utterly lost, succumbing even to suicide in an attempt to resolve their social plight. Arendt writes dryly:

Theirs is a quiet and modest way of vanishing; they seem to apologize for the violent solution they have found for their personal problems. In their opinion, generally, political events had nothing to do with their individual fate; in good or bad times they would believe solely in their personality ... If we are saved we feel humiliated, and if we are helped we feel degraded ... we cannot realize that we by ourselves are not so much concerned as the whole Jewish people.” (*JW*, 268)

These sentiments—however well intentioned, however focused they were on shaking people out of complacency—would ultimately lead to a major break between Arendt and others in the Jewish intellectual community.

Gershom Scholem, for instance, chastened Arendt for not showing enough love for the Jewish people (“*Ahabath Israel*”) and for the severely critical tone and harsh judgments she presented against Jewish council leaders in her reporting on the Eichmann trial.¹⁴ Norman Podhoretz, writing in *Commentary*, accused her of Jewish self-hatred, calling the “brilliance” of her analysis of totalitarianism presented in the Eichmann essays a form of “intellectual

¹⁴ Cf. “The Eichmann Controversy” in *JW*, 465, and Michael Ezra, “The Eichmann Polemics: Hannah Arendt and Her Critics,” *Democratija* 9 (2007).

perversity,” because it seemed (at least to him) to hold Jews to a higher standard than it does Nazis.¹⁵ Likewise, Irving Howe writes how Arendt’s Eichmann reporting was characterized by “the supreme assurance of the intellectual looking down upon those coarse Israelis.”¹⁶

Arendt’s response to these lingering questions—to the accusations against her fidelity to the Jewish diaspora and particularly to the question of love for a people—is quite telling. What she says in response to Scholem (and repeats in a famous interview with Günter Gaus) is that the group membership on account of one’s identity is a “matter of course, beyond dispute or argument.”¹⁷ However she continues, “I indeed ‘love’ only my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons.”¹⁸ As she explains further in the Gaus interview, “belonging to a group is a natural condition. You belong to some sort of group when you are born, always.”¹⁹ This type of membership she distinguishes from an “organization,” a group that “has a relation to the world” and is organized around common interests (*EIU*, 17). What is crucial for Arendt is that we understand the difference between the types of bonds that are afforded by group belonging, affection for another individual, and political solidarity achieved through organizing around a common interest. To confuse these types of bonds, to “bring love to the negotiating table” as she puts it, is to attempt to substitute bonds of group belonging or affection—bonds that are a *fait accompli*—for the work of forging a political community that, in

¹⁵ Norman Podhoretz, “Hannah Arendt on Eichmann: A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance,” *Commentary Magazine* 36, no. 3 (1963): 201.

¹⁶ Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 271.

¹⁷ Ezra, “The Eichmann Polemics,” 148.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 147–48.

¹⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 17 (hereafter cited in text as *EIU*).

order to be free, relies on nothing more than political judgment made in the company of plural others (*EIU*, 17).

Why is this important? In all of these depictions and in her own experiences, Arendt argued that invocations of love within political discourse amounted to an evasion of the public world. For her, love is “fatal” to politics not because it is irrational, but because it forecloses a public world of free action and judgment with a worldless, always-already-assumed unity of either group identity or personal affection. This assumed unity is an organizational shortcut that allows politics to be displaced by moral imperatives, social conformities, and dogmatic ideologies. As such, invocations of love become emblematic for Arendt of modern world-alienation, an evasion of reality that can only be perceived in the plurality of public life. Specifically, Arendt argues that public figures who invoke love make two dangerous mistakes. First, they hijack the persuasive form of dialogue inherent to politics and replace it with a discourse of unimpeachable truths. Second, they make a public declaration of sentiment that can only be honestly be shared in private (if at all), and they thus engage in a hypocritical contradiction to terms.

However, even in these admonishments of the invocation of love as anathema to politics, Arendt still calls on us to reaffirm, to love, the political world in which we experience our freedom. Such a task is, at our current political juncture, perhaps the most important political lesson she can teach us, because despite the hardships she faced and despite her pessimism about modern conditions, Arendt consistently refused to despair of the world. Instead of what she saw as politically impotent calls to love as charity, she calls on us to organize and to re-constitute ourselves. She calls on us to face the reality of a political world that is not guaranteed from one day to the next, to reach instead for a love that cares and preserves this world, and to experience

the joy revealed in sharing it with plural others.

Contemporary Assessments of Arendt's Approach

While never systematically explicated, Arendt's ongoing articulation of *amor mundi*, dates from her doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine and continues through all of her major works. Throughout her corpus Arendt shows a recurrent interest in the relationship between love and politics. However, much of the scholarship around this question is bound by Arendt's admonition that love as we typically understand and experience it—for example, in the friendships of social intimacy (“where one heart reaches out directly to the other”) or in romance (where “the world goes up in the flames”)—is foreign and dangerous to political life.²⁰ Because these sentiments have the capacity to “abolish political action under all circumstances,” George Kateb and many others, for instance, have argued that the public invocation of love was completely anathema to Arendt's theoretical approach. On Kateb's reading “love, goodness, conscience, compassion, and pity” are feelings that may be useful for “moral virtue” but as the basis of public life they are forms of “political vice” on Arendt's account.²¹ Nonetheless, other scholars read throughout Arendt's corpus not just a sustained critique of love in terms of its relationship to politics, but also a sustained attempt to articulate a public form of love that serves to underpin and strengthen political freedom.

In this dissertation I argue that it was not simply to ward off the dangers presented by our passions as such, but to articulate an alternative emotive grounding to politics, one informed and cultivated by a unique account of the political world and the type of action and judgment therein,

²⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Promise of Politics* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 202 (hereafter cited in text as *TPP*).

²¹ George Kateb, “Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt,” *Political Theory* 5, no. 2 (1977): 161–63.

that Arendt arrived at her particular conception of a love of the world. Arendt's "love of the world" is the virtuous desire of politically engaged individuals to inhabit a space, to constitute a life-world, where political freedom is enacted and maintained through time. It is a *virtuous* desire, because it elevates the shared freedom of all above the subjective or private interests of any single individual. In so desiring, it enables the mutual commitment necessary to persevere in a world where freedom is always possible but never secure.

The distinction between this kind of affection for the world and other, more common forms of love—whether romantic, filial, or charitable—is critical. These "traditional" affections define us in relation to particular individuals, and if they become the basis of a public life we must share in common with everyone, Arendt argues that this "destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others" (*HC*, 242). Common forms of love lead us to neglect what must be made public and permanent for what is private, personal, and perishable. They crowd out or silence the speech and action that make spaces public, where we act together and distinguish ourselves as individuals in the body politic.

For many of us, it may be puzzling that Arendt asserts the need to defend the political world from affections we naturally cherish, particularly in times such as ours that seem to indicate their increasing rarity. It is perhaps even more curious, then, that Arendt seems to predicate this defense on another form of love, the desire for a political space of freedom. With that understood, Arendt is not suggesting that personal affections are unimportant. Instead, she wants us to recognize that the means by which we create and sustain a world in which we can live politically requires a deep and fundamental commitment. A love of the world is the emotive underpinning of that commitment, a desire for a world constituted through political action, one where freedom is institutionally founded and where the courage necessary to preserve it

continues to endure.

Arendt's conceptual architecture is built on the relationship between political action, judgment, and a loving orientation toward the political world. For her, *amor mundi*, is crucially tied to the world-generative force of political action (*TPP*, 201–3). Action is the activity that founds and maintains freedom; *amor mundi* is its emotional source. As such, action establishes a “space of appearance” between actors and spectators whenever people engage in the public space (*HC*, 198–99; *TPP*, 116–17). And, as she argues, action in the form of political judgment maintains the public world by giving meaning to the enduring “human artifice” of shared objects, an “in-between” that “relates and separates” unique individuals, imparting a shared significance to what would otherwise be “a heap of unrelated things” (*HC*, 204, 52).

The interpretive responses to Arendt's work as it relates to the concept of love have largely fallen into two broad groups, neither of which fully perceive or explicate the way in which she conceptualizes a love of the world and its relationship to action and judgment. The first group, perhaps understandably, emphasizes her fears of politicized forms of love. I argue that because these criticisms portray her philosophical commitments as precluding affective emotions, they conflate crucial distinctions between forms of love and their objects. They thus fail to fully explicate the pivotal work that a love of the world performs for her political philosophy.

The second group diverges from the first by arguing that love is in fact a pivotal concept throughout Arendt's corpus. As I try to show, these theorists offer a useful corrective to those commentaries that would expunge love altogether from our understanding of Arendt's work, but that they do so for the wrong reasons. The particular difficulty here is that they attempt to extrapolate from *amor mundi*, Arendt's love of the political world, a more transcendent form of

love. In so doing, they gloss the emphasis Arendt places on the bounds between the political and the social spheres and their respective characteristics. In other words, if the first group reads Arendt as so ascetic that her political theory becomes purged of any affective emotions, the second group overemphasizes the role of love in her thought such that her political distinctions become secondary to a deeper mysticism.

Consider first the contemporary scholarship that attempts to overextend her critiques of love's incompatibility with politics, much of which draws heavily on her analysis of love in *The Human Condition* and *On Revolution*. Dana Villa argues that Arendt's pairing of Nietzschean perspectivism (a focus on self-creating and self-disclosing action) with Kantian aesthetic judgment (imaginative representation mediated by a *sensus communis*) takes her away from the teleological consensus-oriented "Aristotelian" model of deliberation attributed to her by Jurgen Habermas and Seyla Benhabib.²² For Villa, political action becomes a kind of aesthetic activity, constructing a world in which meaning, and perhaps beauty, are the prerogatives of the actor. On this model, Arendt prioritizes worldly deeds of self-expression and self-realization over "'care for one's soul' and the avoidance of injustice."²³

George Kateb sees Arendt's "quest for meaning" as the closest she comes to an endorsement of love in politics, but Kateb maintains that even this desire for meaning remains apolitical because of Arendt's rejection of ideological bannisters.²⁴ Emotional appeals, on this interpretation, are ideological and coercive instead of political. He argues that because Arendt is

²² Dana Villa, *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 69–71.

²³ Dana Villa, *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 218.

²⁴ George Kateb, "Ideology and Storytelling," *Social Research* 69, no. 2 (2002).

singularly concerned with “the unique and supreme existential achievement of political action as revelatory speech” she argued that emotions such as love and compassion are “separable from speech in their expression, and may even despise speech, or be driven to substitute direct, inarticulate action for it.”²⁵ (47, 45). Similarly, and perhaps more bluntly, Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves states that “[Arendt] maintained that love harbors an anti-political tendency, since it is by its very nature unworldly.”²⁶

Others find the sources of her errors deeper in her intellectual biography, some arguing that the putative influence Augustine had on her writings is a source of confusion, because she ultimately breaks with his account of love as *caritas*. Eric Gregory, for instance, diagnoses Arendt’s discussions of love as presenting two politically unworkable problems, a “problem of passion,” where “the capricious intimacy of love is not suitable for the political world of action and appearance,” and a “problem of God,” where “Augustinian eudaimonism issues in a world-denying and individualistic form of apolitical piety.”²⁷ Relatedly, Thomas Breidenthal argues that *Love and St. Augustine* shows that Arendt saw that “the Incarnation chiefly signifies the means of rescuing humankind from political interaction.”²⁸ Likewise, Dean Hammer argues that despite Augustine’s influence on Arendt, for Augustine there is a resolution of the conflict between *caritas* and *civitas* through God, a God to which “Arendt could not seek recourse,” and

²⁵ Kateb, “Freedom and Worldliness,” 163.

²⁶ Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London: Routledge, 1994), 94.

²⁷ Eric Gregory, *Politics and the Order of Love: An Augustinian Ethic of Democratic Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 241–42.

²⁸ Thomas Breidenthal, “Jesus Is My Neighbor: Arendt, Augustine, and the Politics of Incarnation,” *Modern Theology* 14, no. 4 (1998): 491.

that she thus leaves these two concerns incompletely explicated.²⁹ Finally, Richard Wolin argues that Arendt ultimately makes a fundamental break with her Augustinian influences, and that despite the conceptual inspiration Christian thought provided her, the “human community” theorized by Augustine “must always be mediated by our all-encompassing relationship to God.”³⁰ He argues that for Arendt this community is “morbid and oblique, drenched in a veil of theological tears” a “mournful community of the fallen,” noting that Arendt herself diagnosed Christian charity as a worldless desire, one “admirably fit to carry a group of essentially worldless people through the world.”³¹

Beyond the literature of love as a mistake, confusion, and contradiction, the second group of scholarship on Arendt and love makes her Augustinian influences into a larger and comprehensive interpretive framework for understanding her discussions of love. The unifying theme of this literature is that her approach to politics imports love as a form of Christian *caritas* as its animating principle. James Martel, for instance, argues in *Love is a Sweet Chain* and elsewhere that Arendt's political theory—despite her many disavowals—is fundamentally linked to the currents of thought she first explored in Augustine and to which she returns time and again.³² He states, “To be able to conceive of action, we require a sense of something beyond us, of faith and hope...” and “In this sense, her notion of action denies but does not forget its

²⁹ Dean Hammer, “Freedom and Fatefulness: Augustine, Arendt, and the Journey of Memory,” *Theory, Culture, Society* 17, no. 2 (2000): 97.

³⁰ Richard Wolin, *Heidegger's Children: Hannah Arendt, Karl Löwith, Hans Jonas, and Herbert Marcuse* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 43.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 44.

³² Martel, *Love Is a Sweet Chain*. See also James Martel, “Amo: Volu ut sis: Love, Willing, and Arendt's Reluctant Embrace of Sovereignty,” *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 34, no. 3 (2008).

rootedness in Augustinian notions of love.”³³ Elsewhere he argues, “love is crucial for Arendt's notion of politics,” indeed it is “the very basis of politics.”³⁴ This is because love (just as much as action) reveals an interior “who” of our fellow humans as distinct from the “what” of their exterior “qualities and shortcomings.”³⁵

Lauren Barthold likewise insists that Arendt relies on a concept of love that is a fundamental facet of both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*.³⁶ She argues that Arendt finds in Augustine a discussion of love that relates both willing and acting, a solitary reflection on the world and a plural engagement within the world. Extending this countervailing interpretation of Arendt, Stephan Kampowski goes so far as to argue that actually, “Arendt's own ideas are closer to Christian morality than Arendt herself would have thought.”³⁷ His sentiments are echoed by James Bernauer, who argues that Arendt's writings exude a “covert theology,” which expressed “the intrinsic value of every human being” and a belief “in love as the fitting response to each person's appearance.”³⁸

In these two schools of interpretation, Hannah Arendt's account of love is either the antithesis of her approach to politics or, conversely, its cornerstone, a specific analysis of what she meant by a love of the world becomes lost or obscured. However, even scholars who focus

³³ Martel, *Love Is a Sweet Chain*, 14–15.

³⁴ Martel, “Amo: Volu ut sis,” 296, 297.

³⁵ Ibid., 297.

³⁶ Lauren Barthold, “Towards an Ethics of Love: Arendt on the Will and St. Augustine,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 26, no. 1 (2000).

³⁷ Stephen Kampowski, *Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning* (Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 73.

³⁸ James Bernauer, *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987), 17.

specifically on aspects of Arendt's concept of *amor mundi* run into trouble. For instance, Shin Chiba seems to fall into the "covert theology" interpretation of Bernauer, arguing that upon close reading, Arendt's concept of *amor mundi* can be read to imply a political *agape* (universal love) necessary for a politics.³⁹ Others, like Lawrence Biskowski and Garrath Williams seek to employ principles associated with *amor mundi* as evaluative standards for judgments, but they do not offer a full explication of what Arendt meant by *amor mundi*, nor how she saw it as integral in combatting the crises she associated with modernity.⁴⁰

More recently Ella Myers argues that Arendt's concept of *amor mundi* "is meant to describe an emotional investment in and deep affection for something other than human selves, namely for the complex, extrasubjective 'web' that constitutes the conditions of our lives."⁴¹ Whereas she uses this reflection as a starting point for her own ethics of care for the world, she does not attempt to systematically explain Arendt's concept, to situate it in relation to other aspects of Arendt's corpus, nor to theorize its potential implications (both its promise and its problems) for democratic thought. My account seeks to provide such an explanation, offering both a critical engagement on a topic within Arendt scholarship that has received scant attention (love of the world) and a topic within democratic theory (love) that is everywhere invoked but rarely examined.

³⁹ Shin Chiba, "Hannah Arendt on Love and the Political: Love, Friendship, and Citizenship," *Review of Politics* 57, no. 3 (1995): 506, 532.

⁴⁰ Lawrence Biskowski, "Practical Foundations for Political Judgment: Arendt on Action and World," *The Journal of Politics* 55, no. 4 (1993); Garrath Williams, "Love and Responsibility: A Political Ethic for Hannah Arendt," *Political Studies* 46, no. 5 (1998).

⁴¹ Ella Myers, *Worldly Ethics: Democratic Politics and Care for the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 87.

My Argument and the Plan of the Study

In what follows I offer an extended and comprehensive account of what *amor mundi* meant to Arendt, how it helps us both make sense of and reckon with the political landscape of modernity, enacting a shared freedom where loving the world inspires our passion for political action.⁴² I side with readers of Arendt who argue that this concept of a love of the world is both importantly relevant and central to Arendt's political thought. However, I also argue that it should not be conflated with either the religious notions of love from which it grew nor the modern imaginary of love as a political claim to which it stands in opposition. This is no easy task, however, as Arendt's discussion of a love of the world are often submerged within discussions of her other views on action, freedom, and judgment. Moreover, the political exemplars of love that Arendt describes are at times equivocal, sometimes more affectionate, other times more rational.

I argue that Arendt theorizes love as anathema to politics only when love's object is a specific individual, group, or ideology. When this is the case, politics becomes for the sake of something else, instead of oriented around a space of its own freedom. In this characterization of love, it is, on her view, "worldless." However, what she proposes as fundamental to political freedom is precisely a form of love in which its object becomes the space in which political action appears: the world itself. When this is the case, then Arendt theorizes love as an imperative political passion. The key to unlocking the at times curiously contradictory references

⁴² In this sense my dissertation is, I believe, akin to recent volumes delving into the role of love in the approaches of other theorists. Cf. Alice Ormiston, *Love and Politics: Re-interpreting Hegel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004); Corey Beals, *Lévinas and the Wisdom of Love: The Question of Invisibility* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007); Laurence Cooper, *Eros in Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche: The Politics of Infinity* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008); Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); and Ryan Hanley, *Love's Enlightenment: Rethinking Charity in Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

and allusions to love found in Arendt's political theory lies, I believe, in making sense of her aesthetic phenomenology. Specifically, I argue that there is a privileged perspective on what the world entails and what it should include that is always already evident in her writing. Beginning with her concept of the world and her phenomenological distinctions of what it entails, it then becomes easier to evaluate the references she makes to love and its potential political manifestations.

Of course, Arendt's approach to politics and love is not without its own set of problems. I place her in dialogue with James Baldwin to further tease out her conceptual commitments and presuppositions, while also elucidating where her approach may falter. I argue that when we look at the way Arendt characterized what she called Baldwin's "Gospel of love" (similar to her characterization of the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas), we come to see that there is something missing in her judgment of these as examples of the deformation of politics by love. What I draw from Baldwin is an additional sensibility, which, far from deforming or corrupting the world of politics, actually allows it to become more accessible to those who have been effectively denied entry. It is only by deepening Arendt's concept in this way, that "a love of the world" becomes fully meaningful and can be used to evaluate contemporary political action and phenomena. Indeed, by attempting not only to fully explicate what Arendt meant by a "love of the world" but also to critically engage her use of this notion, I argue that we can begin to reckon with invocations of love in contemporary discourse and evaluate them in terms of a world in which freedom is shared equitably.

I set out along this investigation of the concept of love of the world in Arendt's writings by proceeding along two main fronts. First, I begin by offering a reconstruction of Arendt's theoretical engagement with the concept of love. I use a close contextual reading of the sources

of her varied references in order to develop a more systematic account of what she means when she invokes a love of the world. Second, I proceed to interrogate and productively critique Arendt's concept by situating it in relation to aspects of contemporary political discourse. For this, I tease out the implications of the intellectual dispute she had with James Baldwin, an essayist who was her contemporary, and I attempt to analyze contemporary political manifestations like the Black Lives Matter movement through the lens of Arendt's writings on love. This dialogue and critical case study further elucidate her conceptual commitments and presuppositions, but they also attempt to make sense of the ways in which Arendt's phenomenological approach and aesthetic account of judgment at times seems to oscillate between radical democratic and aristocratic accounts of what it means to truly love the world.

In chapter 2, I begin by describing what Arendt meant when she wrote about the world as a public space. As Michael Janover puts it, when Arendt discusses the world and its constituents, it "is never simply an object of description, but the figure of an evocation...."⁴³ While on Arendt's account the political world is the crucial space of political freedom, one that is animated and maintained by virtue of a desire by people to inhabit such a world, her sustained emphasis upon it functions even further as an insistence on its unique capacity as the storehouse and safeguard of human meaning. Perhaps not surprisingly, the world plays the central role in Arendt's political thought, and indeed this is why she maintained that it is worthy of our utmost care, our love. What is perhaps more surprising, then, is why the world is under such sustained threat in contemporary times. Why might people, far from loving the world, actually grow to despise it, resigned to its perpetual inefficiencies and iniquities? By delving into the way in

⁴³ Michael Janover, "Politics and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt," in *Action and Appearance: Ethics and the Politics of Writing in Hannah Arendt*, ed. Anna Yeatman et al. (London: Continuum, 2011), 25.

which Arendt describes both the world and its threats, we can get a better understanding of the way in which the world, action, and judgment form the core of her theoretical perspective, a perspective that is fundamentally animated by a love of the world.

Next in chapter 3, I inquire into the varied and often divergent references Arendt makes to love and a love of the world in her corpus. In so doing I seek to tease out the apparent distinctions she makes between forms of affective love that become dangerous when politicized and a love of the world that she argued was crucial in animating and maintaining the public, political world. Here I seek to explicate how the intrusion of love into politics was for her either a misunderstanding of the stakes of politics, one that represents an ill-fated attempt to achieve social standing, or a dangerous form of hypocrisy, one that parades emotion in order to mobilize the masses and carries with it an invitation to violence. However, I also attempt to show that her admonition was nonetheless coupled with a limited endorsement not of love itself, but of a love of the world, one that she illustrated through various historical exemplars and attempts to envision new forms of political institutions.

In chapter 4, I put Arendt's approach in dialogue with James Baldwin's writings on love and politics in order to critically engage the interpretive framework that I develop in the preceding chapters. Arendt and Baldwin both attempt to imagine radically democratic political practices, and both thought there were forms of love that were appropriate to politics. After having teased out the reasons behind Arendt's desire to quarantine interpersonal forms of love away from the space of politics in previous chapters, I turn to Baldwin examine the potential blind spots of this approach. He envisions a form of political love that respects the public sphere precisely by keeping it in tension with the people it excludes, and I argue that he helps us, with Arendt, to cultivate a more theoretically robust analysis of not only the social but the political

dimensions of racial and other forms of inequality. As a result, I then argue that we are able to theorize beyond the institutional loci of Arendt's approach to a love of the world and towards a more radical political aesthetic sensibility.

In chapter 5, I use the account of love and politics developed through the analysis of Arendt's approach and Baldwin's critical rejoinder in order to evaluate the potential possibilities of a love of the world in contemporary politics. This is of course no easy task for all the reasons that Arendt and Baldwin diagnose. Where might we locate contemporary exemplars of a love of the world, ones that open up spaces for the reanimation and reimagination of political institutions? Here I follow references in Arendt's work where she gestures towards (but never fully theorizes) potential exemplars of political action that she associates with a love the world and potential areas for its deployment. These occur in her discussions of revolutionary movements built on participatory councils (what she calls "the most promising chapter of recent history"), the realm of education (which is where she says, "we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it"), and in the forms of student protests she witnessed later in life (those in which she says students had discovered the "public happiness" of the political world). I follow these gestures, along with the points I associate with Baldwin in chapter 4, to look for and evaluate contemporary sites for and expressions of a love of the world.

Finally in chapter 6, I conclude my reconstruction, analysis, and evaluation of Arendt's concept of a love the world. Here I recapitulate the key points of the interpretation I develop throughout the dissertation in regards to Arendt's approach to love and politics, noting the key constituents that comprised the political world for her and why love toward it is a necessary orientation. Here I further contend that what is so often confounding about Arendt's approach to love is that her conception is at times torn between its moral and political registers, registers that

were for Arendt necessarily kept distinct. It is this apparent contradiction for which I offer the preliminary resolution I associate with the work of James Baldwin. What might come of a further examination of this slippage between the moral and political registers of love is a more complex notion of political judgment, one that is beyond the scope of my project, but one that could potentially integrate Arendt's reflections on public judgment and contemplative thought in order to examine more fully the conditions, both inner and outer, for the experience of freedom.

CHAPTER 2. THE WORLD AND ITS THREATS

In the summer of 1940 Hannah Arendt was a refugee.⁴⁴ The world as she had known it had been overturned. The political world, an institutional space for freedom, had all but vanished, and in its place, the machinery of totalitarianism had appeared. After escaping from Germany to Prague and then to Paris by way of Geneva, she narrowly escaped from an internment camp in southern France shortly before the Nazi takeover.⁴⁵ Then, with tenacious determination and considerable luck she orchestrated passage out of France to Lisbon and onward to New York. She had watched as a wave of terror crashed over Europe, and she had barely escaped with her life. Yet despite these harrowing experiences, Arendt never lost sight of a vision of the world in which people enjoyed and enacted their freedom. Despite all of its potential dangers and lurking evils, Arendt never lost faith in a world worth preserving and worth loving.

Often in her writing, Arendt expresses her thoughts on politics in precisely this way, as a form of love. In fact, in a letter to her mentor Karl Jaspers, she went so far as to propose that her first major book of political theory—what would become *The Human Condition*—be titled *Amor Mundi*, love of the world.⁴⁶ This concept, which Arendt refers to time and again, but never

⁴⁴ Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, 55.

⁴⁵ Sarah Bakewell, *At the Existentialist Café* (New York: Other Press, 2016), 251.

⁴⁶ Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, *Hannah Arendt/Karl Jaspers Correspondence, 1926–1969* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993), 264. Cf. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, 324.

systematically analyzes, is the object of my investigation here. However, to begin to understand exactly what Arendt meant by a “love of the world,” it is necessary to proceed by uncovering and explaining what precisely she meant when she discussed “the world.” What is the world and why is it so important? Why can we not take it for granted? If Arendt argues that we are increasingly alienated from the world in modernity, how might we overcome this and other threats to the world? Why should we care?

In this chapter I attempt to show how unique Arendt is in arguing that the common world takes on a political valence, that its most public, political spaces are essential to the fullest understanding of ourselves as human persons. For her, the actualization of the political world has no higher or more useful purpose than itself as its own end. It is not the means to something “more useful and more beautiful,” nor is it the means to “make life easier and longer” (*HC*, 208). In other words, understanding what she means by a political world is essentially something very different from alternative understandings of politics as either a system of rule or governance, an apparatus for the protection of property rights, or a method for the authorization and sanction of violence.⁴⁷ All of these betray a fundamental orientation around stability and security, the social means of preserving life not very different from any other social animal, certainly not the plurality and freedom that distinguish humans.

Arendt argues that we should understand the political world as an end which is experienced as freedom. Understood in this way, freedom and the political world are actualized

⁴⁷ Arendt is specifically critical of Christian theorists, Locke, Hobbes, and Marx in this regard. She criticizes the way they locate freedom in the social sphere, in “a society of the faithful ... a society of property-owners ... a society relentlessly engaged in a process of acquisition ... a society of producers” (*HC*, 31). Implicit here is also a normative challenge to Weber’s account of the state, in which “force or violence becomes the monopoly of government” (31). Arendt is also critical of Adam Smith, “to whom the only legitimate function of government is ‘the defense of the rich against the poor...’” (220).

concurrently; they are “one in the same” (*TPP*, 116–17). Recovering an understanding of this experience of freedom, one that is experienced in occupying and co-constructing with others a particular type of political space was crucial for Arendt. It is key to understanding who we are as humans and what we might do to prevent the inhuman atrocities she witnessed during her lifetime.

It was for these reasons—to rehabilitate the meaning of what we do when we act politically, the space inaugurated by such action, and the many benefits that attend these experiences—that Arendt attempted to articulate what it might mean to redevelop and reinvigorate the public space of a common world. Here, I will try to carefully articulate Arendt’s concept of a world and its characteristic dimensions. Retracing her phenomenological approach, I organize my analysis around the three main features or benefits that Arendt associates with a common world—reality, meaning, and freedom—and the specific threats posed by modern conditions that correspond to each of these—ideological propaganda, “the social,” and state bureaucracy. The world and its humanizing benefits, along with the threats that continue to stunt them, are precisely why Arendt so often alluded to a love—an *amor mundi*—that marks those people who desire such a world and have the courage to act in the name of it.

Arendt’s Phenomenology of the World: Dwelling Place and Political Space

In tracking Arendt’s thoughts on “the world,” an awareness of her phenomenological approach is important. With this approach, it is a set of *experiences* that define and distinguish the meanings of political and other sorts of phenomena. For instance, in order to study the meaning of what Arendt refers to as “the world,” it is necessary to interpret how she defines the characteristic experiences of the world as it is lived and to decipher the distinctions she makes between these and other sorts of characteristic experiences. Using this approach, she defines the

experience of a world as interacting with others in a space where we become aware of the people and objects around us. The world is a space where things appear.

In thinking of the world in this way, Arendt draws on both Aristotle and Martin Heidegger, yet she diverges significantly from them as well. She follows Aristotle in thinking about the essential humanity that characterizes the founding and maintaining of political communities, communities that would be either nonsensical for other types of animals or superfluous for a deity.⁴⁸ Where she breaks from Aristotle is in his teleological view of the *polis* as a natural end, regarding it instead as a contingent historical achievement that always stands or falls in relation to human action and its conditions.⁴⁹ Likewise, she follows Heidegger's schema of humans as "beings-in-the-world," what Jeffrey Barash describes as the idea of "human existence as inherence in a common world that is prestructured by a network of relations to things and to other people."⁵⁰ However, Arendt disagrees with Heidegger's identification of the world as primarily an impediment to an individual's authentic being, one which he argues can only be overcome in the contemplation of mortality. Instead, Arendt theorizes the world as an intersubjectively constituted space in which humans come to see themselves as authentically plural, a realization that is felt not in the anxiety of our mortality but in gratitude for our natality and its unique, new beginnings. In either case, Arendt argues that both Aristotle and Heidegger perpetuate the Platonic hierarchy that demotes action and the world to a type of philosophical

⁴⁸ Kymlicka summarizes this nicely. Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 296–97.

⁴⁹ This is clear in her discussion of space exploration and the potential destruction of the atomic bomb (*BPF*, 273–74) and her discussion of "dark times" of worldlessness and world alienation. Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (London: Cape, 1970), 11 (hereafter cited in text as *MDT*).

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Barash, "The Political Dimensions of the Public World: On Hannah Arendt's Interpretation of Martin Heidegger," in *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*, ed. Larry May and Jerome Kohn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

contemplation that is alienated from them.⁵¹

Arendt begins her own unique contribution, by describing the world in two basic ways. First, she describes it in contradistinction to “an Earth,” a natural habitat that supports life. This natural habitat, which Arendt says has traditionally meant “the Mother of all living creatures under the sky,” has through the centuries come to be seen as a “mere animal environment” in comparison to our human-made products and spaces (*HC*, 2). A world for Arendt, then, is first a “human artifice,” a fabricated habitat and a semi-permanent dwelling, one that insulates us from bare existence (*HC*, 2). While the earth on Arendt’s account is “the very quintessence of the human condition,” it only becomes truly worldly, truly human, through the creation of an artifice that stands apart from the futility of bare existence—an artifice that helps to orient us, and that provides a durable barrier to natural forces (*HC*, 2, 135). Only recently, with the advent of the space age and forms of virtual reality, has this artificial world threatened to untether us from our earthly, natural lives.

On this formulation, then, the earth as a habitat is distinguished from the world as an artifice through our experiences therein: the former experienced as the exigency of necessity, the latter experienced in the creation of lasting objects and spaces. While we bear the exigencies of the earth through the activity of labor, we fashion tools to overcome them through work. Labor and our natural habitat condition us as beings who live and die, while work and our fabricated

⁵¹ Cf. *BPF*, 18; *HC*, 27; *MDT*, ix. Barash, “The Political Dimensions of the Public World,” helps point out this connection. See also Jonathan Schwartz, *Arendt's Judgment: Freedom, Responsibility, Citizenship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016): “Arendt was unhappy with the significance Heidegger gave the world, arguing that, contra Heidegger, worldliness was not a source of inauthenticity and conformity, but instead a realm where human beings can truly realize their identity in free human action...Second, she argued that...his conception of action as an essentially contemplative activity was profoundly flawed” (36). I will briefly discuss a similar critique Arendt makes of Heidegger’s concept of love as care (*Sorge*) below.

world condition us as human beings—people with culture, history, and meaningful traditions (*HC*, 7). We require such incessant labor—eating, drinking, cleaning, nursing—in order to maintain our natural existence. Labor produces nothing that lasts, but remains a constant daily rhythm, because it remains synchronized with natural cycles of growth and decay, with the processes of life itself. Work, by contrast, interrupts the endless cycles of life and labor in that it involves the production of permanent artifacts—furnishings, dwellings, tools, artwork, and other objects that exist outside of the natural processes of life and death. These durable goods represent the natural habitat that has been made worldly, one that is meant to exist across time in semi-permanence apart from and opposed to nature and its cycles of growth and decay (*HC*, 7). In so doing we become conditioned as human, as something more than what Arendt says would be simply “a specimen of the animal-species man.”⁵²

However, in addition to this way of thinking of the world as a fabricated artifice, Arendt also speaks of the world in a more unconventional manner. This occurs when she speaks of the world as a public, *political* space—“a space of appearances,” one “where everything and everybody are seen and heard by others” (*HC*, 77, 199). This world, unlike the human artifice that houses and protects us, is more experiential than physical. As Arendt says, “Wherever people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever” (*HC*, 199). What constitutes this space? What brings it about? Arendt argues that the world as a political space is constituted whenever people engage in shared political action—that is, political speech and deeds performed in a context of visibility and plurality. If the natural world conditions us as living beings, and the fabricated world conditions us as human beings, the political world conditions us as plural persons (*HC*, 7). It is in this space that Arendt says we

⁵² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1973), 441 (hereafter cited in text as *OT*).

truly distinguish ourselves from one another as individuals, yet individuals who can only act in concert with plural others (*HC*, 7–8).

The political world on Arendt's account is thus marked by several key characteristics. First, the political world, "the space of appearance," is constituted among people who are "together in the manner of speech and action" (*HC*, 199). In other words, isolated individuals cannot constitute a political world. They must be proximate, and they must be engaged in the type of speech and deeds that occurs among political equals when they are concerned with some worldly common interest. These types of speech and deeds constitute the political world by disclosing the unique character of the individual actors who perform them. They form what Arendt calls a "'web' of human relationships" that grows out of these disclosures and the new beginnings they represent: each new individual who enters the world at birth and the new courses of action that they inaugurate.⁵³ Second, the political world is characterized by a specific kind of power. Arendt conceptualizes power not as a type of hegemony wielded by some over others, but as a "power potential" actualized through the organization of people into an active body politic (*HC*, 200). Power, on Arendt's account, "is what keeps the public realm, the potential space of appearance between acting and speaking men, in existence" (*HC*, 200). Third, the political world is characterized by the force of its mutual promises (*HC*, 244). If power is the organizational capacity of a people structured into a body politic that maintains the political world and the possibilities of action therein, then promising—and not obedience or threat of violence—is the "force," albeit limited, that holds this organization of people together.

⁵³ Arendt describes this aspect of the world thusly: "...the physical, worldly in-between along with its interests is overlaid and, as it were, overgrown with an altogether different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to men's acting and speaking directly *to* one another ... The disclosure of the 'who' through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action, always fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt" (*HC*, 182–84).

On both of these accounts of the world, both the “physical, worldly in-between” and the “different in-between that consists of deeds and words,” we are conditioned in numerous ways, according to Arendt (*HC*, 183). The world conditions us not only as living beings but as human beings, not only as social animals but as political animals.⁵⁴ It is a physical place that houses people and offers them shelter, and it is a discursive space, one that arises between people, whenever they are organized around a common object, a common concern, an “*inter-est*” relating them to one another (*HC*, 182). It is this latter sense, where the world is conceived as a public, political space that is decisive for understanding Arendt’s varied references to *amor mundi*, a “love of the world.” This is because, for Arendt, the political world is the space within which humans make sense of what we hold in common, where we act together out of shared principles, and where we make judgments that disclose our unique individuality and situates it in a community of others. In short, it is the space where we are most quintessentially human.⁵⁵

Arendt draws on an Aristotelian understanding of politics in arguing that it is in a political world where we experience a truly human freedom not available elsewhere. This freedom represents “the good life,” “the highest form of communal life,” because it is one that is

⁵⁴ Arendt draws on Aristotle in an attempt to recapture this distinction, one she believes was obscured by the Latin translation of the Greek *zōon politikon* into *animal socialis*. She argues that Aristotle cannot be understood properly until the central role of speech is taken into account, for it is speech for Aristotle that not only distinguishes humans from other socially organized animals but distinguishes humans in political community from slaves and barbarians. These were those people outside the *polis* who not only could not “speak” (Greek), but who could not participate in “a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other” (*HC*, 27).

⁵⁵ Arendt also echoes Aristotle here when she says for instance, “Action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it [because] only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others” (*HC*, 22–23). What she illustrates here is that our humanity is tied up with a world of other humans. On her account animals cannot act, they merely engage in the labor necessary for survival, while it is the capacity of a god, not a human, to accomplish something without the presence of plural others (*HC*, 22).

defined not by compulsion or violence but by persuasion and the equality of political friendship (*HC*, 36; *TPP*, 116). Seyla Benhabib refers to this elevation of the political world as “the normative core of the Arendtian conception of the political,” one where the creation of a common world occurs “through the capacity to make and keep promises among a plurality of humans who mutually respect one another.”⁵⁶ In addition to this normative quality, where the world becomes the site of human freedom and becomes invested with meaning, the political world also serves an epistemic function. This is because the political speech that characterizes the world, speech that Arendt says is most always “*about* some worldly objective reality,” is the mode in which we examine and evaluate everything that appears in common (*HC*, 182). Mary Dietz refers to this feature of Aristotelian (and by extension Arendtian) political thought as its characteristic “integrative experience,” where “all other human acts and occupations are examined in its light.”⁵⁷ It is in recognizing both this normative value and epistemic primacy, that, on Arendt’s account, the political world takes on such a central importance.

In the next few sections I will discuss in more detail the profound benefits afforded by the political world on Arendt’s account. First, the world, when it is organized politically as a space of appearances, furnishes the indispensable setting in which we perceive a shared reality. In other words, the world becomes real to us because others (in their plurality) act as interlocutors who corroborate our senses, establishing the “objectivity” of the objects and phenomena we perceive subjectively. Second, a politically constituted world helps to invest what would otherwise only

⁵⁶ See Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 166. This “normative core” should not be confused with normative moral foundations, the lack of which often vexes readers, but which Arendt refuses to provide. Benhabib later refers to this lack as Arendt’s “normative lacuna” (*HC*, 194).

⁵⁷ See Mary Dietz, “Citizenship with a Feminist Face: The Problem with Maternal Thinking,” in *Feminism, The Public and the Private*, ed. Joan B. Landes (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 53.

be a temporary habitat with enduring meaning, meaning that is disclosed in political action, the political principles such action invokes, and its potential immortality. Finally, a politically constituted world provides a necessary space in which freedom as a phenomenon, an “in-between,” around which actors and spectators are organized, can be constituted and experienced by a people. It is in this space that we can enjoy our freedom: the pleasures of inhabiting such a space, performing the business of public life, and freely judging the speech and deeds that occur therein. In other words, the political world is the what (the things we judge worthy of permanence through time), the why (the meaning behind our judgments, our acts), and the where (the space where our enacted freedom is seen) that characterizes the conditions of our humanity. It is for all of these reasons that the world as a public, political space takes priority for Arendt and is deserving of love.

The World's Reality and the Transcendence of Subjectivity

Most fundamentally for Arendt, the world as a space of appearances is the space in which we apprehend the “objectivity” of reality. What is interesting on her account is that the objectivity of reality refers to the very objects themselves around which people are situated and which they behold in common. While our individual apprehension can never by itself attain objectivity, Arendt argues that we can *intersubjectively* (that is, in speaking to others and imagining their perspectives) discern the reality of the “objective” world around us. Importantly this requires a specific organization of the world. In short, people must have the ability to exit their private households and interact with others in a space of objects secured from the destructive forces of nature. First Arendt argues:

...the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself and for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised. (HC, 57)

What this means is that in order to gain a sense of the reality outside of our own subjective senses, we must be able to occupy spaces where people interact and exchange their unique, plural perspectives with one another. As Arendt puts it, “Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position” (*HC*, 57). She is adamant that our coming to terms with reality can only be carried out in public communication. Private life is no substitute. It merely serves, as she says, the “prolongation and multiplication of one’s own position” (*HC*, 57).

In addition to occupying this space, a political community also relies on objects therein that are perceived by all. Arendt states for example, “the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human life” (*HC*, 137). Worldly objects lend a certain stability to our lives, because they interrupt the constant motion of nature and its unending cycles. While everything in nature is constantly changing in growth and decay, constantly moving in an unending metabolism, fabricated objects endure such that we are able to realize our condition as humans, that we are capable of standing apart and outside what Arendt calls “nature’s household” (*HC*, 137).⁵⁸ By enduring over and against the cycles of growth and decay inherent to the biological world, durable objects act as common referents without which we might not see beyond our immediate struggles and concerns. In other words, because durable objects can be sensed from multiple

⁵⁸ Canovan makes a salient point about this aspect of Arendt’s argument when she points out that it sounds incredibly foreign to contemporary notions of nature. Canovan argues that today we are more concerned with nature, influenced by “the tradition of Wordsworthian Romanticism,” and see the natural world in many ways as more hospitable, containing its own enduring markers, and that it (and not the built environment) is most under threat (106). Canovan reminds us, however, “Arendt’s view of nature owes nothing to Romanticism and a great deal to the ancient Greeks,” and that nature as an “elemental force” capable of overpowering the human world runs through her account of Totalitarianism, revolutionary movements, and the advent of the atom bomb (107). See Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

vantage points without any perceptible change, they possess a certain “objectivity,” they gain a certain reality (*HC*, 137). In this vein Arendt tells us, “Without a world between men and nature, there is eternal movement, but no objectivity” (*HC*, 137).

This means that when we perceive a world of common objects (tables, chairs, books, etc.), we become aware of an “objective” reality. By judging or describing objects held in common we are also judging the credibility of our private senses and their ability to perceive what is really there. This is because in coming to recognize these objects for what they are, we perceive ourselves in relation to others who share in this perception with us. By identifying and making commensurate each person’s specific vantage point, objects help us to render our subjective perceptions more “objective” and gain a better purchase on our worldly reality. As Arendt puts it, “Against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world” (*HC*, 137). Therefore, without a world set apart from and against bare, natural life, we would never gain an apprehension of ourselves as unique or of our world as real.

However, the sheer “objectivity” of objects is not enough on its own to create a world and to ensure its reality. That is, if the reality of the world requires the apprehension and commensuration of plural judging perspectives, so additionally must objects, in order to serve as the conduit for this plural judgment, be organized into a space that allows for this, where they can *appear* and be seen from diverse positions and perspectives. As Arendt says, if it were a question of simply existing, objects would by themselves amount to nothing more than “a heap of unrelated things” (*HC*, 204). Objects can only perform their stabilizing role when they are part of a space of appearances, when there is a public space in which plural men and women see them and speak freely about them.

On this account of the world, the fundamental purpose of the human artifice is not simply

to ease the necessities of our continuous labor, to simply make our lives easier. Instead, its “ultimate *raison d’être*,” as Arendt calls it, is to be spoken about and to orient us in a world set apart from bare life (*HC*, 180, 204).⁵⁹ Thus, it is through discourse that we populate the world with objects that function to establish both the subjectivity of each individual and the objectivity of our shared reality. The world as such thus becomes comprehensibly real (as opposed to just consciously extant) when it is politically organized, when a plural association of people (in their “togetherness”) speak and act in public amongst objects (in their “objectivity”) that house and relate them to one another.⁶⁰

The World’s Meaning and Its Rescue from Futility

The world as a public, political space is not only essential for our apprehension of reality, of what is really happening; it is also crucial in attributing meaning to these events and to phenomena that might otherwise seem to have no ultimate purpose. This occurs in two ways, according to Arendt. First, the political world provides a necessary space of publicity in which each person’s unique identity can be disclosed to others through action. Second, in addition to serving as a space of individual distinction, the political world also houses the greatness of speech and deeds and serves as a conduit for their remembrance. In their remembrance and

⁵⁹ Arendt says, “Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object” (*HC*, 204). This, of course, is threatened by the instrumentalizing forces of modernity. Cf. “...*homo faber*, the toolmaker, invented tools and implements in order to erect a world, not—at least, not primarily—to help the human life process” (*HC*, 151). And also, “...only in so far as the life process takes hold of things and uses them for its purposes does the productive and limited instrumentality of fabrication change into the limitless instrumentalization of everything that exists” (*HC*, 157).

⁶⁰ Patricia Owens refers to this relationship in Arendt’s thought between the political world and the perception of what is real as an “ethic of reality” (106). See Patricia Owens, “The Ethic of Reality in Hannah Arendt,” in *Political Thought and International Relations: Variations on a Realist Theme*, ed. Daniel Bell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

memorialization these acts can overcome an otherwise fleeting appearance to achieve an immortality that survives through generations of mortal beings.

The first way that meaning is attributed through the public world is in the way it serves as a setting for political action. Political action is distinct from either the necessary laboring that sustains life or the fabrication that populates the world with tangible things. It transcends both its own activity and the specific goal it pursues, because it is accompanied by speech that announces its actor and that narrates its intent (*HC*, 179). As such, it effects the disclosure of an actor's "unique personal identity" (*HC*, 179). That is, in performing political action a specific "who" becomes apparent. This "who" is a specific individual with a unique set of characteristic traits, motivations, and dispositions, and it is utterly distinct from the generic "what" that actor may be—any number of abstract categories or classifications that an individual might hold in common with many others (*HC*, 179).

What this means for Arendt is that whenever actors engage in speech and deeds among people in the public world, they reveal singular characteristics about themselves. Moreover, because these characteristics are disclosed and judged in the context of plurality, actors have very little control over how their unique identity is ultimately portrayed.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the most famous (and infamous) portraits of political action are those that provide us with exemplars of virtue and vice, greatness and ignominy. However, it is only through a public world, a political space, "where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them," that these transcendent, unique identities actually appear (*HC*, 180). That is, in order for action and its unique disclosure to attain a worldly reality, it needs a public world where people are seen and heard.

⁶¹ This is why, for instance, Arendt argues that the "unchangeable identity of the person" can only ever be known when that person has passed away and one can tell the full story of their life (*HC*, 192–93).

A second way that the world as a public, political space helps to establish meaning is through the role it plays in remembrance and commemoration of action. Arendt states that the real meaning of political action consists in “those enduring elements that are worthy of being remembered and are revealed only in our living and acting together politically” (*TPP*, 197). Thus, in addition to the meaning inherent in the disclosure of identity performed in political action, the world is also a space in which we create meaningful stories, speech and deeds worthy of remembrance. This is because when the world is organized such that plural individuals can speak and act in public and have these acts recorded and memorialized, action gains the potential for enduring greatness. In short, exemplary action in the past can help make meaning in the present and inspire action in the future.

As with the apprehension of reality, the commemoration of political action relies on the mutual dependence of objects and action, the human artifice and the space of appearances. When political action is commemorated by an artifact, such an artifact (a poem, a painting, a history) becomes a reification of an otherwise intangible event. It serves as a semi-permanent touchstone in order to mark an action that would without such commemoration quickly disappear. In this reification speech and deeds are transformed into the “poetry,” “printed book,” “paintings or sculpture,” and the “records, documents, and monuments” that transmit the memory of action across time (*HC*, 95). It is in this manner that the speech and deeds of political actors escape the mortality of each passing generation.

The whole design of the Greek *polis*, Arendt argues, was to accomplish this institutional organization and commemoration of public life. This is because the *polis*, built as it was around the public space of the *agora*, was designed to house the revelatory political speech and deeds of its citizens and “pass them on to posterity over generations” (*TPP*, 123). Such an organization

granted Athenian citizens both a multiplicity of opportunities to act and a means of preserving great deeds. In so doing it served to rescue their acts from both the *idion* of private life and the potential futility of being forgotten. What this shows on Arendt's account is, again, the central significance of the political world. That is, the example of the Greek *polis* shows that when the stories of heroes and their deeds deserving of remembrance become woven into the fabric of public life, their reality (that they happened) and their meaning (the disclosure they perform) become meaningful—they outlast their specific moments and act as exemplars through time.

This, of course, is a radical departure from how we typically think about politics. To most contemporary readers it might seem tasteless to enter politics to achieve immortal fame. This is why politicians instrumentalize their ambition as a means to an end, seeking office in order “to solve problems,” “to work for their constituents.” We think of futility as what happens when action fails to accomplish its goal. However, Arendt stresses that this sort of failure is simply a matter of course. On her account, action is actually rendered futile when it fails to disclose anything about the actor (when it is reduced to merely a means-end process) or has no chance of being remembered (when it occurs completely outside of a world). She argues that we have lost sight of this, because we have inherited a tradition of Christian thought that emphasizes the impermanence of the world. As moderns we have made the question of immortality a private, religious one, without rehabilitating its public, secular counterpart (*BPF*, 70–71).

The World as a Constituted Space of Freedom

The third and most important function of the world as a political space is that such a space is concomitant with the experience and enjoyment of freedom. Arendt is very clear on this point. “We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves,” she says (*BPF*, 147). The freedom of pluralist political

engagement has as its prerequisite what she calls “mere liberation,” by which she means both the removal of fetters to movement and assembly along with a basic security of life and necessary resources (*BPF*, 147). However, full freedom, experienced in the intercourse with others, is only fully enabled within a world that is “politically organized,” one where each individual, under no compulsion from either the threat of violence or the necessity of self-preservation, can publicly distinguish themselves among those they hold to be their equals (*BPF*, 147). As Arendt puts it, “Without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly space to make its appearance” (*BPF*, 147).

This means that political freedom, as opposed to mere unfettered liberation, involves the building of a world experienced as a public, political space. More specifically, freedom consists in principled, uncoerced action among others, and a political world is the space built by and organized for such acts. As such, not just any type of action is action that builds and preserves a political world. On Arendt’s account principles inspire political action and frees it from—makes it more than the sum of—the intellect, which reasons a course of action based on motives and goals, and the will, which orders the act to be carried out (*BPF*, 150).⁶² Principles may be world-building, such as “honor or glory, love of equality...or distinction or excellence,” but they may also be world-destructive “fear or distrust or hatred” (*BPF*, 151). Arendt argues, “Freedom or its opposite appears in the world whenever such principles are actualized; the appearance of freedom, like the manifestation of principles, coincides with the performing act” (*BPF*, 151). A community theatre production, for instance, only becomes a form of political action, transforming its space from one of entertainment to one of political contestation, when it invokes

⁶² Cane offers a very thoughtful reading of Arendt’s discussions of principles and their importance, one that becomes more important for my concerns as they apply to Arendt’s concept of judgment, which I examine in chapter 4 of this study. See Lucy Cane, “Hannah Arendt on the Principles of Political Action,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (2015).

political principles (or is judged publicly to have embodied them). Relatedly, a fascist rally is political action, but because we would judge its inspiring principle to be one of hatred and fear, such rallies are not world-building but are instead world-destructive. Public freedom, then, requires both the liberation from arbitrary coercion, a constituted space in the world, and a community whose world-building acts are seen and judged by others.

Even though the public world is *organized* by formalized spaces and legal structures, it is always *enacted* in the specific space created between people acting together and making political judgments. Moreover, while a formal founding and institutionalization is important for securing such a political space, these spaces can be created independently of the physical location of formal institutions.⁶³ This is because a nascent political world arises and exists wherever people act together, and may shift its location depending on wherever it is that people organize themselves to act out of world-building principles. It is for this reason Arendt quotes the famous plaudit Pericles used to describe his fellow Greeks: “Wherever you go you will be a polis” (*HC*, 198).

Nonetheless, while a political world is kindled whenever the spark of political action occurs, the light of the public space flames out almost immediately without proper care. That is, the in-between space inaugurated by action must in any event become constituted, must become institutionalized in extant political communities, in order to endure. While action that constitutes a political world can arise whenever people gather together, Arendt argues that unless it is given the “stabilizing protection” of law and physical institutions, it will disappear.⁶⁴ It must be

⁶³ Cf. Arendt’s thoughts on the student movements of the late 60s and early 70s expressed in her essay, “Thought on Politics and Revolution,” in *CR*, 203–4, and my discussion in chapter 5 here.

⁶⁴ See Arendt: “It is as though the wall of the polis and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilizing protection could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself” (*HC*, 198). See also:

maintained by the presence of politically organized others in order for freedom to become “tangible,” to become “words which can be heard,” “deeds which can be seen,” “events which are talked about” (*BPF*, 153). For freedom to appear in the world—to become more than a fleeting spark of action in the darkness—our human togetherness must be organized so as to magnify it instead of obscuring it.⁶⁵

While Arendt does not detail specific mechanisms for how the spirit of action should be institutionalized in a political world, she is clear that some attempts have been more successful than others. The French Revolution, which I examine further in the next chapter, is the prime example Arendt gives of a failure to institutionalize freedom. Instead of coming to grips with a constitutional framework, she says the French were “overawed by the spectacle of the multitude” and swept away by pity towards its misery.⁶⁶ The American Revolution, by contrast, was better able to found a lasting political world, because it saw power not in the multitude but in the promises and covenants that were the principle of its new constitution (*OR*, 206). However, Arendt argues that even the more durable American Constitution—what she calls “the greatest achievement of the American people”—nonetheless failed to include the well-springs of the revolutionary spirit, the grassroots promising that took place at the level of wards, townships, and town-hall meetings (*OR*, 231). She calls this failure, both in the French and American

“Performing artists...need an audience to show their virtuosity, just as acting men need the presence of others before whom they can appear; both need a publicly organized space for their ‘work,’ and both depend upon others for the performance itself. Such a space of appearances is not be taken for granted wherever men live together in a community” (*BPF*, 152).

⁶⁵ This more Roman inclination toward the political world is just as strong if not stronger than the classical Greek experience of politics with which Arendt is most often associated. Moreover, it is a model that more closely approximates her concept of love of the world. See Dean Hammer, “Hannah Arendt and Roman Political Thought: The Practice of Theory,” *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002).

⁶⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 46 (hereafter cited in text as *OR*).

context, the “lost treasure” of revolutionary action (*OR*, 272).

Between these two limits—the unconstituted violence of the multitude and the constituted oligarchy of the privileged few—Arendt sees the possibility for founding institutions that maintain the capacity for action, for “new beginnings” built on the principle of mutual covenant, without sacrificing their revolutionary spirit to the control of a unitary, elite authority. Her ideal is a system of grassroots councils, which she illustrates through historical allusion to local revolutionary councils, soviets, wards, and town-meetings. These political bodies are important to her because they build power up from the constituent participation of the locality and engage in mutual promising that does not (cannot) secure for all time and places the national institutions it helps authorize.⁶⁷ Of course, this also makes their power more substantial and the danger of factions and further revolution more real. It is for this reason, Arendt believes, they have consistently been either crushed or unincorporated by the revolutionaries once they have assumed the seat of government. Nonetheless, a federal council system is for Arendt the quintessential illustration of a political world. It is one where freedom is publicly enacted rather than representatively outsourced, actively maintained rather than deferentially ossified, and passionately cherished rather than carelessly begrudged—where freedom becomes a world that exists because it is loved.

⁶⁷ See Arendt, “The danger and the advantage inherent in all bodies politic that rely on contracts and treaties is that they, unlike those that rely on rule and sovereignty, leave the unpredictability of human affairs and the unreliability of men as they are, using them merely as the medium, as it were, into which certain islands of predictability are thrown and in which certain guideposts of reliability are erected. The moment promises lose their character as isolated islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty, that is, when this faculty is misused to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path secured in all directions, they lose their binding power and the whole enterprise becomes self-defeating” (*HC*, 244).

The Threats to the World Posed by Modernity

Implicit in Arendt's phenomenology of the world as a public, political space is a normative ethos that is in many ways radically democratic.⁶⁸ As I have attempted to show here, in Arendt's description of political space as one constituted by political actors and judging spectators, an implicit normative account of political community, one reliant on the presence and participation of plural others, comes to the fore. It is in many ways an ideal description, of which Arendt admits we often only see glimpses enacted. This is because the radically democratic freedom of Arendt's political world is tempered by our modern constraints, just as the freedom exemplified by the Greeks and Romans is tempered by their ancient conceits (against women, slaves, foreigners). Namely, in modernity the political world constrained by the expedients of mass society, what Arendt calls "the society of jobholders" (*HC*, 322).

These constraints, Arendt argues, imperil the creation and preservation of objects that reify, memorialize, and house action in the world—constitutions, assembly halls, archives, monuments—objects that in a consumer society are reduced to means (to public admiration, to harmonizing class interests) when they should be treated as ends, as goods in themselves.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ I agree with Linda Zerilli's reading of the implications of Arendt for democratic theory here. There she argues, "Nonsovereignty is the condition of democratic politics ... Political freedom requires others and is spatially limited by their presence. No subjective relation of the self to itself, freedom requires a certain kind of relation to others in the space defined by plurality that Arendt calls the 'common world'" (19). See Linda Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁶⁹ This argument is already implicit in Arendt's essay "The Crisis in Culture" where she states, "An object is cultural to the extent that it can endure; its durability is the very opposite of functionality, which is the quality which makes it disappear again from the phenomenal world by being used and used up" (*BPF*, 204). It becomes more politically explicit in *The Human Condition*, where she argues, "If one permits the standards of *homo faber* to rule the finished world as they must necessarily rule the coming into being of this [artifactual] world, then *homo faber* will eventually help himself to everything and consider everything that is as a mere means for himself" (*HC*, 158). In either case the public world itself is reduced to exchange values, and this "functionalization" obscures and distorts their greater meaning as the setting for and

Likewise, Arendt argues that modern patterns of life also constrain the ongoing engagement of citizens upon which the world depends. As Arendt describes it, the world relies on the durability of its space and its objects, but additionally this “physical, worldly in-between” is enmeshed in what she calls a “web of human relationships,” which she describes as the interpersonal activities and communication that go on in the world (*HC*, 182–83). This “web of human relationships” is made public, is made to “appear,” through its ongoing enactment amongst people, one that requires courage and fortitude to bring such a world into existence, to endure its outcomes, and to bear it into the future (*HC*, 183). And yet, in modernity market forces often overshadow the political power of organized citizens, and public action is often shirked for private escape and subjective happiness.

The political world through which we might afford ourselves of so many positive benefits is under a constant state of threat. Part of Arendt’s project is to diagnose the eclipse of the political world under the specific conditions of modernity. What is so dangerous about this development for her is not simply a loss of the reality, meaning, and freedom offered by a public world, but the potential loss of a human world at all. She consistently points to the fragility of the world and the potential catastrophe that its destruction would represent.⁷⁰ Indeed, for Arendt the specter of totalitarianism continues to hang over us, and this specter is characterized by unresolved threats, which, even in the aftermath of the 20th century’s horrors, continue to

reification of “activities not only useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication” (*HC*, 173–74).

⁷⁰ John McGowan explains this fragility thusly, “Because our common world is humanly created (although never humanly controlled) through pluralistic action, there is no ontological *fact* that can stand over and against human action. If some human power manages totally to dominate human interactions by destroying the very possibility of those interactions in all their multiplicity, then the world can be utterly transformed” (29). See John McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1998).

undermine it. Specifically, the reality, meaning, and freedom characteristic of the world are increasingly undermined in modern times by three parallel phenomena: world-denying ideology, the rise of what Arendt terms “the social,” and mass bureaucracy.

These threats, which are like the deformed counterparts to the beneficial qualities of the world they corrode, are why Arendt appeals to a love of the world, an *amor mundi*, in hopes of resisting them. The threat that corresponds to our world-enabled perception of reality is what Arendt describes as the threat of “ideology” (*OT*, 469). She describes ideology as a sort of all-encompassing worldview, a single idea that is used to explain the whole course of historic and future events, and to insulate its adherents from the reality of plural opinions and “stubborn” facts that might contradict it (*OT*, 469; *BPF*, 253). The threat that corresponds to capacity for the political world to make acts meaningful is the rise of what Arendt called “the social” (*HC*, 38). This phenomenon, Arendt argues, leads to the eclipse of public action by social trends and the degradation of the durable world (both objects of beauty and public institutions) into exchange value. In other words, the social is the triumph of the constant demands and ephemeral results of life and labor processes. Finally, the threat that corresponds to the freedom possible in a world organized politically is the rise of bureaucracy as a form of administrative rule.⁷¹ Arendt refers to this as “the rule of nobody,” where plural individuals are transformed into a mass society and governed as an undifferentiated, standardized population (*HC*, 45). It is through a re-orientation of thought around the political world, a cultivation of our faculty of judgment, that we gain a greater hope to act against these world-alienating effects of modern life.

⁷¹ Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (Orlando: Harcourt, 1972), 178 (hereafter cited in text as *CR*).

The Threat of Ideology

Ideology threatens the reality we gain through our shared senses as we perceive objects that relate and separate us. It does this, because it attempts to pre-figure a story about those objects without regard for the plural perspectives that assure their reality. As Arendt puts it, ideology “insists on a ‘truer’ reality concealed behind all perceptible things” (*OT*, 470). This ‘truer’ reality is not an expression of critique, because it has lost contact with facts in the world, and as such becomes merely a claim to exclusively define the world, in opposition to its actual openness and plurality. Whereas speech and discussion serve to orient us in a world of enduring objects and distinct individuals, ideology employs a simple dogmatic logic (of race, class, nature, etc.). No matter how false its simplistic logic may be, ideology can replace the reality that is achieved through plural perspectives. It is the triumph of a lie, one that is taken to its logical end. It results in the inability to perceive the shared reality that becomes apparent in a political world, and it results in the inability to resist participating in whatever horrors are deemed necessary to realize its logical solution.

Where this happens most completely, in totalitarian regimes, public speech becomes mere propaganda, and individual political judgments become either doctrine or conspiracy. In other words, the reliance that we share on plural others to ascertain what is real is replaced by an operative logic that any individual can ascertain. Thus Arendt says, “Ideologies always assume that one idea is sufficient to explain everything...no experience can teach anything because everything is comprehended in this consistent process of logical deduction.”⁷² Ideology is thus a system of discourse and education in which a reality, instead of being revealed intersubjectively,

⁷² Hannah Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” *Review of Politics* 15, no. 3 (1953): 317.

is demonstrated through force such that it gains the semblance of truth.⁷³ In other words, instead of reality being disclosed through speech in the world, ideology eschews political discourse for the more reliable (and potentially enforceable) imperatives of its own logic.

In this sense ideology is estranged from the world, relying on its own idea (however false) taken to its logical end. Because the world is too contradictory, too plural, and too spontaneous, ideology seeks to fabricate “a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality” (*OT*, 471). For this reason, Arendt points out that when we have seen ideologues attain power (as in totalitarian regimes), they have inevitably forsaken the original content of their inspiring ideology and instead have begun a process of producing “victims and executioners” (*OT*, 472). “Victims and executioners”—not opponents or even sympathizers—are what is necessary to the realization of an operative logic that seeks to amplify and hasten what it presupposes to be historically “inevitable.”⁷⁴ Because such logics ignore human plurality, ignore the reality that is perceptible only through plural perspectives, it is always prepared to sacrifice individuals to the accomplishment of its ends.

Ideology is able to do this in part by exploiting the “loneliness” that prevents individuals from trusting either one another or themselves, a loneliness that is pervasive under the conditions of mass society. Without being organized among others, we retreat into ourselves and our social enclaves. We lose faith in the world that begins to appear as only a multitude of distortions. As Arendt puts it, ideology “appears like a last support in a world where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied upon,” where “the distinction between true and false (i.e. the standards of

⁷³ Ibid., 318.

⁷⁴ Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” 310–11.

thought) no longer exist.”⁷⁵ Such was the process Arendt describes in *Origins of Totalitarianism* whereby fantasies about race, nation, and empire crystallized into a totalitarian ideology that proposed to explain the entire past and future of the world. This development, which Arendt calls the “New Key to History,” she argues began with the aristocratic nostalgia of Arthur de Gobineau in France, continued with the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer in Great Britain, and became an indispensable justification for the imperialist racism of men like Cecil Rhodes, all before these ideas metastasized into German Nazi ideology (*OT*, 170–84, 200–203).

Ideologies thrive under worldless conditions. Where there are no political relations between people fantasies and conspiracies run wild, driven as much by a desire for power over others as they are by power’s inability (absent a world) to stop them. It is for these reasons that we must build up the world and care for it, and in so doing summon the courage necessary for political action. This is no easy task given the much easier alternative of escapist retreat, an alternative which gone hand in hand both with the rise of ideological world views as it has with the modern triumph of life and personal liberty over the world and public freedom. This latter effect is the growth of what Arendt calls “the social.”

The Threat of “The Social”

What Arendt refers to as “the social” arises on her account as a kind of anti-world. This anti-world is not the opposite of the world as she conceives it, a space of public appearance and political action. The opposite of the public world for Arendt are the private and intimate spaces that are not meant to appear in public. The social is an anti-world, because it pretends to a kind of publicity, meaning a togetherness of various social groups; however, in society, instead of such togetherness being politically organized such that individuals can distinguish themselves—

⁷⁵ Ibid., 326, 321.

can excel, can act—it is instead organized around consumption, security, and satisfaction in place of freedom.

Thus the rise of the social is associated with the movement of populations into growing conformity and regularized behavior. As Arendt puts it, “The social viewpoint is identical ... with an interpretation that takes nothing into account but the life process of mankind, and within its frame of reference all things become objects of consumption” (*HC*, 89). “Mass society” is thus characterized by the ubiquity of labor. Everyone becomes a jobholder whose ends are personal satisfaction and economic value, not the creation of permanent goods and the enactment of public deeds.⁷⁶ In this anti-world, instead of human togetherness being *politically* organized, masses are *metabolically* organized, the aim of which is to ensure the provisions and quality of life instead of protecting an enduring political world, one whose freedom is maintained by but occurs in distinction from the ongoing material processes of growth and consumption.⁷⁷

Whereas the public, political world allows for the greatness of action to persist and thus saves it from its otherwise natural futility and disappearance, mass society perceives men and women economically, behaviorally, and formulaically. The social disavows the individual, the actor, and the freedom that they enact, because from the vantage point of the social, the

⁷⁶ Cf. Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics: How Washington Made the Rich Richer—And Turned Its Back on the Middle Class* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), and Don Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art* (New York: MacMillan, 2012).

⁷⁷ It is no coincidence that in this particular line of thought Arendt closely resembles her fellow ex-pats from the Frankfurt School such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, who saw in the cultural products and the organization of economic life they found in the United States echoes of the Third Reich. See Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss: Lives of the Frankfurt School* (New York: Verso, 2016). It also shares similarities with the perspective her friend Walter Benjamin takes in analyzing commodification in *The Arcades Project*. In both cases, Arendt shares a concern for the reduction of human beings to creatures whose lives become wholly immersed in the monotony and automaticity of economic processes.

individual is a means toward further “life” or “happiness.” Freedom can only be dangerously spontaneous and unmanageable when seen in such a way. Instead, mass society embraces the processes of economic growth and development, seeks to rationalize and control them, and ultimately succumbs to the technical management of human populations according to utilitarian principles of life and stability instead of principles of freedom. The effect of this state of affairs is that excellence, the public distinction gained by political actors, is deformed into what Arendt calls “laboring we perform in public” (*HC*, 49). In other words, the political world is overcome by a society of laborers, even the most distinguished of whom are never able, in their laboring, to transcend their job, their economic role. Economic processes of exchange and consumption eclipse the meaning that is possible within the organization of an enduring political world, and this represents for Arendt a “degradation of the human person” (*HC*, 211).

Of course, all of these arguments may sound like privileged nostalgia for an ancient way of thinking about freedom and political action. What is so urgent about a political world where action might be remembered if there are people dying from poverty, inadequate and inaccessible health care, or racial and sexual violence? While there is perhaps some romanticism on Arendt’s part at least for ancient ways of thinking about freedom, there is also the genuine fear that what happened in her native Germany was emblematic of a systemic danger in modernity. This is not a romantic assertion, but a heartfelt reflection on historical experiences. And what those experiences lead her to is the belief that the technical, logistical problem of administering to a population’s basic needs has no *political* component. Any question that has a definite answer is not a question that calls for political judgment based in freedom, but is a question that responds to the logic of necessity, and which is the same for everyone. Political questions—the organization of democratic institutions, the role of government, debates over foreign alliances

and wars, and the application of constitutional principles to contemporary problems—when they are reduced to technical problems, not only obviate the role of politics, handing over our freedom to technocrats, but relegate us to a world where the regular and regulated flux of our individual socioeconomic lives take precedence over our capacity for meaningful disclosure in political action and judgment with others. This, for Arendt, is a dangerous step away from the political world.

It is not so ironic, then, that Arendt argues that even in this mass society, where we are more and more made to fit into an economy of job-holders and where we are driven into social conformity in order to satisfy our needs through labor, we nonetheless experience isolation and loneliness (*HC*, 59; *OT*, 475). Arendt says that as jobholders we are isolated in our own laboring such that we become agents selling our labor as a commodity without regard to anything but our own immediate needs (*HC*, 212). She argues that, even though laboring may occur alongside many others, and even though there may be a degree of distinction among various different types of laborers and the professionalization and specialization within those different types, from the point of view of the laboring activity and the conditions under which it functions best—“the unitedness of many into one”—sameness reigns and individuality is lost (*HC*, 214).

The point she makes here, and which I agree with, is not that this describes every sort of job, but that this describes the logic of laboring. For instance, she makes a distinction between laboring and what she calls “workmanship,” “the purposeful combination of different skills and callings,” (*HC*, 212). Workmanship, on this account, is “unpolitical” but nonetheless maintains a relationship to the world, while laboring—though it may be performed in concert with others—is “anti-political” because it magnifies the single perspective of the individual laborer (*HC*, 212). In other words, the mind-set of labor is destructive to the world, because it relies on uniformity

instead of plurality. As Arendt argues, the communal “value” of laboring together with others *qua* laborers is no different than the added benefit of eating and drinking with others (*HC*, 212). More to the point, though, is that the means-end logic of modernity (both capitalist and socialist variants) works to reduce workmanship to laboring, to the formation of a “labor gang,” where individual laborers (be they assembly line workers or adjunct professors) are treated as interchangeable.

This is why she argues loneliness characterizes mass society, even when we may be more surrounded by people than ever. It is because when we view ourselves through mass society’s profit-maximizing logic we are not only isolated (whether or not we are in proximity to others), we are also made to feel “superfluous,” both replaceable and disposable, particularly given the problem of unemployment. Arendt calls this superfluity the experience “of not belonging to a world at all” (*OT*, 475). Loneliness, on this account, arises both in the “uprootedness” of modern economic life and the atomization of individuals defined by their labor. Without a space in the world where people can meaningfully (i.e. as plural individuals) speak and discuss the world, we lose a sense of who we are and a common sense that we rely on to think.⁷⁸ Without a common world, we become incapable of disclosing ourselves to one another in any meaningful way. The loss of this experience of meaningful discourse plus the capitalist devaluation and disruption of traditional patterns of life (both economic and cultural) leads to an anxiety that often eschews

⁷⁸ As Arendt puts it, “For the confirmation of my identity I depend entirely upon other people,” with whom the “equivocal” inner dialogue of self with self becomes “the single voice of one unexchangeable person” (*OT*, 476). The problem with loneliness is that as authentic dialogue becomes rare, the inner dialogue, which represents others as part of oneself, also abandons us. As Arendt summarizes, “Self and world, capacity for thought and experience are lost at the same time” (*OT*, 477).

independent thought and instead reaches out for ideological explanations and scapegoats.⁷⁹

The loneliness experienced in mass society is also accompanied by a loss of political power, because its isolation erodes the political organization of people.⁸⁰ When we are too absorbed in our own lives, too rapt in the banal consumption of popular culture, too busy in laboring, and alienated in an apparent superfluity, a space of appearances where power can be actualized in on-going action in concert is largely barred to us. Although in mass society we may very well possess the material factor of “living together” necessary for power, we do not possess (at least not on a mass scale, surely) the “organization” to keep ourselves together in such a manner that our individual concerns do not overtake our common interests (*HC*, 201). When this power is depleted, we become not only politically impotent; we begin, as Arendt says, “a less visible internal decay that invites disaster,” one that she associates with the loss of a common world. This loss of a common world paves the way for tyranny, “the attempt to substitute violence for power” and mob rule, “the attempt to substitute power for strength,” but more

⁷⁹ Roger Berkowitz’ (2009) “Solitude and the Activity of Thinking” helps to explain the relationship Arendt draws between the way loneliness works to isolate individuals politically but also corrodes their once sacrosanct privacy. On his reading, mass society eclipses both the public sphere, where a society of jobholders is “cut off from the experience of taking another seriously,” and the private sphere, into which social conformism invades and where we lose the time for independent thought (237). See Roger Berkowitz, “Solitude and the Activity of Thinking,” in *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*, ed. Roger Berkowitz, Thomas Keenan, and Jeffrey Katz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

⁸⁰ Arendt recognizes the role of labor unions in politics, calling the history of labor revolts “one of the most glorious and probably the most promising chapter of recent history” (*HC*, 215). Her point, then, is not that the workplace or the union shop cannot be places of intersubjective world-building and action in concert. Her point is that the *logic* of labor does not support these exceptional acts in the way a politically organized world does. Indeed, she says that this is evident in the typical trajectory labor’s gains have taken: incorporation into an interest group represented by party politics. She argues that labor’s power has only been revolutionary when it stepped outside the bounds of the logic of labor that permeates both the shop and the modern party and formed self-governing councils. Given the erosion of labor’s political power over the last 30 years, Arendt’s characterization of this logic seems quite plausible.

worrisome for Arendt is that the loss of power in loneliness can also lead to totalitarian terror, which appears as the substitution of ideology for power (*HC*, 203; *OT*, 478). When that comes to pass—“where nobody is reliable and nothing can be relied on”—ideology and its unthinking administrative implements become a last resort (*HC*, 201).

The Threat of Bureaucracy

The rise of administrative bureaucracy is a corollary of the growth of “social” life, where a semi-private social sphere of laboring commerce and entertaining consumption extends both outward into the politics of the public sphere and inward into the intimacy of the private sphere. Arendt calls bureaucracy “the rule by Nobody,” or “no-man rule,” because it is the type of government associated with massive unresponsive institutions made up of indifferent functionaries (*HC*, 40; *CR*, 137). Bureaucracy, on this account, is the attempt to coordinate, regulate, and rationalize the ongoing processes of production and consumption as if it were simply a technical problem that can be solved. It is the demotion of politics to social administration. It describes the type of government that is suited to the elevation of social life over and above the freedom of political action and its inherent meaning.

Under bureaucracy, freedom as it appears in the world—“words which can be heard” and “deeds which can be seen”—is no longer to be found (*BPF*, 153). This is because the nature of a bureaucracy is such that “everybody is deprived of political freedom, of the power to act” (*CR*, 178). In other words, technocrats and *apparatchiks* replace political actors; party machinery replaces meaningful participation, and social administration replaces principled political debate. It is in this sense that Arendt calls bureaucracy, “tyranny without a tyrant” (*CR*, 178). In essence, bureaucratic rule for Arendt is a situation in which it becomes nearly impossible to act outside of functionary channels and one where politics is rationalized to the imperatives of mass society

and party machinery.⁸¹

The two biggest illustrations Arendt gives of bureaucracy as an anti-political phenomenon come in her description of the Nazi bureaucratic mentality she examines in her reporting on the trial of Adolph Eichmann and in her commentary on the release of the Pentagon Papers that brought to light the role of the bureaucracy in the escalation of the Vietnam War. In both instances, she argues that within the operations of a fully developed bureaucracy there develops an insularity that blocks out the reality of world. In the case of Eichmann and the Nazi bureaucracy, Arendt argues that it was so insulated from outside events that it functioned much the same at the beginning of the war, including the “extermination machinery,” whose “intricate bureaucracy functioned with the same unwavering precision in the years of easy victory as in those last years of predictable defeat.”⁸² What was paramount in its functioning, on Arendt’s account, was that thinking—specifically, “thinking from the standpoint of somebody else”—was replaced by ideological clichés and bureaucratic rule. It is for this reason she saw Eichmann as someone who “was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and presence of others, and hence against reality as such” (*EIJ*, 49).

Somewhat similarly in “The Pentagon Papers,” Arendt argues that what these leaked documents reveal is a “willful, deliberate disregard of all facts, historical, political, geographical, for more than twenty-five years” (*CR*, 32). In the Washington administrative bubble—one populated not with political actors, with statesmen and women, but with professional “problem-

⁸¹ This has interesting parallels to Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality. Cf. Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Essential Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994), 244. See also X. Marquez, “Spaces of Appearance and Spaces of Surveillance,” *Polity* 44, no. 1 (2012).

⁸² Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 116 (hereafter cited in text as *EIJ*).

solvers”—calculative reasoning replaced political judgment. Theories and their attendant statistical methodologies became divorced from the real world as bureaucrats exercised their capacity for cognition at the expense of their faculty of thought. As Arendt puts it, these bureaucrats “... lost their minds because they trusted the calculating powers of their brains at the expense of the mind’s capacity for experience and its ability to learn from it ...” (*CR*, 39). What these illustrations show is just how easily a government can devolve into mere administration, and how dangerous a bureaucracy that abandons freedom and judgment for rule-based governance and problem-solving can actually become.

There are many dangers associated with bureaucratic governance, and first among these for Arendt is the danger of totalitarianism. This is because totalitarian regimes rely on bureaucratic methods and organization both to manage society and to insulate their ruling cadres from the outside world and the contradictions it might present to its ideology. Arendt compares such an organizational scheme to an onion, where rule originates from within the apparatus, and each layer presents a “façade of normality” in both directions, rendering it “shock-proof against the factuality of the real world” (*BPF*, 100). The threats posed by bureaucracy and by the replacement of social behavior with political action thus require a reckoning of both the relative size of representative institutions and organizational structures (what Arendt calls their “bigness”) and the constitutional frameworks that have ossified into processes that foreclose any real action or spontaneity (*CR*, 181). It is only by tending to these challenges posed by bureaucratic administration of the world that we will be able to reclaim our freedom. As I will attempt to articulate in the next chapter, tending to these challenges, on Arendt’s account, means tending to the world and redeveloping a specific kind of love therein.

CHAPTER 3. ARENDT'S DESCRIPTION OF LOVE

Arendt's theoretical consideration of love and its relationship to the political sphere extend as far back as her doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine. Augustine, whom Arendt referred to as her "old friend," was from that first scholarly encounter a figure central to her political thought. It is from Augustine, for example, that Arendt develops her concept of "natality," an argument for the inherent capacity of humans for freedom, for novel action in the world. The focus of her dissertation, which was published in English in 1996 as *Love and St. Augustine*, is quite pertinent to my own. In it she seeks to comprehend the relationship between the Christian mandate both to a love of God and a love of neighbor. It is here, in attempting to resolve the potential contradictions in Augustine's characterization of love, that she first begins to interweave the influences of a Heideggerian worldliness (that anticipates death) and an Augustinian sublime transcendence (that remembers creation), influences which would profoundly shape her political thought thereafter.

Specifically, it is in Arendt's early dissertation that we find her first mention of a "love of the world." There, in reckoning with love's meaning to politics, she poses a question that is arguably the cornerstone of her theoretic approach: "Would it not be better to love the world ... Why should we make a desert out of this world?"⁸³ She then begins an examination of Augustine's theology of love, explaining his most fundamental distinction between love as either *caritas*, a love that desires eternal salvation but is otherworldly, and *cupiditas*, a love that seeks a

⁸³ Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 19 (hereafter cited in text as *LS*).

home in the world but fears death's dispossession (*LS*, 17–33). Arendt then lays the foundations for her own theoretical account of a type of love that contains aspects of both *caritas* and *cupiditas*: a love of the world. This type of love is like *cupiditas* in that it is worldly and focused on plural men and women. However, it is also similar to *caritas* in that it desires an object not frustrated by death and enjoyed for its own sake, namely, the public world inaugurated by each successive generation.

Arendt describes a love of the world as the means by which “man explicitly makes himself at home in the world” (*LS*, 67). And this ‘being at home in the world,’ rather than the mere ‘worldliness’ that is frustrated by the fear of death, results from a gratitude and remembrance of birth as “the transmundane source of [our] existence” (*LS*, 51–52). Whereas Augustine’s depiction of this type of love as one of sin, Arendt seems to maintain the notion that this love of the world is inherent in the human condition as such (*LS*, 67).⁸⁴ It is thus both worldly and transcendent. It prepares us for political action that seeks “a potential earthly immortality,” in the enduring space of political freedom (*HC*, 55, 27). It elevates our natality, our capacity to begin, as “the miracle that saves the world” (*HC*, 247). It gratefully recognizes the beauty of a home in the world where new beginnings can take place, and where plural men and women can achieve distinction amongst equals. And while Arendt draws her important theoretical emphases on natality and beginning from Augustine’s elevation of *caritas*, she nonetheless maintains in that appropriation a tension between the otherworldly, “transmundane” object of *caritas* and a love through which humanity finds not eternal salvation, but concrete (not

⁸⁴ See also *LS*, 77: “Love of the world is never a choice, for the world is always there and it is natural to love it.”

spiritually mediated) relations with one others.⁸⁵

We can thus trace back to this early text strands of Arendt's thought that will preoccupy her throughout her life. It is almost as if those themes (natality and death, eternity and world, isolation and community, will and power) that she works so hard to resolve within Augustine's theology, she then takes upon herself to work out in terms of a phenomenology of politics. In this way, the conceptual perspective she came to understand as a love of the world—though she never systematically defines it—appears almost as a political correlate of the *caritas* that animates Augustine's thought. It is a love that finds its transcendent meaning in political action and the foundation of freedom, and it is a love that remains primarily guided not by the “*summum bonum*” of Christian love, but by the preservation of a political space where the concrete plurality of humanity is disclosed in public action.

It is this tension between love as an inspirational model but not a fully *aspirational* one for Arendt's normative political phenomenology that I attempt to resolve in this chapter. This is an interesting puzzle within Arendt's thought, because love as we most commonly experience it is politically problematic for Arendt. For her, the difficulty with love is twofold. On the one hand, love transports us away from the public space of politics and the public business and its demands that are addressed therein. She argues, for instance, that romantic love is “unworldly,”

⁸⁵ Ronald Beiner, “Love and Worldliness: Hannah Arendt's Reading of Saint Augustine,” in *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*, ed. Larry May and Jerome Kohn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997). Beiner describes this tension thusly, “Belonging or estrangement? Loving the world, or coming to view it as a desert? Being at home in the world, or ‘world alienation’? These are the alternatives with which Arendt grappled, not only in the book on Augustine but throughout her philosophical career” (280). While I think it is fairly clear that Arendt was indeed a partisan for the world, I agree with him—similarly to my agreement with Villa on the role of alienation in Arendt's thought that I describe below—that she is cognizant of the very natural human tendency to think beyond merely what appears. Whereas Villa sees a form of alienation in her description of thinking, Beiner sees a yearning toward the supersensible, particularly in her reflections on Kant and his distinction between the beautiful and the sublime (284, n. 56).

because it unites lovers in a passion that is oriented inwardly and endures regardless of the lovers' worldly deeds or misdeeds (*HC*, 242). Indeed, she says that romantic love, "as long as its spell lasts" only allows the perspective of a common world to become apparent through the appearance of a child, "love's own product" (*HC*, 242). On the other hand, acts of love can occur in the public realm and be destructive of it. This, she argues, occurs because love represents a direct confrontation with principles of political freedom. For Arendt, when love is manifested in public it will either take on "an actively negative nature" that seeks no public recognition (the example she gives is of Jesus Christ), or it will become "corrupt on its own terms," and corrupt public institutions in turn (*HC*, 77). In either case she argues that love "destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others" (*HC*, 242). What she means by this is that the public world, that space which relies on the plural perspectives of others, is evacuated when love enters into it. Its plurality is either ignored or unified into a singular loving embrace.

In this way, Arendt's account seeks to show how love (understood as amorous, filial, or charitable) leads us to neglect the public and permanent for the private and transitory, and that it limits or silences the speech and action that make spaces public, where we act together and assert our individual distinctiveness. Specifically, she sees political mobilization inspired by invocations of love as self-destructive for three main reasons. First, she argues that the introduction of questions of social comity at the expense of political discourse at best displaces public concerns with social ones (such as social discrimination and social inequality) and at worst confuses social relations with political ones. This she believed to be both inappropriate and gravely mistaken. Second, she argues that political power that is brought to bear on invocations of love becomes, in essence, a sort of cudgel, one that seeks its end without regard to the difficult task of constituting and preserving a shared space of political freedom (*OR*, 117). Finally, she

argues that a broad politicization of love almost always represents a form of “hypocrisy,” one that, as she puts it, “begins to poison all human relations,” and makes political relations untenable (*OR*, 88). The effect of these three strategies is ultimately that the world, the public space of free discourse and action, is destroyed. A love of the world avoids these dangers, because it refuses to substitute mutual respect among citizens for more passionate, sentimental bonds that destroy the space of constituted freedom that a love of the world holds dear.

Love’s Relation to Social Life

Both in reckoning with the backdrop of racial prejudice in the German historical context and in responding to the contemporary reality of racial strife in mid-century America, Arendt voiced a series of arguments that were rather iconoclast. She insists on the primacy of political rights to social relations, and she argues that retreating to questions of social inclusion from debates that should be about *political* inclusion further demeaned those people most vulnerable to oppression. Specifically, she saw the political attempt to socially assimilate oppressed minorities as both an abdication of claims to equal political recognition and an abridgment of social freedoms. On the one hand, she argues that social assimilation—access to private clubs, elite schools, business networks—are utterly worthless absent actionable political rights. On the other hand, she argues that social discrimination cuts both ways, and that in order to preserve freedom of association (and personal pride), social forms of discrimination should be treated socially, with social praise or opprobrium, but otherwise begrudged as a fact of life. In either case, she consistently warned that questions of love as it is typically understood—desire for private intimacy, care for friends and family—can never be adequately addressed by political means.

While it may seem retrograde to generations that have come of age under the ever-

evolving patchwork of federal and state anti-discrimination statutes, Arendt saw legislative or judicial interventions against social discrimination as an overreach of state authority. To begin with, she was simply unalarmed by discrimination in the social sphere. Calling social discrimination, “only an extension of the right to free association,” she argues:

If as a Jew I wish to spend my vacations only in the company of Jews, I cannot see how anyone can reasonably prevent my doing so; just as I see no reason why other resorts should not cater to a clientele that wishes not to see Jews while on a holiday. There cannot be a ‘right to go into any hotel or recreation area or place of amusement,’ because many of these are in the realm of the purely social where the right to free association, and therefore to discrimination, has greater validity than the principle of equality.⁸⁶

While Arendt made several quite significant caveats to this position—namely in distinguishing those types of social spaces that function as public goods such as transportation and business accommodations—she holds firm to the ideal that neither social discrimination nor social affinities should be the subject of political debate.⁸⁷ To do otherwise, she argues, is to erase an important source of human plurality, one without which “very important possibilities of free association and group formation would disappear” (*RJ*, 205).

While Arendt is resolute that political power must not, indeed cannot, intervene beyond the public space of appearance, she argues that interpersonal love can play a role in changing entrenched forms of social discrimination. Arendt describes two sites where this is possible. The first of these is amongst religious communities, which, in their concern with the human

⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 206–7 (hereafter cited in text as *RJ*).

⁸⁷ To her credit, Arendt does write that certain putatively ‘social’ milieus, in effect, merge into public ones. She writes, “It is, however, another matter altogether when we come to ‘the right to sit where one pleases in a bus’ or a railroad car or station, as well as the right to enter hotels and restaurants in business districts—in short, when we are dealing with services which, whether privately or publicly owned, are in fact public services that everyone needs in order to pursue his business and lead his life” (*RJ*, 207). Moreover, she grants another exception for “theaters and museums,” which are social spaces but ones “where people obviously do not congregate for the purposes of associating with one another” (*RJ*, 207).

individual and their soul, should be able to leverage their spiritual authority toward new social forms. Arendt says in this regard, “the churches are indeed the only communal and public place where appearances do not count, and if discrimination creeps into the houses of worship, this is an infallible sign of their religious failing” (*RJ*, 209). The other site, according to Arendt, is in our personal relationships. Because the choice of “personal friends and those we love,” much like the affirmation of a religious community, is made in light of the uniqueness of the individual and not (or at least not primarily) their social status or public record, it can at times serve as a countervailing force, however small, to social norms. Arendt says in this regard, “The rules of uniqueness and exclusiveness are, and always will be, in conflict with the standards of society precisely because social discrimination violates the principle, and lacks validity for the conduct, of private life” (*RJ*, 208). Such a view may seem bizarre to us now that our private lives are often so entwined with our social milieu and political preferences, but we may look at the growing social acceptance of interracial and same-sex romantic partnerships to see that Arendt is at least partly right on this count.

Importantly though, neither of these venues normally has any *political* validity for Arendt. Quite the opposite, she argues that these private associations must remain unregulated (neither prescribed nor proscribed) by legislation.⁸⁸ If social discrimination is enforced by law, Arendt argues that society has become “tyrannical,” while if social affinities are mandated by law, then so has the state (*RJ*, 208–9). The lesson Arendt draws from this discussion is that a preoccupation with social standing is a distraction from the more important struggle for political standing. This is a rather contrarian position. Movements for justice, particularly the Civil Rights

⁸⁸ It was for this reason (and for other reasons that will become clearer in chapter 5’s discussion of Arendt’s thoughts on education) that Arendt thought it a strategic mistake for the Civil Rights Movement to focus foremost on school integration and not anti-miscegenation laws.

Movement and the Women's Movement, help us better understand how political and carceral power both undergird social relations and social discrimination and are reinforced by them. I will return to examine this point more substantially in the next chapter, yet it is important to address here how it fits with her broader denunciation of love and elevation of a love of the world. To that end, this discussion makes clear that, for Arendt, freedom is not found in achieving socioeconomic parity, reaching a given social stratum, or being included in a social clique. Freedom is found in a world where unequals are held equal, and the space where we "appear" and speak publicly across our familiar social groups—as equals, not as tolerated oddities—should itself be the object of our love for that very fact.

This view is implicit in her biography of Rahel Varnhagen, is also expressed in her discussion of exceptional Jews in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, and is further articulated in her essays "The Jew as Pariah" and "We Refugees." In each of these writings she argues that there is a profound futility lying at the root of efforts to assimilate socially, for desiring the affinity of inclusion as a possible substitute for political standing. In *Origins*, for instance, she discusses the ways that the question of Jewish equality was seen in light of "exceptional Jews" (*OT*, 56). She argues that the experiences of these individuals who "were Jews and presumably not *like* Jews" marked the ambiguity that conditioned the question of the status of all Jews as a social one and not a political one.⁸⁹ For Arendt, because the question of Jewish political emancipation was consistently obscured by the question of Jewish social assimilation and the experience of those Jews who attained a tenuous social inclusion, Jews were never prepared to defend themselves

⁸⁹ See Arendt: "...whenever those who actually tried to improve Jewish conditions attempted to think of the Jewish question from the point of view of the Jews themselves, they immediately approached it merely in its social aspect. It has been one of the most unfortunate facts in the history of the Jewish people that only its enemies, and almost never its friends, understood that the Jewish question was a political one" (*OT*, 56).

and fight as a politically organized group. In “We Refugees,” she argues that the suicide of Jewish refugees displaced by the rise of fascism was an effect of thinking the predicament facing them was a *social* one—a matter of patriotically assimilating to a new national culture—instead of a political one—a matter of organizing and fighting, if necessary, for political recognition.⁹⁰

Rahel Varnhagen, a Prussian Jew who had attempted to fully assimilate into gentile society through baptism and marriage, nevertheless represents for Arendt someone who realized later in life that the attempt at social assimilation could never protect her from anti-Semitic exclusion. This realization and the refusal to accept inclusion merely on social terms she later describes as the status attained by the “conscious pariah” (*JW*, 274). In “The Jew as Pariah,” she explains what she means by this in her description of Bernard Lazare, the outspoken writer and supporter of Alfred Dreyfus (*JW*, 283). She argues that the “conscious pariah” is someone who realizes that they are on the outside of mainstream society for whatever reason. Racism, discrimination, poverty, stigma: these are all characteristics of pariah peoples. The conscious pariah realizes this and instead of either seeking entrée into the society from which they have been barred or silently accepting their fate, maintain their exclusion in vocal criticism and open hostility. This serves to performatively (if not substantially) neutralize their discrimination by announcing their pride and self-worth, and it serves as a catalyst to politically organize for substantive rights. Lazare exemplified these traits, for Arendt, because he refused to judge himself by the standards of an oppressive society. He saw that the problem with Jewish social

⁹⁰ It is no coincidence that Arendt was a vocal proponent, during the war, of a Jewish Army that would fight as Jews and claim a place among the recognized peoples of a federated Europe. See Arendt, “The So-Called Jewish Army,” (*JW* 157–60). It is important to note that Arendt did not see such an army as one that would found a state on the model of other European nation-states, but would nevertheless earn for Jews political standing. See Amnon Raz-Krakotzin, “Jewish Peoplehood, ‘Jewish Politics,’ and Political Responsibility: Arendt on Zionism and Partitions,” *College Literature* 38, no. 1 (2011).

exclusion was that, as Arendt puts it, the Jew “refused to become a rebel...he begs from those whom he ought to fight...he appraises his poverty by the standards of those who have caused it” (*JW*, 285).

In articulating these types of examples, Arendt argues that the social entrée many of us take to be so powerful, a potential lever for political change, have historically crumbled away without the public, political rights conveyed by constitutional recognition and inclusion. What she wishes to stress is that social assimilation, the loving embrace of social inclusion, can never be a substitute for political power and a love of the world. As we will see, the power of this socially mediated love, as opposed to a politically mediated one, is wholly unreliable. It is susceptible to the ambivalent sentiments of a racist society (as Arendt argues was the case of the Jews in Germany) and also susceptible to the rage of mass violence (as Arendt argues occurred during the French Revolution).

The Violent Force of Love

One of the most dangerous problems with love that Arendt identifies is the potential for violence when political power is brought to bear on invocations of love. If politics is a space of persuasion and free judgment, then love (like hatred) is a force that compels agreement instead of eliciting it. And when the “boundlessness of sheer emotion” is applied to mass political movements, the possibility of mass violence is often difficult to avoid (*OR*, 85). Arendt writes:

Since the days of the French Revolution, it has been the boundlessness of their sentiments that made revolutionaries so insensitive to reality in general and to the reality of persons in particular, whom they felt no compunctions in sacrificing to their ‘principles’, or to the course of history, or to the cause of revolution as such. (*OR*, 80)

This is because for Arendt, the pity exemplified in the French Revolution—a politicized form of compassionate love—could only be acted upon without regard to institutions and laws. Because it believed in the natural goodness of the masses, this pity served to overwhelm the

revolutionaries' considerations of political institutions and legal rights—"to lead them astray from reason"—with a self-righteous rage whose only desire was the alleviation of misery (*OR*, 85).⁹¹

Love, on Arendt's account, served as a conduit by which mass suffering was transformed into rage. The force it unleashed was not a political power built on compacts and agreements; it was the force of sheer desperation, what Arendt refers to as "elemental necessity," "the force inherent in suffering" (*OR*, 100, 102). Love, "'the compassionate zeal' of the revolutionaries," by glorifying this suffering as the expression of man's "goodness," fundamentally shifted the direction of the revolution away from constitutional founding to the bare satisfaction of needs. In so doing, Arendt argues, the revolution could only attempt (however impossibly) to liberate people from their misery, and it could only do so violently, forsaking the patient work of negotiating an institutional framework required to found political freedom. Thus, in the case of the French Revolution, Arendt argues that it represented an anti-politics based around the elevation of pity, a love of the suffering masses. This love, according to Arendt, drove the revolutionaries to replace political relations with "natural" ones exemplified in the "goodness" of the suffering masses. In so doing, she argues it reduced everyone to a pre-political equality of conditions shared by all members of the human species, an equality she calls the "exact opposite" of a political equality forged from a constitutional consensus (*OR*, 98). Political

⁹¹ Arendt locates the origins of the French Revolution's zeal, which she considers incompatible with the plurality of constituted freedom, in the philosophy of Jean-Jaques Rousseau. She argues that it was in his exploration of the "*âme déchirée*," the torn, conflicted soul that wrestles between natural inclinations to goodness and the expectations of a corrupt world, that Rousseau "discovered" the compassion which would animate the French Revolution's concern with the suffering masses. Additionally, it was this experience of the soul's conflict—and *not* the inner dialogue of the thinking mind—that was for Arendt the root of Rousseau's concept of the General Will, which did not represent the plural agreement of public opinion but the sameness of individual wills, a "*union sacrée*" to unify the country and calm the soul's conflict (*OR*, 68–70).

equality is, on this account, “that everyone should be equally entitled to his legal personality, to be protected by it and, at the same time, to act almost literally ‘through’ it” (*OR*, 98). It is artificial, something agreed upon to overcome social inequality. Grounding equality in some natural characteristic, “goodness” or otherwise, Arendt argues, strips everyone equally of their political personhood, “the protecting mask of a legal personality” (*OR*, 98).

Arendt illustrates this point through an extended discussion of Herman Melville’s novel *Billy Budd*. She says that in this novel Melville articulates an important distinction between the “virtue” of Captain Verre on the one hand and the “goodness” of Billy Budd on the other (*OR*, 74). The distinction Arendt examines is that virtue, while it may be something “less than goodness,” is a quality that can be articulated politically, “capable ‘of embodiment in lasting institutions’” (*OR*, 74). Captain Verre exemplifies this by following the law and punishing Billy Budd for his violent crime, even though he believed Budd to be righteous, completely pure of heart. Goodness (“goodness beyond virtue”), on the other hand, is characterized by an “absolute, natural innocence,” and as such, it remains anti-political, manifesting itself not in speech but in a “natural” violence (*OR*, 73). The character of Billy Budd, because he is a foundling who comes into the story from outside society and its laws, represents this natural goodness. And yet, in responding to the crime perpetrated against him with violence, the otherwise innocent Billy Budd, referred to as “an angel of God,” shows that goodness, no less than evil, is destructive.

Arendt relates this lesson back to the history of the French Revolution to which it was a direct response. She argues that in loving and elevating the ostensible “goodness” of the masses, the revolutionaries helped to convert the suffering around them into a violent rage. By politicizing their compassion for the masses and fashioning the love of goodness into a political principle, Arendt argues that the revolutionaries doomed the possibility of ever constituting the

freedom they had won. This is because the natural goodness of man was soon manifested in a violent rage whose only end was the cessation of suffering, not the formation of political institutions. She says:

As a rule, it is not compassion which sets out to change worldly conditions in order to cease human suffering, but if it does, it will shun the drawn-out wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation, and compromise, which are the processes of law and politics, and lend its voice to the suffering itself, which must claim for swift and direct action, that is, for action with the means of violence. (*OR*, 77)

This rapid evolution of revolutionary loving compassion to extra-judicial violence is one of the deepest misgivings Arendt expresses as to the anti-political nature of love, and it is crucial to understanding her perspective on the role of love in political movements. I return to these warnings and the problems implicit with them more in Chapter 4 of this study.

The Corrosive Hypocrisy of Love

In the final measure, Arendt's most fundamental opposition to the notion that politics can be a vehicle for acts and relationships based on love lies in a phenomenology that places the experience of love in the inner space of the heart, not in the public sphere. The space within the heart, she argues is "a place of darkness," one which protects our innermost motives and feelings from the light of public display and judgment (*OR*, 86). When these motives and feelings are brought out into the open, she says they are "destroyed in their essence," becoming, instead of something heartfelt, a "mere appearance" (*OR*, 86). This essence, the dark worldlessness that exists in the vagaries of the human heart, Arendt argues "can only become false and perverted when it is used for political purposes" (*HC*, 52).

Arendt associated the worldlessness of this type of love with the Christian commitment to a life of good works. She calls "the experience of love in the sense of an activity," a "religious experience" and a person that devotes their life to the performance of good works "an essentially

religious figure” (*HC*, 76). This is because on her reading these sorts of good works, the activities of compassionate love in the Christian tradition, are by definition performed unselfconsciously. For them to be “good,” they must be unrehearsed, forgotten immediately, only recognized by God. As she argues, “goodness can exist only when it is not perceived,” lest it become phony and false, because “the moment a good work becomes known and public, it loses its specific character of goodness, of being done for nothing but goodness’ sake” (*HC*, 74).

She illustrates this connection between love, goodness, and hypocrisy through a reading of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s ‘The Grand Inquisitor,’ which appears in his novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Here she argues that Dostoevsky’s portrait of Jesus Christ before the Grand Inquisitor illustrates the difference between compassionate love, the activity of which is inspired by a love of goodness, and its political deformation, what she calls pity. For her, the figure of Jesus in this story reflects goodness in “his ability to have compassion with all men in their singularity,” and as a result he remains silent, compassionately listening, and finally offering a kiss to the man who condemns him (*OR*, 75). In contrast, the Grand Inquisitor, by declaring his allegiance to the suffering en masse, reflects the public perversion of goodness into pity, a sentiment that is “indistinguishable from the lust for power” in its rhetorical invocations of love for the less fortunate (*OR*, 75). What this illustration shows is the danger in making a political principle out of compassionate love. Namely, it either requires an otherworldly strength of character (as illustrated by the figure of Jesus), or, if it becomes politicized and part of public discourse, it will be a contradiction to terms, always arousing suspicion even amongst its most ardent proponents.

This ultimately corrosive aspect of politicized compassion, Arendt associated with the figure of Robespierre. She traces the intrigues and murderous trials of The Terror to the French

Revolution's substitution of sentiment and its potential authenticity for public contract and its reliability. This led, first, to a confusion between political pity, which relies on suffering to gain power, and genuine compassion, which seeks to alleviate suffering by taking it on oneself. And second, it eroded trust, because it required everyone to verify and validate the sincerity of their sentiments and motives, something that Arendt says is simply unattainable. She says:

When we say that nobody but God can see (and, perhaps, can bear to see) the nakedness of a human heart, 'nobody' includes one's own self—if only because our sense of unequivocal reality is so bound up with the presence of others that we can never be sure of anything that only we ourselves know and no one else. The consequence of this hiddenness is that our entire psychological life, the process of moods in our souls, is cursed with a suspicion we constantly feel we must raise against ourselves, against our innermost motives. (*OR*, 87)

This desire to make public the inner workings of the heart, a space of suspicious “darkness” even to its bearer, is what she says drove Robespierre to an “insane lack of trust in others” (*OR*, 89). And this corrosive madness arose from both his self-doubt (what she calls elsewhere “the basic unreliability of men who never can guarantee today who they will be tomorrow”) and the basic proposition that compassionate, loving motivations are essentially impossible to display publicly, that the attempt to do so “transforms all actors into hypocrites” (*HC*, 244).

Instead of turning towards political principles such as solidarity, the French Revolution thus became a search for hypocrites precisely because of its insistence on the centrality of sentiment: the heart and the goodness of its motivations. Whereas on Arendt's account the American Revolution remained focused on the world (“the foundation of freedom and the establishment of lasting institutions”), the French Revolution was overwhelmed by violence not just because of the immense suffering from which it sprang, but because it was so fixated on the public display of authentic compassion. On this account, the American founders were able to forge promises and compacts, establish institutions, precisely because they neither reckoned with

mass poverty nor were they overcome by pity (*OR*, 85).⁹² Because the promises they enacted were inspired by world-building principles and not world-alienating ones—a love of freedom and solidarity as opposed to a love of goodness and its obsession with the motives of the heart—they were not drawn into the rampant suspicions of authenticity that marked *la Terreur*. For Arendt, the French Revolution failed because it was premised on the (otherworldly) divinity of man, a compassionate love of *le peuple* that arose from the heart, and the result was not a public world, but a “search for hypocrites.”

Arendt's Limited Endorsement of Love

One clue that points to a more complex reading of Arendt comes during her discussion of the American founding. Here she argues that the American Revolution had a more fortuitous backdrop compared to its French counterpart and that, perhaps as a result, the American framers showed more prudence and were not swept away by the passion of compassion. However, she is nonetheless critical of them for the way they understood passion and sought to wholly excise it from the constitution. She argues that in this case, because the framers were able to avoid the

⁹² This of course is a gloss of the historical record, as the founders did discuss slavery, concentrations of wealth, and inequality. However, Arendt's basic argument is accurate: the establishment of civil institutions, while flawed, clearly took precedence over questions of material welfare (other than their own). The founders only belatedly came to connections between economic well-being and political efficacy, and certainly in the case of slavery, many thought it was a moral embarrassment that would eventually disappear. Cf. Joseph Ellis, *Band of Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), and Joseph Blasi, Richard Freeman, and Douglas Kruse, *The Citizen's Share: Putting Ownership Back into Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). A quote from John Adams (documented in *The Citizen's Share*) I believe accurately captures Arendt's impression of the founders' approach. In a letter to John Taylor dated April 15, 1814, he says, “That all men are born to equal rights is true, every being has a right to his own, as clear, as moral, as sacred, as any other being has. This is as indubitable as a moral government to the universe. But to teach that all men are born with equal powers and faculties, to equal influence in society, to equal property and advantage through life, is as gross a fraud, as glaring an imposition on the credulity of the people, as ever practiced by monks, by Druids, by Brahmins, by priests of the immortal Lama, or by the self-styled philosophers of the French revolution” (48).

inclination to compassion and pity that had swept up their French counterparts, they “found it easy to think of passion in terms of desire” (*OR*, 85). She believed this to be a mistake.

Arguing that the definition of passion derives from the Greek word *παθειν*, meaning both “to suffer *and* to endure,” she writes that the lack of passion from the theories and experiences of the American founders gave their work “an air of lightheartedness, a certain weightlessness” (*OR*, 85). She warned that this incomplete understanding of passion—not just a desire so great it manifests as suffering, but an ability to endure in that desire and bear it forward—marked a failing because, as she puts it, “it is endurance which enables man to create durability and continuity” (*OR*, 85). She openly worries that the American founders’ incomplete understanding of passion made their work susceptible to the loss of its revolutionary spirit, to the abandonment of engaged, public politics that she believed has characterized American politics to the present.

Passion is clearly then, for her, a necessary component of political action and institutions; reason alone is not enough. The question then becomes how do we distinguish between types of passions. If the passion of compassion (the desire to alleviate someone else’s suffering by taking it on oneself) is anti-political, manifesting a love of goodness that is suspicious because it is not meant to be seen, then what kind of passion is the sort Arendt sees as necessary to politics, and what type of love, if any, does it manifest? What type of passion will enable the act of founding and constituting a public world and help it to endure? What type of passion will help to preserve the revolutionary spirit that Arendt argued we had lost? The answer she gives is that there are “political passions—courage, pursuit of public happiness, the taste of public freedom, an ambition that strives for excellence,” and these passions are uniquely appropriate to politics (*OR*, 267–68). They are not anti-political. They describe not heartfelt sentiments that are meant to remain hidden, but principles of public action that by definition belong to the world of

appearances. Politically speaking, then, what these passions manifest is not a love of goodness but a love of the world.

Since Arendt never formally defines this concept, what I attempt in the remainder of this chapter is to construct a plausible understanding of what she means. On my reading, love of the world comes into view as a compelling solution to the world-alienation that Arendt consistently seeks to think against in her political theory. She argues that our relationship to the world is crucially implicated in the horrors of totalitarianism, our contemporary political crises, and the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation. This is why, as Dana Villa argues, for Arendt, “The real problem...is the existential resentment that drives modern humanity to take itself so far out of the world, to ascribe to itself a position from which the world might be mastered, remade, and disposed of.”⁹³ Arendt’s love of the world works along two main fronts to address this existential resentment. First, it is the affective disposition and principle of action around which we can reimagine the conditions in which we have become world-alienated and seek to change them. This reimagining is her goal in *The Human Condition*. Second, it is a perspective which re-establishes important connections between the plural world and the contemplative solitude of philosophy: connections that dissolve the traditional hierarchy between our apparent world and our mental world and that assuages the traditional anxiety, which, from Plato to Heidegger, has led philosophy to malign the common world. Re-establishing these connections is her goal in *The Life of the Mind*.

Both in reimagining the current conditions of the public world and in reestablishing the connections between that world and inner space of reflection, Arendt sheds light on her approach

⁹³ Dana Villa, “Hannah Arendt: Modernity, Alienation, and Critique,” in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 291.

to political love and how this approach might begin to bridge the rift between humanity and our world. Similarly to her phenomenology of the world, Arendt does this, in part, through a nuanced critique of her mentor Martin Heidegger. Whereas in her concept of the world she draws on Heidegger's concept of "being-in-the-world" but foregoes his pessimism about that condition, here too she follows him in conceptualizing an attitude of loving care. While care (*Sorge*) on Heidegger's account is self-directed at Being (*Dasein*), on Arendt's account care is directed towards the world. She tells us that Heidegger is mistaken to direct our attention to the conflict between Being and the intrusive outside world (*EIU*, 181). She says that the Self that this idea of Being seeks to actualize "...is a concept of man that leaves the individual existing independent of humanity and representative of no one but himself—of nothing but his own nothingness" (*EIU*, 181). In other words, in a quest for authentic Being, Heidegger conceptualizes a form of care that works to totally alienate oneself from "the world that entangles me" (*EIU*, 181). Arendt sees the attempt to overcome inauthenticity as completely misplaced, that no matter where our thought takes us, we can nonetheless remain at home in the world.

Dana Villa is, I believe, right to point out that "alienation" is a central feature of Arendt's approach to thinking, and that at least some world alienation is required whenever the mind reaches out in wonderment beyond what appears.⁹⁴ However, I disagree that Arendt's approach to thinking fundamentally changes the account of her approach to politics that I develop here. In her account of Socrates found in *Life of the Mind*, she describes an exemplar of engaged thought, one standing in marked contrast to Heidegger. There she describes the faculty of thinking as a two-in-one dialogue within one's self, which introduces to the mind's eye an exterior perspective of the world (*LOM*, 185). On her account, when we return to discussion with others in the world

⁹⁴ Dana Villa, "The Banality of Philosophy: Arendt on Heidegger and Eichmann," in *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*, ed. Larry May and Jerome Kohn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

we crucially restore and reintegrate the self in its unity, a unity that would otherwise flounder upon this “alienated” inner dialogue (*LOM*, 185). This is also made clear in her discussion of Heidegger in “What is Existential Philosophy?” where she portrays his ideal of the self, one actualized in “thinking the meaning of Being,” as almost tragically worldless. There she argues—in terms reminiscent of her reading of Augustine in *Love and Saint Augustine* and *The Human Condition*—that a common world for such “atomized Selves” as those realized in Heideggerean thought “is essentially foreign to their nature,” and that the only possibility for them “is the organization of these Selves intent only on themselves into an Over-self in order somehow to effect a transition from resolutely accepted guilt to action” (*EIU*, 182).

Likewise, just as Arendt prefers the example Socrates provides of thinking rooted in the world, she prefers Duns Scotus’ account of the Will for similar reasons, which are particularly interesting for the question love’s relationship to the world. Specifically, Arendt counterposes Scotus’ account of Will to Heidegger’s account of care (of Being) as *Sorge*. While care becomes for Heidegger a “will-not-to-will,” a will to engage in the “letting-be” that is announced by the realization of Being, this for Arendt is a completely solipsistic and impotent account of Will that can never lead to action (*LOM*, 176–87). By contrast, the Will on Scotus’ account never loses contact with the world—indeed, it is “bound up with the sensory appetite...to enjoy itself”—and, she tells us, it is in this activity of enjoyment that the will overcomes both its indeterminacy, which vexed Christian thinkers, and its power of negation, which ultimately attracted Heidegger (*LOM*, 142–43). Instead of Heidegger’s “care” (which, as applied to Being is, in effect, a hatred of the world), Arendt endorses Scotus’ model of a Will that transforms into “love,” which she describes as the delight that is produced in the sheer activity of willing itself (*LOM*, 142–43). On Scotus’ account—which Arendt poses as a corrective of both Heidegger’s “care” and the

“binding force” found in Augustine—love is “an activity that finds its rest within itself,” and this seems, ultimately, the model of love that Arendt accepts for a love of the world, one built upon but never finally coming to rest in the “sheer activity” of political action (*LOM*, 102–3).

Illustrations of a Love of the World

Implicit in this critique of Heidegger and the philosophical tradition is a reaction against not just the elevation of the self over the world but of *poesis* over *praxis*, of designing rules rather than caring about freedom (*BPF*, 36–37). This is partly why Arendt never systematically defines a love of the world. It is something that is experienced fully in action and to attempt to systematically define such an experience runs the risk of foreclosing what is most important about it. Nevertheless, she does have a strategy for describing it, and she does say some rather specific things about it. Her first strategy is to illustrate a love of the world by pointing to specific exemplars. She draws our attention to manifestations of *amor mundi* in public acts and public personas, the significance of which she celebrates and the increasing rarity of which she laments. Her second strategy is to describe those benefits that a love of the world affords us and why it should be cultivated. If it is so increasingly rare in modernity to find enacted manifestations of a love of the world, then what practical or motivational resources can be brought to bear in order to rekindle it? Finally, Arendt tells us what the implications of a love of the world are for politics, both organizationally and thematically. What would it mean for contemporary politics to be animated by a love of the world? What might it look like? Combining these various references, a more comprehensive understanding of what Arendt means by a love of the world comes into focus, one helpful not just in understanding her fundamental approach to political theory but its application to contemporary concerns.

In chapter 5 of this study I will examine more closely and critically the instances where

Arendt illustrates a love of the world made manifest in action. Here I will touch on some of these instances, but I will also look at other historical exemplars she cites. The first of these, the American Founders, are perhaps quintessential exemplars of her concept of a love of the world. She says that the key characteristic they shared was a “passion for distinction,” a passion that corresponds to the virtue of a “desire to excel” (*OR*, 110–11). It is this virtue, a desire not merely for power over others but a desire for distinction among equals, that Arendt says “makes men *love the world* and enjoy the company of their peers, and drives them into public business” (*OR*, 110–11). Importantly for the American Founders, this desire was made manifest in active experiences of public engagement (“deliberations, discussions, and decisions”) (*OR*, 110–11). Contrary to the theoretical and sentimental proclamations of the French revolutionaries, which were manifest in “an intoxication whose chief element was the crowd,” the American experience had acquainted the founders with a “feeling of happiness,” the pleasure of public engagement in “the world” (*OR*, 110–11).

In addition to the example given in the American experience of public deliberation and founding, Arendt also gives an illustration that is much more commonplace. This comes in her essay “The Crisis in Education,” where she argues that the act of teaching, of taking responsibility for the world and helping to cultivate new citizens to freedom therein, is an illustration of a love of the world. Citing the abandonment of this responsibility by adults—parents and teachers alike—as one of the crucial elements of the crisis she describes, Arendt says, “Education is the point at which we decide whether we *love the world* enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from the ruin which, except for renewal ... would be inevitable.”⁹⁵ What this seems to imply is that we can manifest a love of the world in a

⁹⁵ *BPF*, 193, emphasis added.

variety of ways, not just expressly or completely public ones, but in many activities to the extent those activities take a world shared in common as an object of concern. Indeed, we see with Arendt that in many ostensibly social or administrative matters there exists a worldly, political component, one that is characterized not by the dispositions of a given actor (in this example, the teacher and their sentiments) or the status of those being cared for (in this example, the students and their needs), but by the way in which the world in common figures as the primary object of concern (in this example, the cultivation of its future citizens).⁹⁶

This is clearly the case in the way she describes the political component in the work of public intellectuals and critics. Particularly in her essay on German Jewish enlightenment thinker Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and in “The Crisis in Culture,” we see an articulation of how a love of the world can be exemplified in critical discourse. In both of these essays she describes a mode of thought that finds pleasure in reconciliation to the world, a mode of thought where one is “taking sides for the world’s sake” (*MDT*, 7–8). In Lessing, Arendt finds a thinker who, like Socrates, engages not just in private contemplation but public discourse in order to question prejudices and “stimulate others to independent thought” (*MDT*, 10). She argues that we need to be able to cultivate Lessing’s mode of open-ended critical thought, because it is in this mode of thought—one that does not seek final solutions, relying on neither the crutch of Enlightenment reason or Romantic humanity—that a “concern for the world” is apparent (*MDT*, 7). Such a “concern for the world,” a “partisanship for the world,” consists in “understanding and judging everything in terms of its position in the world at any given time,” and it is marked by a pleasure

⁹⁶ Myers, drawing on Arendt to more fully articulate a democratic ethos of care for the world, makes a similar point using the example of hunger. She says, “Caring for the world, which is to say, tending to a specific worldly thing together with others, requires a shift in perspective, one which involves decentering both oneself and suffering Other(s) in order to bring into view the collective conditions, including habits, practices, and laws, out of which hunger is born,” Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 109.

that “springs from a passionate openness to the world and *love* of it.”⁹⁷

In “The Crisis in Culture” Arendt further articulates a relationship between critical discourse—in this case the critical reception of artistic and cultural artifacts—and a political love of the world. There she describes how when we think of aesthetic judgment as having the public world as its primary referent, we can see that it also manifests a love of the world. That is, if we think of aesthetic judgment as a practice that “judges the world in its appearance and in its worldliness”—what should appear, what should be set aside and preserved—we are also expressing a political love of the world (*BPF*, 222). Arendt argues that in order to engage in this type of judgment an “attitude of mind,” a “taste,” must be cultivated, one that is independent of the instrumental logic of utility, the demands of mass consumption, or any formal criteria of quality. By developing this faculty of taste, she argues we can be “trusted to tend and take care of a world of appearances,” a tending and caring that for her is the essence of what we call culture (*BPF*, 219). And it is in the mode of cultural intercourse that we rehearse the types of judgments that are essential to politics, where we attempt to mediate between the spaces and concerns of fabrication and the spaces and concerns of public appearance (*BPF*, 219).⁹⁸ In other words, as we judge, preserve, and curate cultural artifacts, we also help to preserve and care for a political world, because both rely on our critical judgments, judgments that transcend rule-governed formulas and utilitarian logics.

⁹⁷ *MDT* 6, emphasis added.

⁹⁸ Patchen Markell, “Arendt, Aesthetics, and ‘The Crisis in Culture,’” *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014). Markell explains this point of Arendt’s argument very well, stating “Whenever we insulate an artifact from the immediate demands of use in order to encounter it differently ... to let the question of what the object is good for to open out to the larger question of ‘how [the world] is to look, what kind of things are to appear in it,’ we’re establishing the conditions for an aesthetic experience or—better yet—for an experience that is at once aesthetic and political” (87).

Finally, the most contemporary example Arendt gives for the way in which a love of the world can become manifest occurs in her depiction of group protest actions she witnessed in the 1960s and 1970s. In her essay “Civil Disobedience,” she distinguishes acts of civil disobedience from acts of either conscientious objection or rebellion, arguing that what distinguishes civil disobedient groups was their world-building capacity, their practice of mutual and public promising, which sought to pressure and change the status quo. Conscientious objection, she argues is an individual’s moral decision made in isolation for the sake of one’s conscience, and rebellion neither recognizes a shared public nor employs nonviolent means (*CR*, 64, 76). Civil disobedience, however, is a world-building practice, because it carries a common opinion or goal held by an organized minority and seeks to transform it into a common interest, an object of shared political concern. Moreover, she argues that such groups are formed in accordance with the same spirit of mutual contract that marks the American political experience since its founding. Echoing her account of the world-building effects of promising in *The Human Condition*, she argues that voluntary associations, even civil disobedient ones, “have been the specifically American remedy for the failure of institutions, the unreliability of men, and the uncertain nature of the future” (*RJ*, 102). This action, this promising, arising as it does out of “the will to live with others in the mode of acting and speaking,” exemplify a love that cares for the world.

What a Love of the World Affords Us

In addition to the exemplars Arendt provides, ones that illustrate specific manifestations of a love of the world, she also discusses specific emotional benefits that a love of the world affords us. In particular, Arendt says that a love of the world helps to endow people with specific traits, among those: a feeling of happiness, the courage to act and the endurance to persevere,

and a sense of being at home in the world, a reconciliation of oneself to the world as it is.

According to Arendt these are the benefits, the emotional rewards, which accrue to us when we care for and love the world. In another sense, these are reasons why we might be motivated to love the world, to develop an attitude of engagement with the world instead of seeking an escape from or a supremacy over it.

One of the first benefits Arendt discusses is a happiness or joy that accompanies political engagement. As she states in *On Revolution*, it is the desire to achieve distinction among one's peers, to disclose the intrinsically unique facet of one's identity that becomes apparent in political action, that "makes men love the world" (*OR*, 111). Why does this "desire to excel," to stand out in distinction, become a love of the world? First, because the type of excellence to which it refers can only occur in a political world of acknowledged equals (*HC*, 208). And second, because the unique disclosure that occurs when engaged in political action is pleasurable. There is, Arendt says, a "joy" that comes from inhabiting a world of plural interlocutors (*HC*, 244). There is a "happiness" that comes from participating in public affairs (*OR*, 118). There is a "pleasure" that is felt in acting freely with others (*OR*, 116, 187).

Courage and endurance are two other important benefits Arendt associates with a love of the world, ones that both facilitate political action and help us endure its outcomes, preserving the world into the future. She says for instance in "Introduction into Politics," that it is a love of the world, an *amor mundi*, that is responsible for producing a world and saving it from the desert that it would otherwise become (*TPP*, 203). In modernity, where the political world is pervaded by desert-like conditions of worldlessness, it is thus a love of the world that ultimately enables people to endure these conditions without ever fully acclimating themselves to them, and which ultimately grants them the courage to try to change them. Likewise, it is this love of the world

that enables what Arendt calls the “conjoined faculties” of passion and action: the passion involved in enduring modernity without succumbing to its threats, the action involved in courageously beginning the world anew (*TPP*, 202).

This capacity—to get along in the world without fully succumbing to the modern tendency towards escapism, psychological adjustment, or anti-political mass ideologies—is part of a deeper discussion Arendt returns to again and again. This discussion, represented in the question she poses in her earliest work: “Why should we make a desert of the world?” is an attempt to respond to those perspectives on the world (ancient, Christian, totalitarian, and existentialist) that seek to rationalize or master the plural freedom of a public political world (*HC*, 234–35). In the *Human Condition* for instance, she says that the nature of action, our inability to control its outcomes and our reliance on plural others to carry it out, “is reason enough to turn away with despair from the realm of human affairs and to hold in contempt the human capacity for freedom” (*HC*, 233). At the end of *The Life of the Mind*, she says that her conceptualization of political freedom “seems to tell us no more than that we are *doomed* to be free” (*LOM*, 217). Similarly, at the end of “Introduction into Politics,” she argues that the worldlessness of modernity can lead to a despair of what is, questioning, “Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?” (*TPP*, 204).

Against all of these fears, Arendt consistently argues that it is a love of the world that enables us to come to terms with what is, both the sheer contingency of the world and the ever-shrinking space of public action that marks its modern conditions. To the “frightening lines” of Sophocles’ *Oedipus at Colonus* she quotes at the end of *On Revolution*, where “Not to be born prevails over all meaning uttered in words...” she reminds us that there is even in this play an answer: “what it was that enabled ordinary men, young and old, to bear life’s burden: it was the

polis, the space of men's free deeds and living words, which could endow life with splendor" (*OR*, 273). What motivates us to enter that public space of distinction, what helps us to organize it politically, and what gives us the courage to enact and to endure its inherent contingency is this specific kind of love. It is this love, which is not merely a sentiment or a feeling, but an orientation towards the world that helps us understand our modern situation. As Arendt puts it, "the human heart is the only thing in the world that will take upon itself the burden that the divine gift of action, of being a beginning and therefore being able to make a beginning, has placed upon us" (*EIU*, 322).

Implications of a Love of the World for Politics

In addition to specific exemplars of a love of the world and motivational resources and benefits Arendt associates with a love of the world, we can also identify specific implications that a love of the world might carry for contemporary politics. Arendt is not (at least not primarily) interested in offering a new set values, as if by reforming the values we unthinkingly accept we will ward off catastrophe. She sees how easily those values that were thought to be self-evident—be they moral or cultural—have, in modern times, become merely "exchange values," easily exchanged from one moment to the next.⁹⁹ Her goal is primarily to repair the modern rupture between thinking and acting, to help us better judge and reckon with the world for ourselves, not to rely on pre-figured *mores*. To this end, wherever she employs judgment herself, wherever she offers a response to the political crises of her day (racism, violence,

⁹⁹ Cf. Arendt in "The Crisis in Culture" where, in reference to the modern process whereby cultural objects began to be assigned use value, she states "cultural values were treated like any other values, they were what values always have been, exchange values..." (*BPF*, 201). See also where Arendt states, referring to the Nazis, "It was though morality, at the very moment of its total collapse within an old and highly civilized nation, stood revealed in the original meaning of the word, as a set of *mores*, of customs and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with no more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of a whole people" (*RJ*, 43).

government corruption, war), she does not seek to simply articulate new values nor does she call on us to simply be more moral. Instead, she seeks ways to reanimate our worldly judgment, she describes formal constitutional and institutional changes that might lead us back to the worldly space of public politics and reengage our judging faculties. As she puts it:

...we can no more change a world by changing the people in it—quite apart from the practical impossibility of such an enterprise—than we can an organization or a club by attempting to influence its members in one way or another. If we want to change an institution, an organization, some public body existing in the world, we can only revise its constitution, its laws, its statutes, and hope that all the rest will take care of itself. (*TPP*, 106)

This insistence leads her to advocate changes that reorganize politics around a public space available to as many people who wish to participate therein. A love of the world thus does not lead merely to an evangelism of values or an unrealistic nostalgia for bygone eras. Instead, it involves changing not people but the spaces in which people have the opportunity to act politically. In turn, Arendt believed that the experience of a political space and the manifestation of public freedom would cultivate in people a taste for public engagement and kindle a love of the world.

To this end Arendt proposes a system of grassroots councils as a means to make the experience of political freedom a real possibility in people's lives. If a love of the world is what had ignited the desire for political revolution, then it was only in grassroots institutions that the revolutionary spirit would be kept alive and where a public, political world would be available to people. Arendt cites Thomas Jefferson as having proposed a national system of wards for precisely this end, and here she specifically relates his proposal (and by extension the others she praises: "the communes, the councils, the Räte, the *soviets*") to the love she associates with the public, political world. She says:

When, at the end of his life, [Jefferson] summed up what to him clearly was the gist of

private and public morality, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself, and your country more than yourself,’ he knew that this maxim remained an empty exhortation unless the ‘country’ could be made as present to the ‘love’ of its citizens as the ‘neighbour’ was to the love of his fellow men. For just as there could not be much substance to neighbourly love if one’s neighbor should make a brief apparition once every two years, so there could not be much substance to the admonition to love one’s country more than oneself unless the country was a living presence in the midst of its citizens. (*OR*, 245)

What this means is that for Arendt a love of the world implies an organization of politics around public spaces that grant citizens the opportunity to take on a share, however small, in the public business.¹⁰⁰

A second political implication of a love of the world, one related to the ideal of participatory politics envisioned by Arendt, is the decline of party politics. This is because, as Arendt argues, a further effect of the reorganization of the political space around councils or wards would entail a conflict between those councils and party elites (*OR*, 255). Why is the reinvigoration of the public space of politics anathema to traditional party politics? Arendt argues that political parties have been primarily the vehicles by which parliaments gained the imprimatur of the people, and that “it was always understood that the people, through voting, did the supporting, while action remained the prerogative of government” (*OR*, 263). Arendt associates parties with the instrumentalization of action into managerial rule, whereby the voter “can only consent or refuse to ratify a choice which ... is made without him” (*OR*, 268). She argues that councils, on the other hand, historically intersected party lines and also attracted people of no party, and that this was because unlike parties, councils “were spaces of freedom,”

¹⁰⁰ It is clear from her reading of Jefferson that his use of the term “country” goes beyond mere national patriotism and indicates what, for Arendt, is significant about a political world, which is not synonymous with merely a state of exception based on race or ethnicity. In this context, where she argues that Jefferson is reflecting on the missed opportunity of the founding constitution and his desire to see a grassroots ward system, Arendt clearly draws on his thoughts (rightly or wrongly) as expressions of world-love premised on a creed, not just allegiance to a place. It should also be noted the stunning parallel between the sentiment she expresses here and the question of Christian neighbor-love she explores in her dissertation.

spaces of genuine political participation and debate (*OR*, 256). Thus to the extent that parties seek to pacify an electorate with rhetoric and ideologies (“ready-made formulas”) while seeking “to protect the island of freedom they have come to inhabit from the surrounding sea of necessity” instead of providing spaces for genuine (and not vicarious) political participation, they are not commensurate with a love of the world (*OR*, 268).

Arendt’s commitment to institutional reorganization also extends to unconventional forms of political activity. Writing in the wake of mass protests and civil unrest of the 1960s, she argued that constitutional amendments were necessary in order to formally clarify the status of African American citizens, to fully elucidate the relationship between free speech and assembly, and potentially even to institutionalize civil disobedient groups (*CR*, 101). For Arendt, even radical challenges to political authority can be met with formal constitutional and institutional responses—indeed, in political crises, where the world is at stake, such constitutional responses for her are most apposite. This approach grows out of her basic premise in *The Human Condition* that mutual promising and the “contracts and treaties” that are their political manifestation serve as the “force” that holds the political world together (*HC*, 244).

Because they help to determine the contours of the public, political world and represent a consensus of the body politic, these foundational documents become a “fountain of authority” (*OR*, 196). However, it was equally important for Arendt that such documents not ossify, that they remain malleable in order to preserve the possibility of freedom. She argues, for instance, that in order for the force of promises (and by extension constitutions) not to suppress public freedom, they must be like “islands of predictability,” “guideposts of reliability,” which do not “cover the whole ground of the future” or “map out a path secured in all directions” (*HC*, 244). To this end she invokes Jefferson’s plan for regular constitutional conventions and their intent to

grant to subsequent generations the experience of political founding (*OR*, 226).¹⁰¹ In this sense, Arendt saw that the importance of constitutional change was both in its “preservation” and “care” of the founding of freedom and in its own manifestation of a new beginning, its enactment of world-building principles (*HC*, 195, 224–25). Both this care and the active manifestation of world-building principles it inspires (like public freedom and public happiness) are political responses engendered by a love of the world.

¹⁰¹ Here Arendt says that Jefferson, “when he had learned his lesson from the catastrophes of the French Revolution...shifted from his earlier identification of action with rebellion and tearing down to an identification with founding anew and building up. He thus proposed to provide in the Constitution itself ‘for its revision at stated periods’ which would roughly correspond to the periods of the coming and going of generations” (*OR*, 226).

CHAPTER 4: HANNAH ARENDT AND JAMES BALDWIN

Debating Love and the World

In 1962 after publishing one of his most famous essays on race, James Baldwin received a letter from Hannah Arendt. It read: “What frightened me in your essay was the gospel of love which you begin to preach at the end. In politics love is a stranger...hatred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free.”¹⁰² This letter is curious, because Baldwin seems to characterize love and politics in strikingly similar ways to Arendt. Indeed, if one delves past the alleged sentimentalism of Baldwin’s essays, there is an almost Arendtian account (had she not mischaracterized it) of the effects of racial hierarchy on the political realm. Nonetheless, there are productive differences in Baldwin’s account that are helpful not only in better understanding Arendt’s concept of a love of the world, but also in evaluating its potential capacity to respond to contemporary political phenomena.

As love and hatred become more and more the currency of contemporary political debates in ways not widely seen since Arendt and Baldwin’s era, we do well to sort out their relevance to politics and political thought. What does this conflation between emotion and politics mean for the public sphere? Political claims and protests claiming a mantle of love, its equality, its necessity, its implicit role in guiding progressive (and regressive) political goals, are

¹⁰² Arendt to Baldwin, 21 November 1962, *Hannaharendt.net*.

all around us.¹⁰³ A fuller account of both Arendt's and Baldwin's thinking on this question allows us to clarify Arendt's evident fears and to sober Baldwin's supposed sentimentalism. Both thinkers help us summon the courage to confront deep divisions that seem so intransigent that only the power of love (or some other emotion, like hatred or fear) might unite us. They do this by refocusing our attention onto the parameters of a shared political world in which our divides can become more fully articulated, recognized, and addressed through political participation. In so doing they are able to see that love's relevance to politics is precisely that it impels us to examine and honestly reckon with those divisions for the sake of the world.

The productive difference I find between Arendt and Baldwin is in the way love informs their judgment of the prospects for political change. In this chapter I argue that Arendt's concept of a love of the world, one predicated on the enlarged mentality of political judgment, leads her to favor formal constitutional remedies as a means of confronting political crises. Baldwin, I argue, pushes this logic even further. He argues that a politically organized world calls people to attempt not just to think in the place of others, but also to *feel*, to begin to acculturate a new political aesthetic, one that recognizes the linked fates of their political community. In this move Baldwin offers a potentially vital corrective to Arendt's sanguine legalism, as his political thought helps us come to a better awareness of the ongoing exclusions that have defined our politics. This is why Baldwin argues that ending what he called our "racial nightmare" requires a shift not just in our political institutions, but in our political tastes, "the consciousness," of the

¹⁰³ One may look no further than the debates and political activism (both for and against) surrounding same-sex marriage rights to see examples of this. Other examples of love as a principle of popular mobilization, however, include everything from mobilizations around income inequality, police brutality, the death penalty, charter school initiatives, military budgets, and recruitment for the Islamic State.

entire country.¹⁰⁴ Contrasting judgment to compassion, Arendt misreads Baldwin's real argument. Baldwin is not issuing a call to public sentimentality, but is instead offering an imaginative reemphasis of the role of feeling in judgment. Baldwin's account of love, emphasizing this capacity to feel, seeks to make possible a world to which Arendt should be sympathetic, echoing as it does her own thoughts on politics and the love she argues is apposite to it.

On my account, the root of Baldwin's emotionally charged appeal lies in the dilemma faced by political actors unrecognized as such. This dilemma, and the key insights he makes in describing it, require a deeper aesthetic intervention than Arendt's strictly political one. Because she saw legal discrimination as a political issue but social discrimination as a fact of life, she mistakenly conflates Baldwin's invocation of love with a plea for mere compassion.¹⁰⁵ Because she did not see the effective denial of personhood to African Americans, she misses the way in which Baldwin's understanding of love resonates with her own account of freedom and a love of the world.

In this chapter, I offer an interpretation of Baldwin's approach to love and politics that delves past the surface of his alleged sentimentalism to highlight the significant parallels that exist between his political thought and Arendt's. Next, I seek to analyze the productive points of distinction that emerge through this comparison. I argue that the relationship these two authors

¹⁰⁴ James Baldwin, *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998), 346 (hereafter cited in text as *CE*).

¹⁰⁵ Arendt writes for instance, "it is not the social custom of segregation that is unconstitutional, but its *legal enforcement*" (*RJ*, 202). As seen in her judgment of the context of school integration in her "Reflections on Little Rock," Arendt insists on "enlarged thought" ("thinking from my position where actually I am not") as the appropriate response to racism. She contrasts this to compassion or pity, which on her account disable the capacity to judge freely and which she (incorrectly I believe) associates with Baldwin. Cf. Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

each forged between the ideal of love and political freedom result in two approaches toward political judgment. While Arendt's ideal of a love of the world emphasizes "enlarged thinking," Baldwin's approach emphasizes the role of feeling, an acknowledgement of others in light of the world and its exclusions. Finally, I argue that Baldwin offers a critical correction to Arendt's concept of a love of the world, and that his perspective is vital in order to help make sense of and respond to contemporary political crises.

The Public Reception of Arendt and Baldwin

The intellectual linkage between Arendt and Baldwin dates back to their appearance, in short succession, in the pages of *The New Yorker* in the early 1960s. Well after establishing herself as an important thinker in post-war America, Arendt was commissioned by the magazine to report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, essays that would become her most controversial book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Likewise, Baldwin had already established himself as an influential novelist when his essay, "Letter from a Region in My Mind," which would become *The Fire Next Time* also appeared in *The New Yorker*, preceding Arendt's by only a couple of months. Norman Podhoretz, responding to their essays in *Commentary*, drew a sharp contrast between the two stylistically even as he connected what he saw as their related attempts to comprehend and confront specific evils. He writes:

If Baldwin is all eloquence and no cleverness, Miss Arendt [*sic*] is all cleverness and no eloquence...if Baldwin brings his story unexpectedly to life through the bold tactic of heightening and playing exquisitely on every bit of melodrama it contains, Miss Arendt with an equally surprising boldness rids her story of melodrama altogether and heavily underlines every trace of moral ambiguity she can wring out of it.¹⁰⁶

While this reception may not have been unanimous amongst New York intellectuals in the early

¹⁰⁶ Podhoretz, "Hannah Arendt on Eichmann," 201.

1960s, it does seem to have been prevalent.

Irving Howe, for instance, wrote that Baldwin betrayed a “conspicuous sincerity” in his essays that often devolved “into mere attitude.”¹⁰⁷ Julian Mayfield in *The New Republic* wrote of Baldwin’s writing style that it “reveals so much about himself that the embarrassed reader cannot help feeling he has stumbled upon a person performing a private act.”¹⁰⁸ At the same time, Howe wrote that Arendt’s essays on the Eichmann trial displayed a “surging contempt” for “almost everyone and everything associated with the trial.”¹⁰⁹ Even Arendt herself referred in interviews to the dry, “ironic” style she employed in the Eichmann essays, and in the letter she wrote to Baldwin she took specific issue with his emotional rhetoric of love.

I see two main reasons why this characterization congealed around their respective essays. The first is that they represent two different strategies in the public articulation of anger. For Baldwin, the essays that comprise *The Fire Next Time* are intended to articulate an emotional experience in what he saw as a largely impassive public. For Arendt, her intention is to show that emotional outbursts by the prosecution and witnesses during the Eichmann trial gave Eichmann too much credit. She thought of Eichmann as a murderer that deserved to be put to death, but she thought the proper response to his clownish stupidity was mockery. Mockery conveys anger and disapproval, but for Arendt this ironic style also avoided making Eichmann into a monster, a specter that might haunt our capacity to build up new political institutions and spaces of freedom.

Arendt and Baldwin also articulate two distinct responses to racism. Arendt, ever vigilant

¹⁰⁷ Irving Howe, “Nobody Knows My Name,” *New York Times*, July 2, 1961, <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/03/29/specials/baldwin-name.html>.

¹⁰⁸ Consuela Francis, *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin, 1963–2010: An Honest Man and a Good Writer* (New York: Camden House, 2014), 111.

¹⁰⁹ Howe, *A Margin of Hope*, 271.

in maintaining the distinction between public space and social space, sees public, legal discrimination as a political issue, but social discrimination as inevitable. This is why she consistently faulted the Israeli prosecution for attempting to make the Eichmann trial a national catharsis rather than a straightforward criminal proceeding, and it is also why she unsparingly examines the role of the Jewish councils in Eichmann's administration of the Holocaust's machinery. As with her misreading of the context of school integration in her "Reflections on Little Rock,"¹¹⁰ Arendt's focus is on a particular type of *thinking*, on "enlarged thought" ("thinking from my position where actually I am not") as a response to racism, a method that insisted on the equal autonomy and self-worth of the thinking observer. The idea that this type of judgment could or should be colored by empathy or the affective recognition of another's perspective is anathema to Arendt's approach, because Arendt believed that reason alone preserved the distance necessary to make sound judgments. It is this aspect of her thought that Ralph Ellison referred to, for instance, when he sarcastically described her writing both in "Reflections on Little Rock" and in her Eichmann essays as marked by an "Olympian authority."¹¹¹

Baldwin, on the other hand, writes in response to racism precisely to elicit recognition of the deep need we have for greater empathy. As such his approach is rooted not just in thinking but also in *feeling*. Feeling for Baldwin is a transformational aesthetic, a recognition of others (particularly white Americans) as emotionally vulnerable and psychologically in need. It is a coming to terms with the unreality of racial superiority. Whereas thinking for Arendt implies attempting to perceive the world from the position of someone else, feeling for Baldwin implies

¹¹⁰ Cf. Allen, *Talking to Strangers*.

¹¹¹ Ralph Ellison, "The World and the Jug," in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 156.

the further recognition that we each stand in need of those other positions. As he puts it:

A vast amount of energy that goes into what we call the Negro problem is produced by the white man's profound desire not to be judged by those who are not white, not to be seen as he is, and at the same time a vast amount of white anguish is rooted in the white man's equally profound need to be seen as he is, to be released from the tyranny of his mirror. (CE, 341)

This further, deeper recognition on the part of Baldwin may seem to take him out of a political register and into a merely emotive one, but I believe that when probed further, this argument is revealed to be in service of a potential shared politics rather than merely representative of its displacement.

In failing to see this connection, Arendt follows many of her contemporaries in a similar misreading of Baldwin. She cannot see, from her position, the deep denial of personhood faced by African-Americans, the varieties of white paternalism disguised as politics. She therefore misses the way in which Baldwin's invocation of love actually resonates with her account of political freedom. This account, invoked by Arendt in her letter to Baldwin, entails a radical re-visioning of politics as a pluralist practice of founding and re-founding political space, making political judgments and being judged in turn, and it is one that has been path-breaking for new approaches to the question of freedom's relationship to social identity.¹¹² Nonetheless, I argue that Arendt, keenly sensitive to the historical abuses of love, conflates Baldwin's invocation of love with a plea for mere compassion. Instead of parsing the political register in which Baldwin argues for the necessity of love, engaging his work as potentially enhancing her own, she only warns him off it. It is indeed ironic that what motivated Arendt's letter, her own attempt to judge and be judged in return, is the same love of the world she fails to recognize in Baldwin, a potential ally.

¹¹² Cf. Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), and Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*, to name just two examples.

Beyond the public perception of their work, Arendt and Baldwin both hold that love (properly understood) is apposite to politics. Baldwin does in fact speak in a soulful—some might say melodramatic—register, and this is intentional. It is a strategy he employed—one which, to quote Podhoretz, “forced his readers to listen for once.” However, the soulful eloquence of Baldwin must not cloud his substantive political content. When properly scrutinized it becomes clear that Baldwin conceptualizes love and the political world in markedly similar ways to Arendt. The real differences are much subtler (and theoretically productive) than a superficial caricature of a fiery eloquence on the part of Baldwin and a cool restraint on the part of Arendt.

Re-evaluating Baldwin’s Political Aesthetics

It is only recently that the work of James Baldwin has begun to be widely acknowledged as a distinctive exemplar of American political thought. Important discussions of Baldwin by Lawrie Balfour, George Shulman, Jack Turner, and Joel Schlosser attest both to the continuing impact of Baldwin’s writing and to the continuing interest in Baldwin’s use of sensuality and emotion as they relate to political awareness and democratic practices.¹¹³ While Arendt was often received as a thinker too ironically detached from her subject matter, Baldwin emerged as a writer who appealed to the power of sensual forms of love to overcome racial oppression and its

¹¹³ Lawrie Balfour, *The Evidence of Things Not Said: James Baldwin and the Promise of American Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); George Shulman, *American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Jack Turner, *Awakening to Race: Individualism and Social Consciousness in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Joel Schlosser, “Socrates in a Different Key: James Baldwin and Race in America,” *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2012).

relationship to masculinity in both white and black communities.¹¹⁴ Relatedly, Baldwin has been re-read by more contemporary theorists who examine the intersection of sexuality and public politics.¹¹⁵ In this way he is often seen as a thinker engaged in what José Muñoz calls “queer world-making,” the critical evaluation of rigid social and political categories that locates spaces of free play within and between them, producing a new social imaginary.¹¹⁶

Clearly, the sensual is an important part of Baldwin’s political analyses and should not be ignored. Baldwin himself writes, “White Americans do not understand the depths out of which...ironic tenacity comes, but they suspect that the force is sensual, and they are terrified of sensuality and do not any longer understand it” (*CE*, 311).¹¹⁷ On this reading Baldwin is a writer

¹¹⁴ See for instance the discussions of Baldwin’s reception by Addison Gayle, Robert Bone, and Colin MacInnes in Francis, *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin*, 7–34.

¹¹⁵ James Dievler, for example, argues that sex is the linchpin of Baldwin’s critique of both homophobia and racism and that as a result he is “advocating a postcategorical, poststructural concept of sexuality that we might call ‘postsexuality.’” See James Dievler, “Sexual Exiles: James Baldwin and Another Country” in *James Baldwin Now*, ed. Dwight McBride (New York: New York University Press, 1999). Emmanuel Nelson argues that “blackness and homosexuality” serve as metaphor for Baldwin, a metaphor of “agony as well as means of redemption ... they bring suffering, but if dealt with courageously they can lead to ... genuine self-identity.” See Emmanuel Nelson, “James Baldwin’s Vision of Otherness and Community,” *MELUS* 10, no. 2 (1983): 28. Susanna Feldman also highlights the depiction of bisexuality in *Another Country* to show how “Baldwin locates the repressed history of racism in a fear of sexual equality (or sexual sameness), in the threatened collapse of the symbolic structure of sexual difference.” See Susanna Feldman, “Another Look at Another Country: Reconciling Baldwin’s Racial and Sexual Politics,” in *Re-Viewing James Baldwin: Things Unseen*, ed. Quentin Miller (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 93. Similarly, Lorelei Cederstrom argues that Baldwin offers “a glimpse of love which is free of political patterns of dominance and subordination.” See Francis, *Critical Reception*, 49.

¹¹⁶ José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 40.

¹¹⁷ By ‘sensual,’ however, Baldwin does not simply mean the explicitly sexual or sexualized, referring instead to the capacity “to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself.” In this sense his account resonates strongly with Audre Lorde’s discussion of the uses of the erotic. Cf. Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic,” in *Sister Outsider* (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984). She makes this distinction through an invocation, similar to Baldwin, of “feeling”: “...

who overturns the white, hetero-sexed aesthetic order through depictions of sexual freedom, emphasizing quotidian sexuality of the sort in which Muñoz argues we catch glimpses of in “utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures that exist within the present moment.”¹¹⁸

Baldwin does this in his essays by highlighting lived experiences that transcend the boundaries of the world as given.¹¹⁹ Similarly in his novels, particularly *Another Country* and *Giovanni's Room*, we read about characters who are both complex and compelling, who illustrate sensual confrontations with (and evasions of) entwined sexual and racial oppressions.¹²⁰ In both genres, Baldwin revalues these experiences, articulating them as both tragic and sublime, as fully and profoundly human.

This claim to a voice, one made with the recognition that sexual repression is infused within the structures of political power, is often understood as a queer politics *avant la lettre*. As Roderick Ferguson contends, Baldwin offers a “rearticulation of queer identity,” one that “posits a new valuation of black inner-city communities as sites of a regenerative nonheteronormativity, establishing a link between reconfigurations of African American queer identity and African American culture.”¹²¹ This interpretive move has great merit, particularly as an evaluative heuristic for the differences between Arendt and Baldwin. Arendt's vision is profoundly

pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling” (54).

¹¹⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22–23.

¹¹⁹ In describing life in Harlem Baldwin recounts, “... we ate and drank and talked and laughed and danced and forgot all about ‘the man.’ We had the liquor, the chicken, the music, and each other, and had no need to pretend to be what we were not” (*CE*, 311).

¹²⁰ Cf. Shlosser, “Socrates in a Different Key,” for an excellent discussion of the political implications of Baldwin's fictional representations of race and sexuality.

¹²¹ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

democratic in many ways, but still uncritically assumes patriarchal, heteronormative, and racist social relations that in some ways preclude the foundational re-ordering Baldwin envisions.¹²² Yet it is also important to avoid constraining Baldwin, to “cruise” him as the progenitor of a queer politics that emphasizes the deconstruction of norms and is perhaps not as concerned (as I argue Baldwin is) with a constructive political project. In other words, we should not lose sight of the way Baldwin connects the sensual ability to feel, to confront our racial and sexual vulnerabilities and the oppression they produce, to a political ability to bear freedom—a world—that is predicated on just such a confrontation.

Baldwin’s intervention is of course aesthetic and sensual. It offers a way of re-visioning the world informed by non-normative modes of being. However, it is not (at least not simply) the always-impossible utopia that Muñoz describes, because it uses a language of love to describe freedom as a real political possibility in the world.¹²³ Because of this, Baldwin’s aesthetic does more than challenge norms as such. It emphasizes as well the stakes between the normative and the non-normative, and it articulates an attunement toward a common politics, one that remains cognizant of freedom as both subversive and shared.¹²⁴ For Baldwin, any vision of sensual freedom, when it lacks this shared attachment or responsibility, represents an attempt “to have one’s pleasure without paying for it,” and accordingly, such freedom becomes devoid of

¹²² Cf. Kathryn Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 112. Gines charges Arendt (convincingly) of “symbolic violence.” See also notes 186 and 187.

¹²³ “For I do not for an instant doubt, and I will go to my grave believing, that we can build Jerusalem, if we will” (*CE*, 704).

¹²⁴ As Matt Brim notes, what makes Baldwin’s writing so special is that it, “...extends the moment when the queer and the unqueer exist in unpredictable, unresolvable, untenable relation.” For Brim, Baldwin “offers a flash point,” one that “eclipses a subversion/constraint or oppositional paradigm.” See Matt Brim, *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 6.

meaning (*CE*, 234). It becomes, as he puts it in his essay on Gide, “a search for pleasure which grows steadily more desperate and more grotesque” (*CE*, 234). Thus when Baldwin speaks about love in relation to politics, we do well to see that it anticipates a potential world, a world where our pleasures are not only liberated but felt in relation to their worldly conditions, one resembling the political world Arendt portrays as an appropriate object of our love.

Baldwin’s Invocations of Love: Strange Similarities?

If the prevailing wisdom about Baldwin among today’s readers centers on his contribution to theories and critiques of race and sexuality, then I seek here not to dismiss that wisdom but to complicate it. This is because in order to fully appreciate Baldwin’s contribution, it is necessary to attend to the ways he not only questioned dominant (racial and sexual) norms, but also how in questioning these norms he held out hope in the possibility of a shared politics. Specifically, in his analysis of what constitutes reality, his use of metaphor to describe public engagement, and the central place of a shared world in his political aesthetics, Baldwin’s account of love can be read in surprisingly consonant ways to the world-love of Hannah Arendt.

There are many passages, for instance, where both the themes and metaphors in their writing seem to overlap. The theme of reality, which as I showed in chapter 2 is intrinsically tied to the status of the world for Arendt, is addressed as well by Baldwin in “My Dungeon Shook,” where he describes how white people “are losing their grasp of reality” (*CE*, 294). The “reality” to which he refers is one in which African Americans had been an objectified mass, “a fixed star” around which white America had organized their world, had secured a privileged judging perspective through an ideology of racial superiority.¹²⁵ While Baldwin does take a different tone

¹²⁵ “Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any

from Arendt—referring, for instance, to Whites as “lost, younger brothers,” and Blacks as people who “with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are”—by claiming this new “reality,” Baldwin is making a world-building judgment that sees African-Americans as political interlocutors, who, equal to other groups, have a perspective necessary to establish the world’s reality (*CE*, 294). This forces race to become more than a social problem of discrimination or an interior matter of the heart. It demands that we take race and its effects as a public, political question, part of the political world that matters to everyone.¹²⁶

Similar to Arendt then, Baldwin describes an intersubjective phenomenology of reality. However, in applying this to conditions of racism, he shows why change is so difficult. He argues that the Civil Rights Movement increased the visibility of black people who “refused to be controlled...” and as a result, “whites were abruptly and totally lost. The very foundations of their private and public worlds were being destroyed” (*CE*, 694). This resonates with Arendt’s conceptualization of freedom as “the impossibility of remaining unique masters” in “a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all” (*HC*, 244). However, Baldwin helps make explicit the implication of this non-sovereign vision of freedom in the context of racial hierarchy, namely, that it requires a radical reevaluation of how the world has been constructed and the false premises upon which it continues to justify itself.¹²⁷ His argument attempts to shift

upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one’s sense of one’s own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations” (*CE*, 294).

¹²⁶ While Arendt described the infiltration of administrative bureaucracy into politics as “a plague,” she took for granted that political questions (such as integration) should be debated by citizens as equals. See Melvyn Hill, *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Political World* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 316–17.

¹²⁷ See Markell, *Bound By Recognition*, 65–66. Markell develops from Arendt’s account of non-sovereign freedom an understanding of political recognition that is likewise non-sovereign, one

our thinking away from seeing black bodies as another object around which white America orients itself in the world, and it pushes the political imaginary to encompass black citizens as constitutive equals.

This becomes even more apparent in the metaphors both authors employ to describe political engagement, especially through tropes of ‘masks’ and ‘light.’ Baldwin, for instance, discusses the roots of white racism as involving the projection of white psychic fears and desires on to black bodies. He describes these twin impulses as “the white man’s profound desire not to be judged by those who are not white” and “the white man’s equally profound need to be seen as he is, to be released from the tyranny of his mirror” (*CE*, 341). He says here that the power of love, the reason it is both “desperately sought” yet “cunningly avoided,” is that it “takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within” (*CE*, 341).

This echoes a description that Arendt herself employs at the end of *On Revolution* in describing the happiness associated with political freedom. There Arendt cites the poet René Char’s description of the “*épaisseur triste*” of private life, one to which he would be forced to return if he survived the German occupation.¹²⁸ What Arendt tells us Char had discovered was “that he needed no mask and no make-believe to appear, that wherever he went he appeared as

that requires mutual “acknowledgement” of our incapacity to ever be fully or perfectly recognized, try as we might. He argues that Arendt provides theory that helps us realize via action what the Greek tragedians attempted to help us realize via drama, namely “action’s unpredictability” and “the ineliminable possibility of suffering.” I do not disagree with those arguments. Instead, I attempt to show how Baldwin may represent an even louder echo of the Aristotelian notion of “*anagnōrisis*” than that which Markel reads into Arendt. This is because Baldwin not only highlights (through the lens of race) the non-sovereignty of political recognition; he seeks to confront and question more explicitly the modern avoidance of tragedy. As I will attempt to show, Baldwin theorizes racism as a paradigmatic outcome of the modern avoidance of feeling, and in poetically confronting this and other forms of oppression, he seeks to force the world’s tragic limitations to become comprehensible to modern ears.

¹²⁸ Arendt quotes him as saying, “If I survive, I know that I shall have to break with the aroma of these essential years, silently reject (not repress) my treasure” (*OR*, 272).

he was to others and to himself, that he could afford ‘to go naked’” (*OR*, 272). For Arendt, Char’s description represents how he had discovered the joys of acting in the world, of disclosing one’s identity apart from social roles. When read alongside Baldwin, the subtle connection between political engagement and its affective context becomes clearer.

Another parallel between Baldwin’s and Arendt’s illustrations is their descriptions of publicity as a form of light. In the essay “Nothing Personal,” Baldwin writes, “One discovers the light in darkness...but everything in our lives depends on how we bear the light. It is necessary, while in darkness, to know that there is a light somewhere...What the light reveals is danger, and what it demands is faith” (*CE*, 704). Here Baldwin uses light as a metaphor connecting the capacity for love (premised on honest feeling) with the ability to bear a world of others with whom we give and receive light, be it in the form of publicity, shared meaning, or simple affirmation. This metaphor continues in an essay he wrote on the painter Beauford Delaney, where he describes Delaney’s use of light as having a power “to illuminate, even to redeem and reconcile and heal,” because it “leads the inner and the outer eye, directly and inexorably, to a new confrontation with reality” (*CE*, 721). For Baldwin, this image of light shows how crucial it is that we develop both this inner and outer eye, to perceive both the world and one’s position in it with a light both dangerously perceptive and powerfully sustaining, similar to what shines in love. If we develop this capacity, we may gain the hope “to illuminate,” “to redeem and reconcile and heal.” And while this turn inward might seem dangerously Rousseauian to Arendt, what Baldwin is politicizing is not some specific feeling, but the capacity to feel at all, a capacity he argues is politically paramount.

Arendt also uses the metaphor of light at least in part to show how we come to see the world through our affective reception of it. In “Karl Jaspers: a laudatio,” Arendt praises Jaspers

as a public intellectual (*MDT*, 71). Using uncharacteristically emotive language, she says that Jaspers affirmed the public sphere because he “loved light so long that it marked his entire personality,” that he had “an innate pleasure in making manifest, in clarifying the obscure, in illuminating the darkness” (*MDT*, 75). This love of light brings into the public sphere an image of equal concern for the world that Arendt, following the Romans, calls *humanitas*, describing how those who encountered Jaspers loved him for having led them to it (*MDT*, 80, 74).¹²⁹ In these passages Arendt, like Baldwin, describes the affective register with which participation in a public world and the bonds forged therein are felt.¹³⁰ Similarly to Baldwin, she describes the feeling of connection made in the light of public life.

This final parallel between Arendt and Baldwin, their hope for the possibility of a shared world is evident in their respective impressions of modernity. They are both essentially “anti-social” thinkers: Arendt to the extent that society eclipses the space necessary for private thought and public action, Baldwin to the extent that he associates society with an unflinching whiteness that refuses to acknowledge history and that disregards black life.¹³¹ Still, despite these shared

¹²⁹ This is preceded by her telling the audience that Jaspers’ *humanitas* actually helps us to overcome our misgivings of the public sphere and expressions of love therein. Here she says, “When I suggest that the personal element which comes into the public realm with Jaspers is *humanitas*, I wish to imply that no one can help us as he can to overcome our distrust of this same public realm, to feel what honor and joy it is to praise one we love in the hearing of all” (*MDT*, 74). The cultivation of *humanitas* as a taste that cares for the world is also what Arendt gestures toward at the end of “The Crisis in Culture” (*BPF*, 221–22).

¹³⁰ Arendt concludes, “Those who enter [the public realm of *humanitas*] recognize one another, for then they are ‘like sparks, brightening to a more luminous glow... The sparks see one another, and each flames more brightly because it sees others’ and can hope to be seen by them,” (*MDT*, 80). As Gudrun Von Tevenar points out, this metaphor is extended in her discussion of Brecht and his desire to give voice to “those in darkness.” See Gudrun Von Tevenar, “Compassion and the Problem of Invisibility in Arendt’s Public Space,” in *The Politics of Compassion*, ed. Michael Ure and Mervyn Frost (New York: Routledge, 2014), 43.

¹³¹ It is worth noting here that both Arendt and Baldwin expressed pessimistic views about modern psychotherapy as part of their “anti-social” approach to politics. Arendt remarks,

anxieties over modern society—both its “massification” of administrated populations and its puerile monoculture—both writers give us cause to remain hopeful for the world. I argue that this occurs at the site of their genuine disagreement about love’s relationship to politics: their respective accounts of judgment.

Arendt and Baldwin at the Intersection of Love and Judgment

In the final analysis, what truly distinguishes Arendt’s and Baldwin’s approaches to love and politics is not their stylistic divergence, one that Norman Podhoretz described as Baldwin’s emotional “heightening and playing exquisitely on every bit of melodrama” and Arendt’s irony that is “all cleverness and no eloquence.”¹³² Nor is it a stark thematic divergence, where on the one hand freedom is characterized in terms of a self and on the other it is characterized in terms of a public world. These distinctions are overly simplistic and are not helpful in understanding the anti-democratic trends and forms of oppression that continue to haunt our politics. To this end, I argue that a better way of understanding the divide between Arendt’s and Baldwin’s approach to love and politics is to examine the implicit ethical character of judgments that help constitute a political world. This is more fruitful for understanding them and for thinking about the political crises we still face.

“Modern psychology is desert psychology ... Insofar as psychology tries to ‘help’ us, it helps us ‘adjust’ to those conditions ... precisely because we suffer under desert conditions we are still human and still intact; the danger lies in becoming true inhabitants of the desert and feeling at home in it” (*TPP*, 201). This resonates with Baldwin’s comments on how the American “adulation of simplicity and youth”—in other words, the desire to avoid confronting the tragic—explains “some of the stunning purposes to which Americans have put the imprecise science of psychiatry” (*CE*, 703). He continues, “This is not at all the same thing as ‘adjusting’ to reality: the effort of ‘adjusting’ to reality simply has the paradoxical effect of destroying reality...” (*CE*, 704). They take these notions in opposite directions: Baldwin arguing that we should endeavor to honestly understand our selves, Arendt arguing that self-knowledge is at best a distraction and at worst an impediment to political action. Cf. *HC*, 244 and *OR*, 86–88.

¹³² Podhoretz, “Hannah Arendt on Eichmann,” 201.

Despite Arendt's broad distinction between matters of public concern and matters of the heart, we see clearly that feelings related to a love of the world ("political passions—courage, pursuit of public happiness, the taste of public freedom, an ambition that strives for excellence") have a special political significance for her (*OR*, 267–68). What she theorizes as the connective tissue, so to speak, between these two frames—the internal relation of one to one's self and the external relation of citizen to citizen—is the judgment that grows out of thinking about the world and what appears in it. This judgment she calls "the manifestation of the wind of thought" in the world (*LOM*, 193). In political contexts, private thoughts become public judgments by imaginatively representing to oneself the standpoints of others and drawing one's own opinion, an opinion with greater subjective validity the greater the number of standpoints are taken into account. In non-political contexts or during political crises, private thoughts becomes public judgments in the form of "truthtelling," whereby historians and novelists put facts into meaningful narratives, and philosophers transform speculations about morality into "exemplary truth."¹³³ In both contexts—judgment or truthtelling—what lies at the heart of political thinking for Arendt is a responsibility to love the world. Judging fits us into the world by reconciling our subjective positions to one another, while truthtelling grants acceptance of the world by making sense of the world as it is.¹³⁴

¹³³ Arendt argues that truths are political inasmuch as "no human world destined to outlast the short life span of mortals within it will ever be able to survive without men willing...to say what is" (*BPF*, 225). Notably for Arendt, truthtelling becomes political in times of crisis, "where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle" (*BPF*, 247). It is this sort of a role I am claiming for Baldwin, for whom America is a country where "we live by lies" (*CE*, 698).

¹³⁴ See Garrath Williams, "Disclosure and Responsibility in Arendt's *The Human Condition*," *European Journal of Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (2015). He effectively makes this point about responsibility as it relates to the disclosures that become evident either in political judgment or in historical narratives. See also *TPP*, 202, where Arendt says, "Only those who can endure the passion of living under desert conditions can be trusted to summon up in themselves the courage that lies at the root of action, of becoming an active being." See as well *LOM*, 217, where she

Arendt distinguishes both political judgment and truth-telling from moral conscience, because in her words, “conscience is unpolitical” and “not primarily interested in the world” (*CR*, 60). In making this claim, she seeks to show how morality and politics exist in tension, how public spaces of freedom can be destroyed by the imperatives presented by the convictions of conscience, and how maintaining such spaces often requires the deferment of the demands of conscience that weigh upon an individual. Additionally, Arendt argues that personal feelings of guilt or innocence are not adequate barometers of right and wrong but of conformity to accepted habits, habits that may be changed (*RJ*, 50, 107). For these reasons, we shouldn’t trust morality, which is a condition of the self, to be a world-building principle for action; it might only prevent certain wrongdoings in emergency situations. While we may have moral motives (“every deed has its motives as it has its goal and its principle”), they remain hidden, and we are judged as to what we say and do, not what we feel in our hearts (*OR*, 88).¹³⁵

Given this approach to moral concerns and given her view of modern conditions (a mass society of laborers, flawed and unresponsive bureaucracy, the loss of compelling authoritative guides), Arendt favored institutional change as our best chance for recapturing the spirit of public action and creating spaces for the practice of pluralistic judgment. She believed that changing conditions could fundamentally alter the way we relate to the world, and that this was

says that it is the faculty of judgment that helps us understand how we can both take pleasure in our freedom or feel “doomed” to its “awesome responsibility.”

¹³⁵ Dan Degerman is helpful in seeing this argument about Arendt and moral feeling, although I believe he gives too short shrift to the question of our ability to be moved in the first place, a question for which I argue Baldwin is helpful in addressing. See Dan Degerman, “With the Heart’s Darkness: The Role of Emotions in Arendt’s Political Thought,” *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2016.

more important than attempting to change people.¹³⁶ Such a commitment to the world and to its organization is purposefully impersonal, arising as it does not out of sentiment but out of the disinterested reflection of judgment. It is what translates her political judgments, which are rooted in an aesthetic encounter with imagined others, into political proposals that home in on the shared institutions that condition public life.

Arendt's judgments about racial issues reflect this commitment. In response to the school integration protests that occurred in Little Rock, Arkansas, she argued that federal intervention was paternalistic, an assault on the freedom of association of both white and black families. She proposed instead a "pilot project" akin to a charter school where concerned families who favored integration could send their children, and she argued for federal intervention only if state authorities contested this sort of undertaking (*RJ*, 195).¹³⁷ This is but one example of the emphasis she placed on institutional frameworks for addressing the fundamental questions of political community that racism makes evident. She argues elsewhere for a new constitutional amendment to formally enshrine the equality and political inclusion of African Americans.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ She writes, "we can no more change a world by changing the people in it...than we can change an organization or a club by attempting to influence its members in one way or another...we can only revise its constitution, its laws, its statutes, and hope that all the rest will take care of itself" (*TPP*, 106).

¹³⁷ Ironically, this sort of proposal plays out in many parts of the United States today but with the exact *opposite* intent, using charter and private schools (or carefully drawn district maps) to achieve racially monochrome schools. Cf. Erica Frankenberg et al., "Southern Schools: More Than a Half Century After the Civil Rights Revolution," UCLA Civil Rights Project.

¹³⁸ See *CR*, 91, "We know the result [of the failure of the 14th and 15th amendments], and we need not be surprised that the present belated attempts to welcome the Negro population...are not trusted. An explicit constitutional amendment, addressed specifically to the Negro people of America, might have underlined the great change more dramatically for these people who had never been welcome, assuring them of its finality." This is why, moreover, Arendt argues (somewhat curiously given the context) that civil disobedience groups be granted an official function in Washington akin to any other lobby, "the same recognition for the civil-disobedient minorities that is accorded the numerous special-interest groups" (*CR*, 101).

However, in this turn to institutions we see the limitations of her approach to judgment that questions of race highlight. That is, confronted with claims about integration and basic equality, Arendt perceives claims to greater social status opportunities, and she responds with a judgment about the structural boundaries of racism as a political question without ever judging those structures' moral content.¹³⁹

In analyzing the roots of American racial exclusion, Baldwin articulates a form of public conscience that perceives how political world-building only occurs between those who share in the "love of public freedom" and its mutual promising that Arendt theorizes at the heart of politics (*OR*, 127; *HC*, 244). He emphasizes the important affective power of feeling over the representative power of thinking, and in so doing occasions a different type of moral imagination rooted in love to appear in political judgment. In Baldwin's approach, the world alienation that so troubled Arendt is related to "an inability to *feel*," an "aversion to experience," a "fear of life."¹⁴⁰ This should not be confused with the loving sentimentality that Arendt feared, as Baldwin makes nearly the same warnings she does, defining sentimentality as "the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion," "the mark of dishonesty," "the inability to feel"

¹³⁹ The most comprehensive and nuanced analysis of Arendt's Little Rock essay (and Ralph Ellison's response) occurs in Allen, *Talking to Strangers*. She persuasively argues that Arendt did not recognize the democratic sacrifice endured by the black students and their families, and her analysis of Ellison's response resonates with the role I find love playing for Baldwin. She states, "For Ellison...the evolution of a newly inclusive citizenship required addressing those aspects of democratic decision making that the dream of unity had previously hidden: loss and disappointment...resentment and distrust" (35–36). See also James Bohmann, "The Moral Costs of Political Pluralism: The Dilemmas of Difference and Equality in Hannah Arendt's 'Reflections on Little Rock,'" in *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later*, ed. Larry May and Jerome Kohn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁰ *CE*, 12, emphasis added.

(*CE*, 712).¹⁴¹ He continues (sounding very similar to Arendt describing Rousseau or Robespierre), “the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty” (*CE*, 12).¹⁴² For Baldwin, the difference between sentimentality and feeling is the willingness to “make a further journey,” one initiated by artists and novelists, who not only make events meaningfully comprehensible and thus reconcile us to the world (as they do on Arendt’s account), but also honestly confront the world’s contingency and its tragedy (*CE*, 12).

Baldwin’s approach to judgment, while not systematic, emphasizes the capacity to be moved in such a way that an honest reflection actually occurs. For him experiences of feeling that activate honest judgment rarely ever occur in racial discourse or in political discourse generally.¹⁴³ As such, the question of race becomes a flashpoint in a broader struggle to maintain our humanity under conditions of unfeeling, of “democratic anguish,” similar to the world

¹⁴¹ This is also very reminiscent of Arendt in “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship” (*RJ*, 28). On both accounts the sentimentality of diffuse responsibility displaces any real redress of the present situation when action is what is most needed, or as Baldwin puts it, “Guilt is a luxury we can no longer afford” (*CE*, 712).

¹⁴² In this distinction he aligns with Arendt’s discussion of “pity” as the transformation of compassion into a sort of unbounded public objectification of mass suffering. In Robespierre’s pity, Arendt argues, “he lost the capacity to establish and hold fast to rapports with persons in their singularity” and, as a result, was led “to a glorification of its cause, which is the suffering of others” (*OR*, 79–80). Compare this to Baldwin’s warning that a “devotion to the human being” should not be confused with a “devotion to Humanity,” because the latter is “too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are notoriously bloodthirsty” (*CE*, 12).

¹⁴³ “The ways in which the Negro has affected the American psychology are betrayed in our popular culture and in our morality; in our estrangement from him is the depth of our estrangement from ourselves. We cannot ask: what do we *really* feel about him—such a question merely opens the gates on chaos. What we really feel about him is involved with all that we feel about everything, about everyone, about ourselves” (*CE*, 19).

alienation Arendt describes (*CE*, 173).¹⁴⁴ In fact, Arendt herself recognized such indifference as both a moral *and* political problem, calling it “the greatest danger” (*RJ*, 146).¹⁴⁵ However, she demurred from confronting this problem of affect directly, insisting only on the importance of institutional change and public judgment. Baldwin, by contrast, directly connects racial ideology not just to an unwillingness to reflect properly on our feelings about race (as Arendt might), but also to an inability to be moved at all.

What appears crucial on Baldwin’s account is that this kind of feeling is activated by the imagination.¹⁴⁶ For Arendt, imagination is crucial in responding to feelings. With it, we represent the opinions of others to our own judgment and reproduce what we take to be the community sense, the *sensus communis*, to our mind’s eye.¹⁴⁷ On Baldwin’s account imagination *activates* feelings by producing aesthetic or experiential encounters that we have not confronted. It creates

¹⁴⁴ As Baldwin says late in life, “I think Americans are terrified of feeling anything...I never met a people more infantile in my life.” James Baldwin, *The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2014), 64.

¹⁴⁵ Arendt says: “In the unlikely case that someone should come and tell us that he would prefer Bluebeard for company...the only thing we could do is to make sure he never comes near us. But the likelihood that someone would come and tell us that he does not mind and that any company will be good enough for him, is, I fear, by far greater. Morally and even politically speaking, this indifference, though common enough, is the greatest danger” (*RJ*, 146).

¹⁴⁶ Baldwin writes for instance, “It is really quite impossible to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question; one is doomed to remain inarticulate about anything which one hasn’t, by an act of imagination, made one’s own” (*CE*, 96). I am grateful to Andrea Dworkin for bringing out this aspect of Baldwin’s thought for me. See Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 60–61. In her essay “Communion,” she addresses themes of imagination in Baldwin’s writing, arguing “The person with imagination is pushed forward by it into a world of possibility and risk, a distinct world of meaning and choice; not into a bare junkyard of symbols manipulated to evoke rote responses.”

¹⁴⁷ I am grateful to Linda Zerilli, who argues that Arendt had a more limited political account of imagination on this point. See Linda Zerilli, “We Feel Our Freedom: Imagination and Judgment in the Thought of Hannah Arendt,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005): 163. In her words, “[Arendt] never really considered the imagination in its freedom, for she never thought of it as anything more than reproductive.”

new images that help us to crawl from behind worn-out ideologies and habituated responses. In “Fifth Avenue, Uptown,” he provides an example of such an imaginative encounter:

The white policeman...is exposed, as few white people are, to the anguish of the black people around him. Even if he is gifted with the merest mustard grain of imagination, something must seep in. He cannot avoid observing that some of the children, in spite of their color, remind him of children he has known and loved, perhaps even of his own children. He knows that he certainly does not want *his* children living this way. (CE, 177)

Here, the policeman realizes something different than what is gained by imagining, for instance, what it would be like for the cop and his (white) family to live in this (black) neighborhood and confront its issues, the “being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not” of Arendt’s account.¹⁴⁸ He also realizes something different than if he had imagined what it might be like to actually be a black parent in this neighborhood, to take on their subjective feelings as if they were his own, which Arendt warns would prevent his judgment from being made freely, at a distance (BPF, 237; LKPP, 43).

What Baldwin says the policeman realizes is a feeling of “uneasiness,” a discomfort felt in realizing an image of the world that is tragic and contingent (CE, 177).¹⁴⁹ The policeman reimagines the world, a new image that reorients both him and the children, and in it he glimpses the greater equality such a world, one relieved of its comforting myths and made aware of its injustices, might entail. In this description and others, Baldwin depicts the feeling activated by

¹⁴⁸ BPF, 237; Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 43, hereafter cited in text as LKPP. This is precisely what she attempts in her “Reflections on Little Rock” in *Responsibility and Judgment*.

¹⁴⁹ Both Diana Meyers and, more recently, Sarah Ahmed speak to the way in which our feelings can become habituated to social norms such that what Meyers calls “heterodox moral perception” becomes obscured and the potential lessons of uneasy or alienated emotions are lost. See Sarah Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory G. Siegwirth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), and Diana Meyers, “Emotion and Heterodox Moral Perception: An Essay in Moral Social Psychology,” in *Being Yourself: Essays on Identity, Action, and Social Life* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

imagination, and he attempts to use that depiction to inform his own judgment of the world.¹⁵⁰

And while he goes on to say that the policeman retreats (as perhaps most of us do) from his uneasiness into an habituated “callousness,” Baldwin continues to argue that we must dare not to retreat, that we must advance and reckon with the uneasiness of this new image of the world. Instead of callousness, this reckoning with the world can lead to the feeling needed to make better judgments and, hopefully, to the political love needed to endure them.

This, ultimately, is the meaning of Baldwin’s final passage in “Down at the Cross.” There he describes how love helps us to judge the world, arguing that through love we can “insist on” and help “create” the consciousness, the community sense, necessary to see one another as equal. He states:

If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: *God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!* (CE, 347)

While Arendt seems to have read this as an appeal to fraternal embrace or to justice under threat of violence, I argue that Baldwin is describing how love sustains the difficult work of constituting a new public consciousness, a new community sense, through a practice of judgment that grasps the moral contours of the political world. He says we must work *like* lovers, that we must become those who insert something new into the world, taking great risk to care for it and

¹⁵⁰ Linda Zerilli describes the type of move I attribute to Baldwin in her recent account of democratic judgment, one in which no community sense or other standards of taste are taken for granted. She says, “When we quarrel, we express not only the hope that we can reach agreement (based on a common sense) but the expectation that we can somehow change each other’s feelings,” and reiterates, “What we hope for when we quarrel is to change each other’s feelings by rearranging how the common object is viewed and creating a shared orientation.” Linda Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 64–65, 72.

avert catastrophe.¹⁵¹ In this sense Baldwin helps to make the implicit ethical character of Arendtian *amor mundi* politically legible, and he recovers the affective resources—the feeling, the daring—necessary to animate it.¹⁵²

Baldwin's approach to judgment helps respond to two important and related questions that Arendt's account otherwise evades. The first relates to the sensation of the "it-pleases-or-displeases-me," with which Arendt's account begins. Here she says we reflect on the "it-pleases-or-displeases-me" of the internal sensations an object triggers in terms of a community sense, the imagined tastes of others who might also judge it (*LKPP*, 66). Baldwin calls into question not this pattern of thinking and reflecting, but its unquestioned and unexamined reliance on the internal sensations of pleasure and disgust. He shows the more important question we ask in forming a judgment is not, "Does this please or displease me?"¹⁵³ While this question and the mode of reflection it entails are important, we must also inquire as to *why* we feel pleasure or disgust in the first place. Are we really feeling this or that sensation, or are we just repeating ingrained and habituated responses? While Arendt argues that these inner sensations "are overwhelmingly present," "are immediate, unmediated by any thought or reflection," we can also

¹⁵¹ Cf. Arendt: "The child, this in-between to which the lovers now are related and which they hold in common, is representative of the world in that it also separates them; it is an indication that they will insert a new world into the existing world" (*HC*, 242).

¹⁵² To use a distinction from Seyla Benhabib, Baldwin intervenes between the "morally good" and the "morally right" to provide an "ethos of democratic participation," and while his is no Habermasian discourse ethics, it does effect an ethico-aesthetic confrontation with racial exclusion that helps to engender solidarity "through the actual confrontation in public life with the point of view of those who are otherwise strangers." See Seyla Benhabib, "Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Hannah Arendt's Thought," in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 200–201.

¹⁵³ Or perhaps more precisely, "Does the judgment resulting from the immediacy of my subjective feelings in anticipation of judging others please or displease me?"

understand them as conditional and malleable (*LKPP*, 66).¹⁵⁴ Moreover, while reflecting on the legitimacy of our feelings may be a trivial endeavor in judging most things (“the beauty of the rose,” etc.), it is all too often a matter of life and death when those feelings relate to the presence of black and other marked bodies.

The second question to which Baldwin responds relates to Arendt’s idealization of the political *sensus communis*, the community sense we imagine as we evaluate our own opinions in light of the potential opinions of others (*LKPP*, 72). Baldwin’s project seeks to uncover how our ideals of community (be they progressive or regressive) always make assumptions about who is represented without attending to the foundational question of who *should* be represented. If for Arendt political judgment is how we come to determine our community, how we “choose our company” among those with whom we share in freedom, then for Baldwin this choice is not simply political but also has an ethical relevance in determining who belongs and who matters.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ See Jennifer Nedelsky, “Embodied Diversity and Challenges to Law,” in *Judgment, Imagination, and Politics: Themes from Kant and Arendt*, ed. Ronald Beiner and Jennifer Nedelsky (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 238, 244. Here she discusses what she calls “affective failure,” where someone judging has “failed to assign the appropriate affect to the event they confronted” (238). She argues with Arendt that, “We do need to avoid simply acting on our affective starting point, by examining them critically, and comparing them to others for the purpose of genuine judgment,” but continuing as I do with Baldwin, she argues, “we also need to transform these starting points themselves” (244). See also Jennifer Nedelsky, “Receptivity and Judgment,” *Ethics & Global Politics* 4, no. 4 (2011). There she offers a potential method to transform affective starting points, arguing that we should attempt to become more mindful of our “receptivity” to others. In a similar vein, Susan Bickford highlights the way that not only our own affective receptivity but also “emotion talk” generally, the way emotions discursively figure into public deliberations, influences how we make judgments. See Susan Bickford, “Emotion Talk and Political Judgment,” *The Journal of Politics* 73, no. 4 (2011).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Susan Bickford, “In the Presence of Others: Arendt and Anzaldúa on the Paradox of Public Appearance,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). Bickford points to this issue of visibility (that I argue Baldwin helps us confront) in her discussion of what she calls Arendt’s “paradox of public appearance,” which she describes as the way in which our desire to engage politically in self-representation is constrained by “the attention of others who will judge for themselves” (315). She rightfully reminds us that “In an inequalitarian society where race, class,

He helps to show that when we allow ourselves to feel, when we do not retreat from our uneasiness, we can more adequately judge the world anew. We can begin to recognize the ethical dimension of who gets included and what questions get priority.

In Baldwin's response to these two questions about the importance of feelings and their relationship to communities of judgment, what becomes clear is that, given conditions of racial inequality, invisibility, and terror, we require an ethico-aesthetic confrontation with racial and other constructs that condition us. This confrontation can foster a re-visioning of black life and the political spaces where black lives might truly matter. Only then might it be possible not just to love the world but to share this love fully, and only then will we no longer cling to "chimeras," those myths "by which one can only be betrayed, and the entire hope—the entire possibility—of freedom disappears" (*CE*, 339). In this way Baldwin pushes further than Arendt, not just in helping us think and rethink how we judge, but also in helping us to feel, to recognize the affective contours involved in sharing the world. Political love, premised on the feeling he describes, helps sustain us in reckoning with the full equality of citizens across racial and other divisions, and it empowers us to make judgments in light of what such an image of the world reveals.¹⁵⁶

A Shared Love of the World

In the political theory of Hannah Arendt and James Baldwin we find innovative and

gender, and sexuality are relevant categories, not being seen—or not seeing oneself—as a member of a group is a marker of power and privilege" (319).

¹⁵⁶ In this sense, Baldwin expands our model for judging beyond the "enlarged thought" of Arendt ("being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not") toward that of Audre Lorde's "mutual stretching" across difference and Maria Lugones' "loving perception." See Audre Lorde, *I Am Your Sister* (New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1985), 57; Maria Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'-Travelling, and Loving Perception," in *Making Soul/Haciendo Caras*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990).

productive ways of conceptualizing the connections and ruptures that exist between love and political engagement. Arendt's is a vision of a love of the world where political actors come together to be seen and distinguished from one another; it is the joy felt in freely acting together and engaging in the public business, building the world together. It is a love felt by citizens for the world they create and maintain. Baldwin also develops a political account of love that seeks to forge a common world. But his account, stemming as it does from a reckoning with life's tragic constraints, remains more closely attuned to the potential exclusions of political community. As Lawrie Balfour puts it, "Baldwin's celebrations of the individual and his understanding of the impact of exclusion and powerlessness...are connected to an unsentimental appraisal of the human weakness that make democracy such a risky undertaking."¹⁵⁷

In this sense we can see that, far from a cloying entreaty to love one another or a simplistic reversal of oppressor and oppressed, he offers a critical expansion of Arendt's vision of *amor mundi*. That is, Baldwin shows not just why we should love the world, and what is at stake in our attempts, but he also illustrates more fully the moral and political intersections of such a love—namely, that a public world is only possible when its effective *and* affective equality is fully shared. In articulating an ethico-aesthetic that helps us appreciate love's political relevance, he also provides a motivating rationale for developing the moral capacity to feel, to honestly reckon with the world, what pleases and disgusts, and why. In the words of Joel Schlosser, Baldwin provides both a "survival tool," an ethic that reintegrates self into community, and a "political practice of resistance," a counterhegemonic politics that redeems plurality in the name of the oppressed.¹⁵⁸ As we see time and again, Baldwin maintains both a

¹⁵⁷ Balfour, *Evidence of Things Not Said*, 26.

¹⁵⁸ Schlosser, "Socrates in a Different Key," 496–97.

commitment to the world—the conciliatory possibility of a politics shared among equals and passed down to succeeding generations—and an acknowledgement of the staggering reimagining necessary for such a world to be truly shared.

The upshot of this comparison between Arendt and Baldwin is a fuller appreciation of the depth of their concern with freedom and how, though inspired by very different intellectual and experiential heritages, they shared a fundamental concern for a world in which freedom exists. This concern is a love that cuts against the grain of our conventional notions. Reading Baldwin in dialogue with Arendt is to push against the limits of the sort of freedom possible within a political world characterized by stark inequalities and forms of discrimination. While Arendt brings to bear the theorist's prerogative with clarifying and distinguishing concepts, Baldwin brings a novelist's sensibilities to help us see the interstices of those concepts, how they can at once shine a light and cast shadows. He helps us reimagine our political space and tastes, so the freedom that they make possible is fully reckoned with and meaningfully shared by all. On this account, it is only through this sort of reckoning (with history, with one another, with our political tastes) that we begin to pull back the curtain of the myths and ideologies that comfort us, and trigger the feelings upon which love—especially a love of the world—is borne.

CHAPTER 5. CONTEMPORARY EXEMPLARS

Looking for a Love of the World

In this chapter I carefully examine the moments in Arendt's work that discuss the exemplary sites of action that she associates with a love of the world. I first return to two of the contexts I sketched in chapter 3. There I discussed briefly the way in which Arendt argues that certain sites, in particular those of education and group protest, are sites where action most clearly embodies a love of the world. In addition to those two discussions within Arendt's work I also turn to her discussion of the council system, which Arendt consistently held out as an institutional embodiment of a love of the world. Each of these contexts, according to Arendt, is a specific example of where a love of the world becomes manifest in action. In analyzing them, I continue the line of argumentation I began in chapter 4 comparing Arendt and James Baldwin. I use this comparison to help identify contemporary exemplars of these types of action in the world today.

Here, Baldwin is again important, because he offers a fascinating analysis of many of these same contexts. His essays "A Talk to Teachers" and "To Be Baptized" are important counterparts to Arendt's "The Crisis in Education" and "Civil Disobedience." While he is thematically quite similar to Arendt in his analyses, his judgment suggests a divergent understanding of the ways in which a love of the world can be embodied in action. What I locate in this perspective is a more nuanced, less strident, and ultimately more coherent set of prescriptions for contemporary politics. This set of prescriptions is reflective of not only

judgment centered on the world, but also judgment about the status of that world. In other words, Baldwin shows that to love the world, exemplary political action should not only create and conserve public spaces of freedom, but also work to make these spaces fully cognizant of the plurality they all too often exclude.¹⁵⁹

Using these insights, I follow Arendt's discussions of the sites of love's justified political manifestations, along with Baldwin's considerations, to locate and interpret contemporary exemplars of a love of the world. I will argue that these exemplars, while they may diverge from Arendt's explicit ideal, each nonetheless represent a powerful commitment to the political world. The exemplars that I investigate here include teachers' organizations for social justice education, the ongoing protest movement around anti-black violence, and council movements that have sprung up in recent historical moments. In analyzing them it is my hope to further clarify both the type of love that Arendt advocates for politics and the way that these contemporary exemplars, while they may overrun the boundaries of Arendt's ideal, also serve as a critical lens through which to reimagine it.

Arendt's "The Crisis in Education"

An interesting point of departure in searching for contemporary exemplars of a love of the world occurs when Arendt talks about the role of public education. In "The Crisis in Education," she argues specifically, "Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable"

¹⁵⁹ In some ways this argument is similar to one made by Rancière in his distinction between the police as a "distribution of the sensible" and politics as the "manifestation of dissensus," of "re-figuring space," "what is to be done, to be seen, and to be named in it." Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 37–38.

(*BPF*, 193). The task of teaching, the role of the educator, thus takes on special significance for Arendt in relation to the type of love she associates with political life. In this section I attempt to unpack the warning she makes to educators, parents, and engaged citizens. Namely, she sees the decision to concern oneself with the education of young people as crucial for the survival of a public, political world. It is moreover a peculiar instance where the type of familial love she characterizes as anti-political overlaps with the world-love that she argues underwrites politics. If we love our children and if we love the world, we must educate them differently, equip them with a political sense that helps both to fit them into the world yet also preserves in them the freedom to change the world anew.

In this chapter I extend the productive critique I developed in chapter 4 drawing on the work of James Baldwin. That is to say, instead of narrowly following Arendt and somewhat reductively treating “the world” as an always already established phenomenological object, I use Baldwin’s insights to deepen and challenge aspects of Arendt’s approach to education as a specific manifestation of a love of the world. Baldwin, somewhat coincidentally, echoes Arendt in raising the alarm of crisis and its relationship to love in his essay “A Talk to Teachers.” Here his writing again helps to shed further light on the way in which a love of the world might be applied in a world with stark racial, economic, and other inequalities. While Arendt argues that education must engage in a specifically “conservative” mentality—that it requires of practitioners a responsibility to protect children from the outside world and also to insulate the world from the sheer newness of young generations that might trample it—Baldwin, by contrast, recognizes that such a mentality is untenable (*BPF*, 188–89). He argues that for students and teachers living at the margins of the common world, such advice will only serve to further reinscribe their marginality (*CE*, 685).

Both of their essays begin from similar premises. They both agree, for instance, that education in America is a social phenomenon, operating somewhere between the publicity of politics and the privacy of the home, and that, moreover, it reflects the prevailing structure of social discrimination and prejudice. They also agree that the point of education is to help students both adapt to the world and interrogate it, and that adults must take responsibility for the education of children or risk the world's destruction. However, the conclusions they draw from these premises diverge significantly. These differences indicate again the deeper reckoning with race Baldwin makes in theorizing a love of the world, and they shed light on different potential exemplars that could be better understood in our own contemporary context.

For Arendt, the crisis in education rests on trends both in education and in political life. In education, Arendt first points to the assumption of some progressive education theorists that children must be generally left to their own devices to sort out their own affairs within their own world, a world that is fundamentally disconnected from the world of adults (*BPF*, 177). Second, she highlights the trend in modern education of emphasizing pedagogical techniques over content knowledge (*BPF*, 178). Third, she points to the related assumption that learning should not be rooted in a canonical field of knowledge but instead should be rooted in experiential skill development (*BPF*, 179).

Politically, what this means for Arendt is that students are not being properly brought to a knowledge and responsibility for the world. Instead, they are being left to sort things out on their own, teach themselves, glean knowledge from their peers as opposed to adults. In short, they are not gaining the faculty of independent, critical judgment. For Arendt, this crisis has been reinforced by a modern context where traditional forms of authority have been lost, and where adults have lost their ability to come to terms with the world as it is, to judge it in terms of

anything other than what it offers them personally, and to make sense of its crises. The result, as she puts it:

It is as though parents daily said: “In this world even we are not very securely at home; how to move about in it, what to know, what skills to master, are mysteries to us too. You must try to make out as best you can; in any case you are not entitled to call us to account. We are innocent, we wash our hands of you.” (*BPF*, 188)

In other words, Arendt argues that trends in education are diminishing knowledge of the world as a good in itself and transforming it into know-how, the marketable skill sets appropriate not for judging the world but for market commerce. Moreover, modernity, marked by the unleashing of unforeseen processes and unspeakable human catastrophes, has diminished the authority of experience in teaching and parenting, leaving instead anxiety over the future and how to respond. Finally, she argues that this has resulted in a corruption of the safe harbors of childhood, turning them into battlegrounds of competing conformities and political ideas.¹⁶⁰

In this instance Arendt articulates her political judgment, “a consideration of the principles of education,” as an indictment of adults and an insistence that the space of education remain distinct from the space of the public world (*BPF*, 191). Putting herself in the place of parents and teachers she says, “Authority has been discarded by the adults ... [they] refuse to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought the children” (*BPF*, 187). Because adults bring children into a world for which they would rather not claim responsibility (its horrific histories, its continuing dangers) and because children more and more inhabit a social world of their own and are not given the proper space and time in which to think and

¹⁶⁰ Here Arendt is really critiquing a mischaracterization of John Dewey’s writings on progressive education. It is not at all clear that Dewey ever actually elevated “doing” to “knowing,” nor is it within my scope here to adjudicate this, but Arendt is clearly concerned with teaching that veers away from the transmission of canonical knowledge gained through work and towards the acquisition of skills gained through play. This she believes leaves students with an inability to ever make full sense of the world (*BPF*, 180–81).

grow, Arendt argues that a “conservative attitude” must be established (*BPF*, 189). She counsels conservatism, a return to canonical knowledge and a re-establishment of adult authority, both as sources of knowledge and as guides to action in the world.

Arendt does this, reiterating that she means conservative “in the sense of conservation,” because she sees the crisis in education as one more symptom of a crisis in the public world. On her account, instead of students being protected from the world and gradually introduced to it through schooling, children are being left to a world of their own. Here, because adults are unwilling to claim authority over students and responsibility for the world, children are more and more “banished from the world of grown-ups,” and their own world comes to have its own specific (“tyrannical”) order (*BPF*, 178). Thus, Arendt argues, in order that children might avoid the conformity and delinquency engendered by modern educational conceits, and so that they might one day enter the public world without destroying it, students need their schools to serve as a transitional space. In this space, which she explains is neither the public world of adults nor a world of its own, students are concealed from public life while they gradually learn about the world but are protected from it as they grow and develop their individual personas, “the uniqueness that distinguishes every human being from every other” (*BPF*, 185). In this way, Arendt’s judgment is that education must remain “conservative” in order that politics might remain revolutionary. She argues that it is the mandate of adults to insist on an authority over students that would be totally inappropriate to politics, in order that these new beings might be brought into the freedom afforded by a public world without destroying it.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ This of course directly parallels her thinking in the “Reflections on Little Rock” essay discussed in chapter 4. There, she faulted the black parents and NAACP not only for seeking what she considered social gains at the expense of political rights, but also for politicizing—for shining the light of the public world—into a space she held to be private, a transitional refuge from its judgments.

In the next section, I again turn to James Baldwin in order to show how Arendt's focus on recovering authority in education distracts her from the question of whose authority it is to be recovered. On Arendt's account, educational authority is self-evident. It arises out of specific content knowledge and competencies ("a measure of qualification") and the "assumption of responsibility" for teaching about the world (*BPF*, 186). But this too easily obfuscates the very real dilemma facing adults in a public world that, as Arendt argues, has lost its traditional authoritative guideposts. In other words, if authority is no longer self-evident in the public world, then how can we, without irony, assume it is self-evident—merely a question of loving the world enough to take responsibility for it—in the private world of education? If, as Arendt says, "one can quite easily teach without educating, and one can go on learning to the end of one's days without for that reason becoming educated," then how are we to judge between the adult who is merely teaching and not educating (*BPF*, 192)? Baldwin, I argue, helps to articulate an authority that is gained with students not only by recognizing what must be conserved in the world, but also by recognizing what must change, and by empowering students to this possibility.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Arendt's approach is resistant to this move in two ways. First, she seems broadly resistant to the specifically American notion of equality, one that she thinks "struggles to equalize or to erase as far as possible the difference between young and old, between the gifted and the ungifted, finally between children and adults, particularly between pupils and teachers" (*BPF*, 177). While I do not believe Baldwin argues for an equal authority between teachers and students, they do elevate the authority of the experiences students have in the world, which he argues begin much earlier than we give credit (*CE*, 679). Second, Arendt is resistant to what she calls the "revolutionary poses" of "modern educational experiments," because she openly worries that they will preclude students from becoming fully free adults—that in so doing, we might "strike from their hands their chance at undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us..." (*BPF*, 193). However, revolutionary indoctrination is not Baldwin's intent. He argues that the point of education is to inspect everything, "...to ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions..." (*CE*, 679). Similar to Arendt, Baldwin is concerned with enabling students to be "anti-social," to buck the conformity of mass society, but he goes further in suggesting that taking a responsibility for an unjust world must also involve a responsibility to help change the world—and that this can be part of an education.

Baldwin's "Talk to Teachers"

For Baldwin, the crisis in education is not just that children are left unprepared for the world, and it is not just that adults refuse to claim the authority needed to prepare them for it. For Baldwin, conserving the world as it is means conserving deeply ingrained and harmful inequities. He argues that education must prepare students to change the world such that it becomes fully worthy of their love. He argues that the world to which children are being educated represents "a backward society" and "a criminal conspiracy" (*CE*, 685). By this he means that pervasive forms of social, economic, and political discrimination sit alongside political myths and triumphant histories that not only do not own up to these real harms but, in that they remain unacknowledged, further confound the problems of people who have been subjected to them. In terms of education, this inability to grow up and face the tragic aspects of America and of life more broadly construed, produces children who are educated toward either a sort of "schizophrenic" world (if they are black) or a fantasy world (if they are white) (*CE*, 679).

Baldwin interprets the symptoms of the crisis of education similarly to Arendt. He cites a breakdown of authority and the reality of juvenile crime. However, similar to the analysis of "feeling" I presented in the previous chapter, Baldwin goes deeper than the political judgment that Arendt articulates both in her essay on education here and in her "Reflections on Little Rock." Her approach to political judgment centers on her ideal of a common world, and it attempts to realize this ideal by thinking from the position (but not the identity) of others and making judgments that account for these various other positions. Baldwin's approach, by contrast, centers on the extant impediments to a common world, and it makes judgments in terms of the changes necessary to lift those extant impediments. He asks what sort of encounter or reckoning needs to take place such that a truly common world can be imagined. This is

illustrated in their essays on education. Arendt judges the actions of adults in terms of a common world, one in which they seem to be lost, and she blames them for refusing their responsibility to newer generations, for refusing to love the world. Baldwin, instead, judges the world in terms of its effects on students, arguing that the ideal it represents has been warped by racism.

By acknowledging the tragic aspects of the world, Baldwin attempts to rehabilitate an orientation toward it that can be accessible to and representative of marginalized people. This move, to reconstitute the marginalized as political (if not social) equals, is one that is not completely lost on Arendt. As I describe in Chapter 4, she thought that a constitutional amendment was imperative to fully substantiate black political equality. However, her judgment there in regards to civil disobedience and here in regards to education, belies an ideal image of the world she takes for granted. This is an ideal whereby formal political equality is an efficient means to substantive political membership, and where an education is a real invitation to participate in that membership, to wield substantive political power.

Baldwin, under no such illusion, addresses this lacuna in respect to education by attempting to reckon with the reality of a world that produces irresponsible adults and leaves children to the streets (*CE*, 684). This goes beyond merely reflecting on the pain of childhood abandonment or the alienation from politics experienced by adults, although both he and Arendt address this affective experience to a greater or lesser extent. On Baldwin's account, education is another site where imaginative feeling helps us not only bridge our alienation from the world and its concerns, but also become conscious of others such that we recognize the world as more profoundly shared.¹⁶³ In terms of education, this requires teachers to honestly imagine all

¹⁶³ Baldwin describes this capacity here by contrast to the way he saw "infantile" white Americans treat others, "They weren't cruel they just didn't know you were alive (684). They didn't know you had any feelings" (*CE*, 684).

students as belonging to a world to be shared and to “begin to develop a conscience” that recognizes and reacts to the world’s injustices (*CE*, 684–85). On Baldwin’s account, we do this when we work to recognize our history and its atrocities, and when we work to recognize the harmful myths that deny this history. In so doing, we gain the capacity to see all students as deserving an education, one that will equip them to fully share in the freedom that it helps afford.

The crisis of education then, for Baldwin, results from more than just the decline of authority and the related shirking of responsibility. For him, it is the result of the incommensurability of curriculum and context. It is the result of the directive to prepare children for a world in which they will share, ostensibly, in the freedom and equality of the public world, yet in a context in which stark inequalities and racial animus make that preparation incoherent and farcical. Baldwin argues that by the time black children have realized the true character of their country (and he says this occurs “much sooner than adults would like to think”), they have effectively had “almost all the doors of opportunity slammed” in their faces (*CE*, 679, 681). This leads young people to either “more or less accept it with an absolutely inarticulate and dangerous rage,” or turn into “a kind of criminal ... outside the law,” “turned away from this country forever and totally” (*CE*, 681). The crisis, then, is the result of the realization that the authoritative myths of the public world in the American context are false and injurious.¹⁶⁴

Baldwin’s injunction then is not to conserve an aesthetically privileged ideal of the world, which, at least in the American context, never existed. Instead of arguing for a return to canonical sources of worldly authority and a greater emphasis on fundamentals of learning and discipline, as Arendt suggests, he argues that we must break out of this nostalgic, conservative educational mindset and work to equip ourselves and our students in order to face reality and

¹⁶⁴ As Baldwin puts it, “If I am not what I’ve been told I am, then it means that *you’re* not what you thought *you* were *either!*” (*CE*, 682).

change it. In fact, the differences in their prescriptions are as stark as their diagnoses of the crises are similar. Whereas Arendt, in another context, argues against demands for a more inclusive curriculum, Baldwin argues that this is fundamentally central.¹⁶⁵ As he puts it:

What is upsetting this country is a sense of its own identity. If for example, one managed to change the curriculum in all the schools so that Negroes learned more about themselves and their real contributions to this culture, you would be liberating not only Negroes, you'd be liberating white people who know nothing about their own history ... If you have to pretend that I hoed all that cotton just because I loved you, then you have done something to yourself. You are mad. (*CE*, 683)

In addition to curricular changes aimed at correcting the historical record, Baldwin also argues that students must be exposed to critiques of popular culture that enshrine myths of white supremacy and American exceptionalism (*CE*, 685). Finally, he argues that teachers must expose the social structures affecting their students, “those streets, those houses, those dangers, those agonies by which they are surrounded,” and they must show them that these are not natural but are instead “the results of a criminal conspiracy” (*CE*, 685). In this sense, he argues that education, no less than the political sphere of adults, cannot afford to be conservative in the way Arendt idealizes. He argues instead that it must dare to be liberatory.

It is worth noting that both Arendt and Baldwin conceptualize education around the development of a responsibility to, and a love of, the world. Whereas Arendt says education “is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it,” Baldwin states somewhat similarly that the purpose of education “is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself” (*BPF*, 193; *CE*, 678). However, Baldwin’s formulation takes this insight further, stating that education in profoundly unequal contexts such as ours

¹⁶⁵ For instance, in the appendix to her essay “On Violence,” Arendt quotes Bayard Rustin at length to share in his denunciation of black student activists fighting for the introduction of more diverse course offerings. She writes, “...what Negro students need is ‘remedial training’ so that they ‘can do mathematics and write a correct sentence,’ not ‘soul courses’” (*CR*, 191).

becomes “the point at which you begin to develop a conscience,” where it becomes “your responsibility to change society” (*BPF*, 193; *CE*, 685). Baldwin’s insistence on cultivating change does not forsake the world, nor does it pretend to the sorts of revolutionary indoctrination that Arendt fears. It seeks simply to empower students to interrogate the disparities that confront them, and it seeks to grant them the perspective, the analytical tools, with which they might claim their dignity and force the world to open to them as equals.

Educators for Social Justice

Given this encounter with Arendt and Baldwin, the question then becomes where, if at all, do we see this sort of worldly engagement through education actually put into practice? What sorts of information might we need to reasonably determine whether or not a pedagogical practice is oriented toward the world in this way? Are there teachers who are able, even in the current climate of high stakes testing and privatization, to employ such an approach? Are there teachers who attempt to cultivate a sense of the world as it really exists, in all its stark inequality? Are there teachers who, rather than indoctrinate their students, bring them to a consciousness of the world without foreclosing their capacity, their “birthright” as Arendt might say, for new and unforeseen action?

There are, in fact, a whole host of contemporary examples of the way in which a commitment to the world can become manifest in the realm of education. There are exemplary educational practices that accept responsibility for the world and, following Arendt, balance adult authority and childhood natality, and yet also, following Baldwin’s appeal, remain cognizant of the realities of oppression in the world. One of the most famous iterations of this occurs in the work of Paulo Freire and the many contemporary acolytes he has inspired. Freire, a Brazilian educator and theorist, is one of the most widely acclaimed figures in politically

engaged teaching, and his most famous text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is perennially cited by practitioners and researchers.¹⁶⁶ Two ideas are central to his approach: the “banking” model of education, of which he is highly critical, and an approach to education centered on dialogic investigation. This dialogic approach he calls conscientization (*conscientização*), and he argues that it is a politically revolutionary practice that refigures the role of authority in education and in the broader space of politics.

Freire describes the “banking” model of education as a traditional model of education whereby an unchallenged lecturer dispenses a litany of facts and concepts, which students passively receive and regurgitate.¹⁶⁷ The main argument he makes with regards to this model is that it enshrines authority and subjectivity with the teacher, relegating students to the status of passive objects. Contrasting this view of knowledge as “receiving, filing, and storing the deposits” teachers make upon students, Freire argues that knowledge only really originates in dialogic investigation.¹⁶⁸ For him, the banking model mirrors other forms of oppression in society, and thus should be reimagined. Instead of students as empty receptacles to be filled, he argues that we should see students and teachers as active interlocutors engaged in a form of mutual inquiry “in the world, with the world, and with each other.”¹⁶⁹ This mutual inquiry is

¹⁶⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008 [1968]). And see, for example, Maurianne Adams and Lee Ann Bell, *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016); Adams et al., *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013); Tracy Davis and Laura Harrison, *Advancing Social Justice: Tools, Pedagogies, and Strategies to Transform Your Campus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013); bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as a Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁶⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 72.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

conscientization, or critical consciousness-raising. It is an image of dialogue, of “problem-posing” teaching, that is clearly reminiscent of Socrates, and it is one that calls teachers and students alike to a kind of action, an active and critical learning about the world as it relates to the realities they face.¹⁷⁰

Freire has clear Arendtian parallels in that his approach to teaching is both “an act of love,” “a love of the world,” and is premised on seeking consciousness of the world’s reality through dialogue.¹⁷¹ He describes conscientization as neither the “depositing” of information which is “consumed” by students, nor “a hostile, polemical argument” where one seeks to impose one’s ideas on another.¹⁷² He calls it a “problem-posing education,” “an encounter” among people who are “mediated by the world” and who seek to name it.¹⁷³ This is very similar to Arendt’s intersubjective phenomenology of the world that I describe in chapter 2. It is also quite similar to the description Arendt gives of Socrates’ engaged thought in *Life of the Mind*.

However, Freire’s work also resonates with the critical insights of Baldwin, in that he

¹⁷⁰ In a recent volume, Jon Hale argues that the civil rights-era Freedom Schools, which emphasized the lived experiences of students and enlisted students and teachers alike as agents of social change, were an early forerunner to the model of education that Freire theorizes. See Jon N. Hale, *The Freedom Schools: Student Activists in the Mississippi Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 211–12.

¹⁷¹ Freire, *Pedagogy* 89, 109. Freire also makes direct reference to Arendt’s teacher and mentor Karl Jaspers in the *Pedagogy* in reference to so-called ‘limit situations.’ Whereas for Jaspers these involve (according to Freire) a realization of the limitations that condition human existence, an insight Freire calls “pessimistic,” Freire is much closer to Arendt in describing action as limit-transcending (Freire 99). Cf. Arendt, “... it is in its [action’s] nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because everything that exists is unique and sui generis” (*HC*, 205).

¹⁷² Freire, *Pedagogy*, 89.

¹⁷³ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 88–89.

extends the logic of this “love of the world” to an engagement with the world’s unavoidable inequities. Arguing that love as conscientization is “the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself,” he argues it entails a “commitment to others.”¹⁷⁴ Much like Baldwin (and as if anticipating Arendt’s admonition against love), Freire says that love “cannot be sentimental,” that it “must not serve as the pretext for manipulation.”¹⁷⁵ But with Baldwin, he does push against Arendt in where this love of the world that informs education leads. For Freire and Baldwin, it entails a revolutionary outlook and not the conservative mindset Arendt endorses, because it treats students and their world, their experiences, their lives as really mattering, and not just to instruction but to the world, the experiences, and the lives of their instructors.

Exemplars of this Freirean approach are numerous and growing, if still not widespread. Some of its established organizational promoters include Rethinking Schools, Teachers for Social Justice, and The Education for Liberation Network.¹⁷⁶ Rethinking Schools is a non-profit magazine and advocacy organization that seeks to promote new pedagogical initiatives, theories, curriculum, and action in support of public school teachers and underserved students. Teachers for Social Justice is a loosely connected network of teacher groups throughout the US that seeks to improve pedagogical practice through teach-ins, curriculum fairs, and direct action. The Education for Liberation Network is a national non-profit that seeks to connect educators and community members with resources and opportunity to expand social justice teaching methods and activism. Here I will present a few illustrative examples of the type of work these

¹⁷⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 89.

¹⁷⁵ Freire, *Pedagogy*, 90.

¹⁷⁶ For more information about this group see “About Rethinking Schools,” <http://rethinkingschools.aidevt.com/about/index.shtml>; “About Teachers for Social Justice,” <http://www.teachersforjustice.org/2007/09/about-tsj.html>; and Education for Liberation Network “Mission and Purpose,” <http://www.edliberation.org/about/mission>.

organizations seek to promote and expand, and argue that these embody Arendt's call for educators to love the world such that they take responsibility for it and Baldwin's critical insights into the way that this responsibility extends to the students and the realities they face in and out of the classroom.

One recent example comes from the Chicago Teachers for Social Justice, and it involves a social studies unit organized around investigating the massive school closures that took place in 2013.¹⁷⁷ In this curriculum students investigate the arguments for and against the school closures and the history of public education in Chicago. They are then tasked with writing their own persuasive essay and planning a service-learning action that is student-driven and reflective of the political claims made in their essays. As Cyriac Matthews, the teacher who designed the curriculum puts it:

The purpose of the unit is for students to learn the importance of civic participation in a democracy through the exploration of an issue very relevant to students' lives: school closings...The end goal is for students to develop a clearer understanding of the issues involved so that together we can make a decision about how to take action...¹⁷⁸

The connection between grassroots, participatory democracy, including an intentional attempt "to give fair hearings to all sides involved," and the practice of and reflection upon forms of direct action is clearly influenced by Freire. It also nonetheless responds to Arendt's call for adults to love the world such that they accept responsibility for it (*BPF*, 193). However, it does so in a way that pushes back against the "sense of conservation" she advocates, one that would insulate students from public affairs (*BPF*, 188).

¹⁷⁷ Teachers for Social Justice, "School Closings Curriculum—Teaching for Social Justice," <http://www.teachersforjustice.org/2013/04/school-closings-curriculum-teaching-for.html>. J. Cyriac Matthews, "Civics Through School Closings," UPLIFT Social Studies Unit Plan, <http://files.ctctcdn.com/93eca296201/c50cbe3c-5e2f-4efe-8d44-8b45520a0f2c.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Perhaps an even more interesting example comes from *Rethinking Schools*, as it involves a science unit written by a Chicago public school teacher that was organized around the theme of drinking water and the crisis of lead-tainted water in Flint, Michigan.¹⁷⁹ For this curriculum the teacher, Karen Zaccor, used the study of chemistry to set the stage for a profound set of learning experiences about the political causes and effects of environmental waste, the chemical mechanics of water contamination, and the steps students and their communities can take to address these issues in their homes and in the public sphere. Beginning with brainstorming about what they had heard about Flint and relating that to Chicago-area reporting about similar problems, particularly in public housing units, students then learned about the biochemistry of lead poisoning and its social effects. Once they had become familiar with both the issue and the science behind it, Zaccor's students collected data and looked for patterns in the geography of the city's lead contamination, all the while maintaining reading journals about what thoughts and connections they were making between the topic they were learning about and their own communities. Finally, the students collectively prepared a prevention protocol for families and a list of demands for local officials. Group projects included a brochure, a television public service announcement, and a presentation that was delivered both to the school community and to the local alderman.

What is so troubling about these projects to Arendt's approach is that they empower students to a sort of limited political equality that she argues is completely detrimental, both to the authority of teachers and to the growth of students. She sees what she calls "modern educational experiments" and their "revolutionary poses" as belying an estrangement from the world so "desperate" that they task themselves with initiating a new order not in the public action

¹⁷⁹ Karen Zaccor, "Lead Poisoning: Bringing Social Justice to Chemistry," *Rethinking Schools* 31, no. 1 (2016).

of adults but in the more sequestered educational training of youths (*BPF*, 188). She fears that these curricular initiatives prejudice students both to the issues they will face as citizens and the manner in which they should be resolved, and that this impedes students from developing their own unique perspectives, perspectives honed in the safety of private discussion and eventually deployed as world-building judgments in a common public world. Here I think Arendt's fears simply get the best of her.

In neither of the examples highlighted here is a responsibility to the world sacrificed to ideological indoctrination, nor is a critical education sacrificed to a programmatic set of particular skills. Students are confronted not with an education that has been politicized, but by political questions that are already part of their world and of which they must make sense. Here, teachers do not relinquish their authority; they justify and reenforce it by bringing their content knowledge to bear on the world's problems. Consistent with their students' age and context, they channel and cultivate those very "new and revolutionary" qualities that Arendt argues most characterize young people (*BPF*, 189). Moreover, there is evidence suggesting this approach helps students in profound and long-lasting ways.¹⁸⁰ These types of pedagogical practices then, while they eschew a conservative attitude towards the world as it has been traditionally configured, nonetheless take up Arendt's broader call to love as a responsibility for the world, one that must change with each generation so that it can be preserved through time.¹⁸¹

Specifically, in these practices teachers act as "representatives of the world," and they seek to introduce students to the world and its realities. Moreover, they seek to develop a habit of

¹⁸⁰ Marinda K. Harrel-Levy, Jennifer L. Kerpelman, and Daniel Henry, "'Minds Were Forced Wide Open': Black Adolescents' Identity Exploration in a Transformative Social Justice Class," *Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice* 11, no. 2 (2016).

¹⁸¹ "...The world, in gross and in detail, is irrevocably delivered up to the ruin of time unless human beings are determined to intervene, to alter, to create what is new" (*BPF*, 189).

investigation, of critical thinking as opposed to rote learning, and they endeavor to allow students to engage with political topics and come into contact with the public world of adults from the relative safety of the classroom. They do this so that their students will have the wherewithal to take full responsibility for the world themselves when the time comes. Each of these efforts echoes Arendt's analysis of the political questions affecting education and resemble the types of recommendations she makes. However, they also resonate with Baldwin's approach (and diverge from Arendt's), because they seek to empower students *as* students—citizens in the making that can have valid and critical insights to share and defend. Teachers, on this approach, are empowered to work in solidarity with them and their families to actively intervene in the world. Only then, with the greater self-efficacy and consciousness that such instruction affords, does an education really involve a love of the world.

Protest as a Site of Amor Mundi

Arendt also cites other phenomena as exemplars of a love of the world, and makes particular note of the social movements and civil disobedience protests that she witnessed towards the end of her life. As Ella Myers notes, these manifestations represent “a key example of such *amor mundi* in action ... in which participants effectively took sides for the world's sake.”¹⁸² Here Arendt describes what she finds positive in the forms of student protests that developed over the course of the 1960s, through a similar analytic lens to the one she employs in *On Revolution*. Namely, she contrasts forms of protests that are world-building, that generate a space of publicity through political action, with those that address what she characterizes as social questions of status and economic inequalities (*CR*, 202). The former, she argues, have been practically successful, because they achieved significant changes to specific racial

¹⁸² Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, 88.

ordinances, university policies, and created a broad-based anti-war mobilization (*CR*, 203–4, 207–8). More significantly, however, she argues that these movements, through their action, “discovered what the eighteenth century had called ‘public happiness,’” and by that she means they discovered the pleasures associated with a love of the world (*CR*, 203).

“Public happiness,” is an idea that Arendt associates with John Adams and returns to consistently. I explored its relationship to love of the world in chapter 3, but in this context it seems to take on further significance. Recall first that in *On Revolution* she describes ‘public happiness’ as the joy experienced in distinguishing oneself from others through shared engagement in public concerns, and she says it is the desire for such experiences “which makes men love the world and enjoy the company of their peers, and drives them into public business” (*OR*, 111). There, for instance, she distinguishes between the world-loving public happiness the American founders had experienced in action and the French philosophical tradition of “public freedom,” which had devolved into the world-effacing excesses Arendt associates with the compassion of Rousseau. In that context she contrasts the experience of public happiness and political action centered on a space of freedom with the pursuit of “goodness” and its attempt to publicly embrace moral motives.

Arendt clarifies the relationship between morality and politics in her appreciation of the student movements, because she references the way in which their action was borne out of moral convictions, what she calls their “moral factor” (*CR*, 203). As she puts it, “a spontaneous political movement arose which not only did not simply carry on propaganda, but acted, *and, moreover, acted almost exclusively from moral motives.*”¹⁸³ Thus, what becomes clear is that moral *motives* are not an issue for Arendt, so long as these moral motives are in service of the

¹⁸³ *CR*, 203, original emphasis.

space created by action in the world. As I showed in chapter 3, what corrupted the French Revolution on Arendt's account was not that the Jacobins had formulated moral motives, but that these were employed in the service of a sentimental philosophy rather than a political world, ultimately transforming the revolution into an unconstituted tyranny. Moreover, Arendt argues that because the French were obsessed with affirming the purity of motives and uncovering false ones, they further eroded the space in which a political world could become a constituted reality.

This distinction between motives, their ends, and their interrogation is what allows Arendt to cite the student movements approvingly. She believes that the students' moral motives were in service of democratic world-building and were also secondary to the experience of action and "public happiness" they initiated. Thus, despite all of the qualms she expresses elsewhere, both with the intrusion of moral imperatives into political discourse and the dangers of parading motives, she is nonetheless able to say, "In all these matters I would rate the student movement as very positive" (*CR*, 203). This is important for my purposes in this chapter, because it is necessary for examining current protest groups and movements that embody a love of the world. In short, Arendt approves of movements that embody a love of the world, not because of their motives or goals, but instead in terms of the space of public freedom they create and the world-building principles they invoke.

Arendt is elsewhere adamant that conscience—by itself—is unpolitical. Referring to Thoreau, she argues that conscience, unlike a love of the world, requires nothing more than breaking a law when it requires wrongs to be committed (*CR*, 60). She distinguishes the conscientious objector, "the good man" who insists on following the imperatives of conscience despite their worldly effects, to "the good citizen," who she argues says with Machiavelli, "I love my native city more than my own soul" (*CR*, 61–62). By this she does not necessarily mean to

elevate politics over morality, but she instead seeks to show how they exist in an historic tension, how often the worldly space of freedom inaugurated by political action is destroyed by the necessities presented by religious or other convictions upon the self. Hers is an argument about how the conservation of such public, political spaces in the world often relies on the deferment of more radical changes that weigh upon the individual self.

According to Arendt this deferment is reasonable, even necessary, for several reasons. First, recall that she argues that conscience, by itself, is unpolitical. It is concerned not with the outer world but with the inner integrity of the self. She gives the example of Lincoln as a public figure who, despite enormous moral concerns, was able to act pragmatically, sometimes against his morals, out of concern for the world. She says that he acted “to save the Union, and ...not either to save or destroy slavery,” and was thus able to distinguish “official duty” from “personal wish” (*CR*, 61). Second, she argues that the feeling of guilt or innocence is not an indication of right and wrong but of conformity to accepted habits, habits that may be exchanged, as Arendt puts it, like changing “table manners” (*RJ*, 50, 107). Third, she argues that conflicts of conscience are resolved not in feeling but in thinking, and because thinking occurs between me and myself, such conflict is resolved not in action but in abstention, in saying “I can’t and I won’t” (*RJ*, 108). In other words, we shouldn’t trust morality, which is a condition of the self, to be the impetus for action; it might only prevent certain wrongdoings in emergency situations. Moreover, on Arendt’s account, to treat the public sphere as a place to display one’s morality is (as I attempt to show in chapter 3) to make oneself a hypocrite, as the “goodness” of one’s conscience must remain hidden by definition (*OR*, 86). Instead, when we appear in the world by acting and judging, the disclosure of our public persona, that which unites the inner dialogue of the thinking self, is never completely under our command. While we may have moral motives

(“every deed has its motives as it has its goal and its principle”), they remain hidden: we are judged by others as to what we say and do, not what we feel in our hearts (*OR*, 88). As such, our appearance is predicated not on morality and the self, but on fidelity to the world.

Arendt supplements this argument, however, with the caveat that there do arise moments when conscience *can* take on a political and not just a subjective significance. This occurs when people of conscience make a public show of their refusal *en masse*, and, as she says, “a number of consciences happen to coincide, and the conscientious objectors decide to enter the market place and make their voices heard in public” (*CR*, 67–68). The difference between the two is that, for Arendt, once someone chooses to take a stand not as an individual but as part of group, they “no longer rely on themselves alone” (*CR*, 68). In other words, they make their stand more than simply for themselves, for the good of their own conscience, and instead affirm a judgment about the way the world should be, combining their opinion with that of others as leverage to effect a specific change. This is perhaps why the student movement’s moral motives were not problematic for Arendt, were even “positive” in her words. She argues that they successfully converted moral motives into world-building political action, that they sought to do more than just resist evil; they sought to actively cultivate a political world, one refashioned in light of new invocations of world-building political principles.

This is possibly one of the more vexing aspects of Arendt’s political thought: determining when and where the public, political aspect of a phenomenon is being given priority as opposed to being overtaken by its social or moral components. Arendt is quite clear that social and moral questions can have a public, political side to them. However, she seems intentionally vague (and at times contradictory) as to where we might draw this line, how we might determine when some

public question or manifestation is properly political in her view.¹⁸⁴ She consciously avoids setting out rules of action or judgment, because on her account, the freedom inherent in action and judgment is incommensurate with any set of prescriptions by which one might somehow “know” they are acting and judging correctly. Instead, she attempts to describe the phenomenologically essential distinctions between categories (political, social, moral) as an exemplary practice of judgment itself, without foreclosing the possibility of future re-visioning.¹⁸⁵

It is thus difficult at times, following Arendt’s own judgments, to say with confidence that a group is engaged in solidarity or pity, political action or social discourse, or when moral motives and goals have been adequately converted into principled political opinions and action. She writes quite positively about the (largely white) student protest movement of the 1960s and its success in forcing political changes on political questions of civil rights and the mobilization of anti-war sentiment, but she also praises them for addressing other seemingly social questions of wage inequality and university administration (CR, 116, 118). She is much less effusive in her description of black students and their mobilization, describing them as having introduced

¹⁸⁴ Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, new edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003). Benhabib makes reference to a conference (captured in Melvyn Hill’s (1979) *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*. New York: St. Martin’s Press) where Arendt is questioned on this particular theme within her work. Benhabib recounts it in an attempt to show how untenable it is to read the distinction Arendt makes here as anything other than an “attitudinal one” (156). She says, “Arendt admits that ‘with every one of these issues there is a double face. And one of these should not be subject to debate’” (156).

¹⁸⁵ In this sense, Arendt’s theory works to exemplify the type of judgment it theorizes. As Zerilli puts it, “In this process of making sense or judging reflectively, we refuse to limit ourselves to proofs based on concepts already given and instead alter our sense of what is common or shared: we alter what Arendt calls the world” (163). And later she continues, “There is nothing necessary in what we hold. To do so is an expression of our freedom. In the judgment, we affirm our freedom and discover what we have—and do not have—in common” (163). Zerilli’s analysis has been crucial for me in thinking about how Arendt’s theoretical approach might relate to contemporary acts. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*.

violence into the university, deploying demonstration tactics in the pursuit of “clearly silly and outrageous” demands (*CR*, 120–21). Whereas white radicals on Arendt’s account are engaged in “disinterested” action in the name of “participatory democracy,” black students “organized themselves as an interest group,” as representatives of the black community and not in service of a shared political world (*CR*, 121).¹⁸⁶ In what follows, I turn to analyze this blind spot that Arendt displays toward black political manifestations, and I attempt to show how Baldwin helps to both recognize these manifestations and extend their implications to how we think of the world.

Protest in Baldwin’s “To Be Baptized”

Baldwin’s political writing is again helpful in extending Arendt’s narrower conceptualization of a love of the world. By focusing on who is effectively counted as part of a shared political world, Baldwin helps both resolve Arendt’s at times equivocal endorsement of the (largely white) student protest movement and broaden the interpretive lens through which we examine the black students’ actions she rather hastily disavows. Baldwin helps us get at the

¹⁸⁶ See also Michael D. Burroughs, “Hannah Arendt, ‘Reflections on Little Rock,’ and White Ignorance,” *Critical Philosophy of Race* 3, no. 1 (2015). Burroughs makes an interesting analysis of various interpretations of Arendt’s thoughts on race and racism. He labels past analyses as “categorical” (focusing on Arendt’s misapplication of categories), “racial prejudice” (focusing on Arendt’s apparent prejudice toward black people and culture), and “cultural” (focusing on Arendt’s immigrant misapprehension of her adopted country’s culture) (53–54). He thinks a fuller understanding of Arendt’s writings on race can be found via Charles Mills’ concept of “white ignorance,” which he uses to explain what he sees as “a fundamental epistemic error in her work” (65). He argues that “...Arendt’s work demonstrates a clear pattern of ignoring and remaining indifferent to the social conditions of the poor, the political disenfranchisement of the oppressed, and a reliance on unchallengeable premises informed by the myth of an egalitarian United States” (65). I agree that Arendt’s work suffers from a hubris that never fully realizes how elusive political power is for racial minorities, but it is productive to think with and against her—including her phenomenological distinctions, though perhaps not her “epistemic error” in applying them—as to what conditions might bring this about. I draw on Baldwin for this purpose.

distinction Arendt attempts in a more direct, honest way. He argues that forms of protest can manifest both a concern for a world and a reckoning with what the world is.

First, Baldwin implicitly questions (and in many ways refutes) the arguments Arendt makes about black students. In his essay “To Be Baptized,” he openly challenges one of the premises of Arendt’s arguments, which was that black students were unqualified to be admitted to the universities they were making demands upon, and that their demands would lower educational standards and potentially destroy the space of the university.¹⁸⁷ Here he states:

The [white] future leaders of this country (in principle, anyway) do not impress me as being the intellectual equals of the most despised among us...For it is a very different matter, and results in a very different intelligence, to grow up under the necessity of questioning everything—everything, from the question of one’s identity to the literal, brutal question of how to save one’s life in order to begin to live it. (*CE*, 431)

Here he is questioning both the evaluation of the intelligence of black students and the standards of entry into predominately white institutions. This represents an attempt to shift the perspective on the world that Arendt takes for granted.¹⁸⁸

Additionally, Baldwin shows how whatever “violence” Arendt refers to as having been introduced into the protests by black students reflects not an anti-political threat of force but the pervasive context of violence directed toward black people in the context of racism. On this

¹⁸⁷ Arendt says specifically, “Negro students, the majority of them admitted without academic qualification, regarded and organized themselves as an interest group, the representatives of the black community. Their interest was to lower academic standards” (*CR*, 120). Anne Norton takes these and other passages as evidence for Arendt’s “uncharacteristic, and profound, indifference to the historical record” (248). See Anne Norton, “Heart of Darkness: Africa and African Americans in the Writing of Hannah Arendt,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

¹⁸⁸ Arendt cites Bayard Rustin to back up her view that Black students sought to dilute college standards with what he called “soul courses” (*CR*, 191). She elaborates further referring specifically to “Swahili (a nineteenth-century kind of no-language spoken by the Arab ivory and slave caravans,” “African literature, and other nonexistent subjects” in ways that seem incredibly outdated, retrograde, and unjustifiably racist today (*CR*, 192).

account, the distinction between what Arendt saw as a militant, anti-political set of “Negro demands” and what she describes as the “disinterested and usually highly moral claims of the white rebels” begins to break down (*CR*, 121). Baldwin’s perspective helps us to shift the way in which Arendt characterizes worldly and political action, because he reminds us in ways that resonate with contemporary political struggles and the contemporary contexts of direct state violence (and of indirectly state-sanctioned violence) toward its black citizens. He says for instance:

... black men and boys are being murdered here today, in cold blood, and with impunity ... the rhetoric of a [John] Stennis, a [Lester] Maddox, a [George] Wallace, historically and actually, has brought death to untold numbers of black people and it was meant to bring death to them ... Now, in the interest of the public peace, it is the Black Panthers who are being murdered in their beds, by the dutiful and zealous police. But, for a policeman, all black men, especially young black men, are probably Black Panthers and all black and women and children are probably allied with them: just as, in a Vietnamese village, the entire population, men, women and children, are considered as probably Vietcong. (*CE*, 433)

In such a context, where the ostensibly “political” world is lived not as a public space of freedom but as a siege, an occupation, we need to move beyond the ideal characterizations and categorizations of properly political questions and properly political actions offered by Arendt. A love of the world, under these circumstances, may manifest quite differently than Arendt idealized.

Take for instance Baldwin’s discussion of the different circumstances faced by white and black protestors, where he draws another set of characteristic distinctions. He argues first that white activists acted “out of profound desire to be saved, to *live*,” and thus engaged in “egging on the blacks” (*CE*, 470). What this argument attempts to relate is how, for many white activists, the engagement in the public sphere, echoing the characteristic “moral motives” already attested to by Arendt, was in service of personal fulfillment, expiation, “private happiness or

unhappiness,” in the worlds of Baldwin (*CE*, 470). On the other hand, he argues that black activists were not protesting problems posed by conscience. For them, political action presented itself not as a solution to a moral conundrum about how to live with oneself, but as an existential imperative about how to stay alive, of the necessity for political power to achieve autonomy and redress. He sums up the difficulty faced by black activists in attempting a politics of solidarity with white activists under conditions of racism, and he employs language reminiscent of Arendt’s discussion of the need for political actors to guard their passion for the world in order not to succumb to modern anti-political conditions.¹⁸⁹ Here Baldwin says of black activists working with white counterparts: “They had to be aware that this troubled white person might suddenly decide not to be in trouble and go home—and when he went home, he would be the enemy ... True rebels, after all, are as rare as true lovers, and, in both cases, to mistake a fever for a passion can destroy one’s life” (*CE*, 470).

The difficulty Arendt had in seeing black student mobilizations as equally exemplary as the white student mobilizations hinges on the difference between politics generated from conscience and politics generated from fighting for one’s life. Whereas Baldwin connects these two impulses rather seamlessly, Arendt is much more cautious, given all the dangers she associates with the intrusion of a determinate moral logic, and the exigencies of life and death, into the plural space of politics. She judges the white students’ actions as exemplary because they were “disinterested,” meaning that although they were motivated by justice and sought specific social goals (income inequality, discrimination), the meaning of their actions was not exhausted by these considerations. She describes their actions in language similar to her

¹⁸⁹ See Arendt: “Only those who can endure the passion of living under desert conditions can be trusted to summon up in themselves the courage that lies at the root of action, of becoming an active being” (*TPP*, 202).

description of the principle of solidarity (*CR*, 121, 203).¹⁹⁰ Black students, on Arendt's account, were specifically not "disinterested." They had organized themselves "as an interest group" that made demands backed up by "verbal or actual violence" instead of engaging in "participatory democracy" (*CR*, 120–21). Her interpretation of their actions aligns with her description of the principle of rage.¹⁹¹ All this is to say that Arendt judges white students as enacting world-building principles, while she judges Black students as enacting world-destructive ones.

Baldwin is much better equipped to see the way that the black students' fight was rooted in an attempt to be recognized as fully in the world, recognition that Arendt's judgment seems to have taken for granted. Arendt argues, "in politics not life but the world is at stake" (*BPF*, 155). Baldwin insists that life is at stake, too. Speaking directly to the experiences of Arendt and at precisely the same time as she was writing about race relations and violence, he says, "Now, exactly like the Germans at the time of the Third Reich, though innocent men are being harassed, jailed, and murdered, in all the Northern cities, the citizens know nothing, and wish to know nothing, of what is happening around them" (*CE*, 454).¹⁹² This judgment is perhaps as strong

¹⁹⁰ Recall also Arendt's discussion of solidarity as the political alternative to pity: "For solidarity, because it partakes of reason, and hence of generality, is able to comprehend a multitude conceptually, not only the multitude of a class or a nation or a people, but eventually all mankind. But this solidarity, though it may be aroused by suffering, is not guided by it, and it comprehends the strong and the rich no less than the weak and the poor ..." (*OR*, 79).

¹⁹¹ Cf. Arendt's discussion of *les enragés* of the French Revolution: "It is indeed as though the forces of the earth were allied in benevolent conspiracy with this uprising, whose end is impotence, whose principle is rage, and whose conscious aim is not freedom but life and happiness" (*OR*, 103).

¹⁹² Compare to Arendt's analysis of racial violence in the 1960s: she thought (somewhat naively, it seems safe to say now) that racism was more a result of black rioting than its cause, and that racial ideologies were more dangerous as potential justifications for police violence than in creating its conditions. She writes, "...an escalation of the violence in the streets may bring about a truly racist ideology to justify it ... In this still unlikely case, the climate of opinion in the country might deteriorate to the point where a majority of its citizens would be willing to pay the

now as ever as black political activism attempts to make these sorts of disparities (which undeniably still exist) clear and actionable. In so doing, they help to reveal the life and death stakes involved in making a shared political world possible. They insist that a world premised on freedom relies on the equal regard for the lives of its members. We see this type of activism resurgent again today in the insistence on “the validity of Black life” and “a world where Black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise,” an insistence that makes explicit the connection between life and the world, and is indeed “a necessary prerequisite for” a world that can be shared with others.¹⁹³

The Contemporary Movement for Black Lives

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement began in the aftermath of the murder of Trayvon Martin and the subsequent acquittal of his killer, George Zimmerman.¹⁹⁴ While its first appearance online immediately ignited a social media phenomenon, it was always rooted in pre-existing anti-racist activist networks. The media hashtag, #blacklivesmatter, grew out of conversations among Patricia Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi, and it was in many ways simply the latest reflection of their ongoing activism and organizing work in their communities.¹⁹⁵ They successfully leveraged their online presence and social media networking to share political content, connect, and organize with others. In turn, they were able to convert feelings of shock, sadness, and outrage around the ongoing litany of extrajudicial black killings

price of the invisible terror of a police state for law and order in the streets. What we have now, a kind of police backlash, quite brutal and highly visible, is nothing of the sort” (CR, 174).

¹⁹³ Black Lives Matter Website, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/about/> and <http://blacklivesmatter.com/guidingprinciples/>

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Garza, Alicia, and L.A. Kauffman. “A Love Note to our Folks.” *n+1*, 20 January 2015, <https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/a-love-note-to-our-folks/>.

into action in the world.¹⁹⁶

Garza describes this ongoing intervention into the political sphere as one that seeks to address the very basic insecurity of black people in a world marked by disparate patterns of racial violence.¹⁹⁷ On her account, “Black Lives Matter” is a political claim. It demands both the recognition that black presence is important and a “fight for survival” to prevent the normalization of violence against black bodies.¹⁹⁸ What she sees this fight necessitating, in addition to concrete action on the part of elected officials and state institutions, is a recognition of the basic value of black life, a simple affirmation of the equal worth of black people in the face of often enormous and unequal difficulties. This is why she describes the work of #blacklivesmatter both online and in direct action as the expression of a “deep love for our people,” that fundamentally the BLM movement “is a love note to our folks.”¹⁹⁹

How this relates to Arendt’s concept of *amor mundi* and to Baldwin’s further articulation of political love is complex but fruitful. The Black Lives Matter movement is not a paradigmatic exemplar of love of the world as Arendt understood it. As I have argued, Arendt was deeply troubled by the dangerous effects on the public space of politics whenever love for a specific group of people was invoked or brought into public discourse. However, with Baldwin’s insights, we can begin to see how BLM (like Teachers for Social Justice) is engaged in a politics that seeks to care for a public world—namely, one in which black people can appear and matter.

BLM activists engage in what Laura Grattan calls a “poetics of love” that serves to hold

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

out hope for a truly shared political world.²⁰⁰ Grattan links this notion of love to James Baldwin as well as Audre Lorde, specifically their discussion in “Revolutionary Hope” about the basic human desire to protect our loved ones.²⁰¹ That desire—and who is and is not positioned to adequately express it—reflects, for Baldwin and Lorde, the inaccessibility of the American Dream as a social and political project under conditions of racial violence and inequality.²⁰² Grattan argues that BLM activists embody these sorts of insights as they perform love through various forms of protests. This occurs, for instance, not only in the way they draw attention to and face down “the routine devaluation of black life in the U.S.,” but also by enacting representations of black love, over social media and in direct action, as a way “to intensify attachments to the dream of a world in which black lives flourish” and “to foster the durable relationships” needed to keep fighting.²⁰³

This argument for the role of love is not solely an argument that either emphasizes the interpersonal bonds that underwrite politics or one that sees love as a basic human capacity to be politically encouraged. Shatema Threadcraft draws on Martha Nussbaum in applying these two arguments about love to the racial justice concerns like those of Black Lives Matter. She argues that, on the one hand, following Nussbaum’s emphasis on basic human capacities we can see how “in order to be afforded equal concern and respect, community members must be able to have attachments to things outside themselves and not have their ‘emotional development

²⁰⁰ Laura Grattan, “Audre Lorde and the Poetics of Love in the Movement for Black Lives,” in *American Political Thought: An Alternative View*, ed. Jonathan Keller and Alex Zamalin (New York: Routledge, 2017), 51.

²⁰¹ James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, “Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde,” *Essence* 15, no. 8 (1984).

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Grattan, “Audre Lorde and the Poetics of Love,” 51.

blighted by fear and anxiety.”²⁰⁴ And she also argues that, on the other hand, love is essential to theorizing how political bonds are rooted in something more than the “competitive cooperation” inherent in instrumentalist versions of liberal contractarianism.²⁰⁵ As Threadcraft puts it, “...it is Nussbaum’s approach that places black bodily integrity (as well as blacks’ ability to form emotional attachments to partners, dependents, and intimates) on equal footing with the ability of blacks to control their material and political environments in securing equal concern and respect.”²⁰⁶

I agree with Threadcraft that both a capacities approach to questions of justice and the underlying role of love as fellow-feeling or social capital in (liberal) politics help a great deal to our understanding of the normative dimensions of race politics. However, I also argue that the actions of Black Lives Matter should be read alongside Baldwin’s insights, so that we might see the power of love as a catalyst of imaginative feeling, of new tastes with which to judge the world. In this way we can see BLM as deploying forms of love both as a catalyst for action in the world and as a semiotic force to re-vision the world. Their actions interrupt the regularity of the social world and transform them into political spaces: stopping traffic, protesting centers of commerce, interrupting brunch service at restaurants, and even interrupting narratives around black victims of violence through social media campaigns.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Shatema Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 143.

²⁰⁵ Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice*, 138.

²⁰⁶ Threadcraft, *Intimate Justice*, 144.

²⁰⁷ See for instance, Emily Badger, “Why Highways Have Become the Center of Civil Rights Protest,” *Washington Post*, 13 July 2016; Kim Janssen et al., “About 100 ‘Black Christmas’ Protesters Block Shoppers on Mag Mile,” *Chicago Tribune*, 24 December 2015; Jordan Owen, “Police Violence Protesters ‘Crash’ Brunch at North Side Restaurants,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1

These BLM actions engage in a rhetoric of love in order to make black life (and its destruction) politically visible. This implies more than just a claim about the capacity to protect loved ones and its importance for political community. It is an attempt to re-assert and reclaim a visibility that is not always already racially prefigured. To use Arendt's vocabulary, these actions seek to make black bodies appear in public not as the "what" of a "hyper-visible" yet unequal racial category, but as a "who" that is disclosed in action, that is seen for once on new terms, as equals in the world.²⁰⁸ They do this by working to dramatize and make apparent the contingency and tragedies of black life in America, providing an immediate referent with which to reorient our imaginative judgment.²⁰⁹

Arendt herself says that "where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle ... truthfulness as such, unsupported by the distorting forces of power and interest,

January 2016; Bill Chappell, "People Wonder: 'If They Gunned Me Down,' What Photo Would Media Use?" *NPR*, 11 August 2014.

²⁰⁸ It's worth noting that Arendt sees this conundrum of visibility as one of racism's pernicious political effects. This is why, for instance, in "Reflections on Little Rock" she writes, "Negroes stand out because of their 'visibility' ... the Negroes' visibility is unalterable and permanent. This is not a trivial matter. In the public realm, where nothing counts that cannot make itself seen and heard, visibility and audibility are of prime importance. To argue that they are merely exterior appearances is to beg the question. For it is precisely appearances that 'appear' in public, and inner qualities, gifts of heart or mind, are political only to the extent that their owner wishes to expose them in public, to place them in the limelight of the marketplace" (*RJ*, 199). Recall also Bickford, "In the Presence of Others."

²⁰⁹ As Grattan points out in "Audre Lorde and Poetics of Love," Nussbaum in "Political Emotions" similarly discusses a "spirit of love" that helps people engage in a "confrontation with their mortality and finitude" in a way that helps to cultivate in citizens a resistance to both liberal ideals of sovereignty and fantasies of purity involved in ethno-nationalism (44–45). However, I tend to agree with Grattan that Nussbaum, as much as she sees a need for emotions like love to buttress Rawlsian-contractualist notions of liberal politics, ultimately misses the ways in which love (as exemplified in Baldwin, BLM, and even Arendt) serves to fundamentally interrupt and re-premise this order. On the account that I am describing, love does not serve to reconcile the individual's private will to the prevailing political order, it serves to re-center the political order around direct participatory action and articulation of group interests.

[can] become a political factor of the first order” (*BPF*, 247). If we consider systemic misrecognition of oppression as a form of lying, then Baldwin and the BLM’s invocation of the *fact* of oppression, its *lived* experiences, shares similarities with what Arendt calls “truthtelling” (*BPF*, 247). Their insistence on the bare fact that violence has and continues to occur is, to use Arendt’s phrase, a set of “unwelcome facts” (*BPF*, 236). Such facts, while they normally stand outside of political consideration, take on a political character when they help us grasp a reality that has been obscured by structural and overt forms of racism and other inequalities.

To deny or subordinate the fact of racial violence is to disengage politics from reality. Arendt consistently recognized this. Recall that in her writings on Jewish identity, she argues time and again that Jews should recognize themselves and fight “as Jews” (*JW*, 164). For Arendt, it is clearly not an insistence on recognizing the fact of identity that is problematic to politics. What is problematic for her is clinging to abstract notions of rights in political contexts where they have effectively vanished, or to rally around notions of love that oscillate between politically sterility and anti-political hysteria. Using the fantasy of rights to orient oneself in the world is to reject one’s persecuted identity in favor of an abstract (as opposed to politically organized) equality, and Arendt calls this the “superiority of a more or less well-equipped cloud-cuckoo-land” (*MDT*, 18). Likewise, Arendt thought it a fantasy that group love could serve as a substitute for political contestation. In between these two extremes, BLM, read with Baldwin, is similar to what Arendt finds exemplary in the “conscious pariah,” those “who insist on telling the truth, even to the point of indecency,” and gain social opprobrium but also a “priceless advantage,” namely, the ability to engage in the politics of a common world (*JW*, 274).²¹⁰ In this

²¹⁰ See Baldwin’s only known statement responding to Arendt’s letter to him (that I know of) in Fred L. Stanley and Louis H. Pratt, *Conversations with James Baldwin* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 75. Here he says, “Hannah Arendt told me that the virtues I

way, they too, enact a love of the world.

The Council Form as a Site of Amor Mundi

A final and particularly interesting context that Arendt points to as a potential site where a love of the world becomes manifest occurs in her writings on revolutionary councils. In this section, I examine Arendt's endorsement of the council form and how this endorsement fits with her discussion of other political forms like protest groups. Whereas protest groups seem to represent for her a love of the world in the context of normal (mass) politics, she associates the ideal of a council system with grassroots as opposed to mass politics, particularly during those extraordinary political moments such as occur during revolution. Lastly, I will offer a final comparison between Arendt and Baldwin in terms of the substance of their political vision. While it seems with the councils that Arendt offers a more substantive vision of the political form a love of the world might take—as opposed to the more artistic and critical stance taken by Baldwin—I argue that both authors exemplify a form of judgment that enacts a love of the world.

It is first in *The Human Condition* that Arendt refers specifically to the European revolutions of 1848 and the Hungarian revolution of 1956 as examples of the possibility inherent when groups find themselves in a revolutionary situation and are able to spontaneously organize without regard for “official party programs and ideologies” (*HC*, 216). She calls these historically recurrent episodes, which over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries were primarily led by working-class organizations, “the most promising chapter of recent history” (*HC*, 215). In *On Revolution* she also refers to various examples of revolutionary councils:

described in *The New Yorker* piece—the sensuality I was talking about, and the warmth, and the fish fries, and all that—are typical of all oppressed people. And they don't, unluckily, she said—and I think she's entirely right—survive even five minutes the end of their oppression.”

American town-hall meetings, French *sociétés révolutionnaires*, Russian *soviets*, and German *Räte*.²¹¹ This organizational form is for Arendt part of “the heritage left by no testament” that she finds in the work of poet René Char. That is, it is a political form that arises in periods when a public world breaks through the surface of status quo, and a new constitution of political life is in the offing. It is important for the purposes of this discussion to examine the specific characteristics of revolutionary councils that appealed to Arendt and how, in addition to the way she describes the role of teaching and protest, they too enact a love of the world.

The way that Arendt relates her thoughts about councils to a love of the world is in the function that they serve. In her view, councils make the public space of politics a tangible reality in the lives of citizens. Arendt remained firmly pessimistic about a political system that consigned participation to the ballot box or to party mobilization. Citing Thomas Jefferson’s exhortation to “Love your neighbor as yourself, and your country more than yourself,” Arendt argues that this love of country would always lack substance “unless,” as she puts it, “the ‘country’ could be made as present to the ‘love’ of its citizens as the ‘neighbour’ was to the love of his fellow men” (*OR*, 245). Councils, in this manner, serve to make citizens present to one another for the purpose of public discourse and action, and they rely on this kind of love that comes into being whenever citizens come together in this manner. This is why, perhaps, they become the occasion of some of Arendt’s most enthusiastic and imaginative writing, even if, as she describes them, the council form remains an ever-distant and always short-lived possibility in human history.

Arendt’s most extended and sustained commentary on her ideas about the council system

²¹¹ Indeed, Arendt says that “Both Jefferson’s plan [for ‘elementary republics’ or wards] and the French *sociétés révolutionnaires* anticipated with an utmost weird precision those councils, *soviets*, and *Räte*, which were to make their appearance in every genuine revolution throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (*OR*, 241).

comes in her article titled “Totalitarian Imperialism.”²¹² There she describes the characteristics that distinguish councils from other forms of political institutions. Namely, she argues that the Hungarian revolution occurred “spontaneously,” growing out of a small student movement into a full-fledged revolution in the span of hours, and she argues that it was motivated by principles of freedom that transcended any ideological “programs, points or manifestos.”²¹³ For Arendt this illustrates the way in which a desire for a political world, for freedom, remains latent, needing only the spark of political action to stir up a broad-based popular mobilization. It also shows for her the way the stupor of ideology can evaporate when the reality of the world reasserts itself as people come together to occupy public space.²¹⁴

What is also crucial for Arendt is that these episodes show how naturally the council form arises in the absence of party and state apparatuses that recede during popular mobilization. Far from leading to anarchic looting and violence, she says that during the Hungarian Revolution there persisted an “atmosphere of fraternity” from beginning to end.²¹⁵ This “fraternity,” which in other contexts she argues is deadly for politics (particularly in her analysis of the French Revolution), does not draw her criticism here. This seems to be because this atmosphere was, for Arendt, the *product* of political action, similar to the “public happiness” she says the American founders discovered in political action. It was not, as it was in her account French Revolution, the *premise* of politics, one that would unite the people into one General Will (*OR*, 68). With the council form, fraternity arises out of the experience of plurality, political speech and deed in the

²¹² Arendt, “Ideology and Terror.”

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

absence of party ideologies and group interests.

The councils, on this account, are able to elicit this fraternity, this “spirit,” because they allow people to have direct, on-going engagement in various facets of their public lives (instead of the mere selection of representatives every few years), and because councils are chosen from the bottom-up (instead of by a top-down party hierarchy).²¹⁶ Arendt relates, for instance, that during the Hungarian Revolution councils formed around pre-existing networks of neighborhoods, revolutionary activists, “writers and artists,” “students and youth,” military personnel, “civil servants,” “workers,” and others, which allowed for a more direct form of popular representation and participation.²¹⁷ Moreover, she argues that these councils were selected not on the basis of party or ideological affiliation, but that they were decided in regards to the specific individual in question and those qualities (“personal integrity, courage and judgment”) that they had revealed in the course of acting and discussing the issues at hand.²¹⁸ These features allow the councils to preserve for as long as they can, the “lost treasure” of direct political engagement. This lost treasure Arendt associates specifically with the failure to institutionalize direct public engagement in the American Constitution and also in the broader suppression of revolutionary councils throughout history.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” 30–31.

²¹⁷ Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” 31.

²¹⁸ Arendt, “Ideology and Terror,” 30.

²¹⁹ In *On Revolution* Arendt counts the American Revolution, the Parisian Commune of 1871, and the Russian Revolution as examples of the ways in which revolutionary, direct public action is abandoned and suppressed. In the American context, “Only the representatives of the people, not the people themselves, had an opportunity to engage in those activities of ‘expressing, discussing, and deciding’ which in a positive sense are the activities of freedom” (*OR*, 227). She argues that even Marx ultimately concluded that the Commune’s councils “were, after all, only temporary organs of the revolution” (*OR*, 249). Finally she notes the irony of how Lenin could lead a revolution with the slogan “All power to the *soviets* [councils],” and yet, when they

Councils for Arendt thus appear as the quintessential exemplar of her political imaginary, the clearest example she gives of a love of the world put into action. They become for her a vessel for her hopes of rekindling the revolutionary spirit, a return to principles of action inspired by a love of the world. Councils are an illustration of this love that she sees as appearing time and again throughout history as a reminder of our power to organize and constitute ourselves under the banner of freedom. However, as hopeful as these reminders are, Arendt herself recognizes that more often than not, they are quite fleeting. Certainly one need only look to the Arab Spring revolutions, the brief experiences of the Popular Committees in Cairo, and the general assemblies of the Occupy Movement for recent examples of their short-lived nature.²²⁰ Nonetheless, for Arendt and for the many admirers of these political manifestations, the meaning of the council form of politics far outshines and outlives its practical significance. As Arendt puts it, “The good things in history are usually of very short duration, but afterward have a decisive influence on what happens over long periods of time” (*CR*, 204).

Baldwin is largely silent on the question of councils as they are theorized by Arendt. However, his discussions of White Citizens’ Councils and the Black Panthers reveals the difficulty of ever achieving truly shared political councils in the American context. He makes it clear that councils in the American context have often been racially motivated, either as criminal conspiracies in the case of the White Citizens’ Councils or as survival strategies in the case of

bridled against his party system, he could move immediately to liquidate them (*OR*, 250). She concludes of this “lost treasure,” “So great is the fear of men, even of the most radical and least conventional among them, of things never seen, of thoughts never thought, of institutions never tried before” (*OR*, 250).

²²⁰ Cf. Hatem M. Hassan, “Extraordinary Politics of Ordinary People: Explaining the Microdynamics of Popular Committees in Revolutionary Cairo,” *International Sociology* 30, no. 4 (2015); William A. Gamson and Micah L. Sifry, “The #Occupy Movement: An Introduction,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2013).

the Black Panthers.²²¹ This points to a continuing difficulty for Arendt's concept of a love of the world, which is supposed to foster a shared politics under conditions of race and other forms of inequality. It is why she writes to Karl Jaspers that "America has a real 'race' problem, and not just a racial ideology."²²² Because inequality maps onto racial discrimination so profoundly, it becomes difficult to bridge the entrenched ideological cleavages that thrive in such contexts, and when people cannot speak to one another outside of these cleavages then "word and deed part company," and we disclose not individual selves but worldviews, worldviews that explain away the need for political debate and judgment (*HC*, 200). This is why Arendt's discussions of race politics seem to equivocate between constitutional redress (such as she suggested for black citizens), a more militant stance (such as she offered to Jewish refugees), and dismissiveness (of social discrimination she considered politically inconsequential, as seen in her reaction to school integration).²²³

This is perhaps one reason why, by the time "Civil Disobedience" was published many

²²¹ Baldwin calls the White Citizens' Councils "pathological," "working against and outside" the law, while he says that the Black Panthers were neither illegal nor lawless, but were "a great force of peace and stability in the ghetto," (*CE*, 210, 455). However he continues, "as this [Panther action and popular support] suggests an unprecedented amount of autonomy for the ghetto citizens, no one in authority is prepared to face this overwhelming fact" (*CE*, 210, 455).

²²² See Kohler and Saner, eds., *Arendt/Jaspers Correspondence*, 31. Arendt writes, "The fundamental contradiction in this country is the coexistence of political freedom and social oppression. The latter is, as I've already indicated, not total; but it is dangerous because the society organizes and orients itself along 'racial lines.' ... This racial issue has to do with a person's country of origin, but it is greatly aggravated by the Negro question; that is, America has a real 'race' problem and not just a racial ideology" (31). Benhabib, *Reluctant Modernism*, new edition: Benhabib responds to this exchange by pointing out that it shows how Arendt mistook both the ways political freedom and social oppression do not, in fact, coexist and the reasons for this "problem." Benhabib argues that Arendt fails to see "that it is not racism as such but a racially based condition of social slavery that marks relations between white and black people in North America..." (153).

²²³ See *CR*, 91, "The Jewish War That Isn't Happening," and "The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition" (*JW*, 160, 297), and "Reflections on Little Rock" (*RJ*, 204).

years after her reflections on the Hungarian revolution, Arendt seems more interested in the role of what she calls “voluntary associations.” She describes these, following de Tocqueville, as “*ad-hoc* organizations that pursue short-term goals and disappear when the goal has been reached” (CR, 95). Instead of critiquing these associations for their partiality, she looks to the possibilities afforded by associations that even *she* admits “seem to have been formed only for the protection of special interests, of pressure groups...” (CR, 96). Nonetheless, she does see in these associations parallels to the council form. For her, both councils and associations represent organic political action that spring up outside of party and other apparatuses (“voluntary associations are not parties”). They both conserve the model of mutual promising that is the bedrock of all political association. They also both preserve the basic plurality of their participants—the councils create a space for pluralistic engagement, while associations allow their concerns to enter into such spaces they would otherwise be denied.²²⁴ And while Arendt agrees that voluntary associations, groups she also describes as “organized minorities,” represent an “elemental danger” to the idea of a mutual contract at the heart of the American Constitution, she sees them as a beneficial bulwark against majority tyranny.²²⁵ Even given the dangerous organized dissent and disobedience they can bring to bear, she nonetheless ultimately argues that they should be instituted within government as permanent watchdogs against the overreach of the majority (CR, 101).

²²⁴ Arendt argues that such mutual association groups will only become dangerous “if the original contractual model of the associations—mutual promises with the moral imperative *pacta sunt servanda*—should be lost” (CR, 97). She says this happens “when an association is no longer capable or willing to unite ‘into one channel the efforts of *divergent* minds’” (CR, 98).

²²⁵ Arendt quotes Toqueville here, stating “‘the liberty of association has become a necessary guarantee against the tyranny of the majority,’ that ‘a dangerous expedient is used to obviate a still more formidable danger,’ and, finally, that ‘it is by the enjoyment of dangerous freedom that the Americans learn the art of rendering the dangers of freedom less formidable’” (CR, 97).

Arendt seems to have realized in her move toward institutionalizing space for participatory action within normal/liberal politics that there are practical difficulties with the council form. Other potential practical difficulties with the ideal of councils includes research that associates non-partisan political deliberation with technocratic governance, which often lacks substantive contention and participation.²²⁶ Research also indicates that parties are associated with greater predictability and transparency in policy formation and selection than individualist representation.²²⁷ Moreover, it is unclear whether or not non-partisan councils can ever really be described as non-partisan as many ideological divisions persist even in ostensibly non-partisan institutions and contexts.²²⁸ There is also research suggesting that non-partisan elections can often exacerbate already existing demographic disparities.²²⁹

There is, of course, more work to be done in identifying the practical concerns of instituting Arendt's ideal of grassroots councils.²³⁰ However, for Arendt the normative import of the councils and the world-building principles they manifest is something more meaningful than can be revealed by their empirical practicality. In describing the councils she is engaged in a type

²²⁶ Russell Muirhead, "A Defense of Party Spirit," *Perspectives on Politics* 4, no. 4 (2006).

²²⁷ Ann-Kristin Kölln, "The Value of Political Parties to Representative Democracy," *European Political Science Review* 7, no. 4 (2015).

²²⁸ Cf. Chris Tausanovitch and Christopher Warshaw, "Representation in Municipal Government," *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 3 (2014); Gerald C. Wright and Brian F. Schaffner, "The Influence of Party: Evidence from the State Legislatures," *American Political Science Review* 96, no. 2 (2002).

²²⁹ Cf. Monika K. McDermott, "Race and Gender Cues in Low-Information Elections," *Political Research Quarterly* 51 (1998); Craig M. Burnett and Vladimir Kogan, "Do Nonpartisan Ballots Racialize Candidate Evaluations? Evidence from 'Who Said What?' Experiments," 2017.

²³⁰ There is, nonetheless, evidence that citizens do desire opportunities for political deliberation, particularly when it is uncoupled from party politics. See Michael A. Neblo et al., "Who Wants To Deliberate—And Why?" *American Political Science Review* 104, no. 3 (2010).

of judging storytelling, which as Lisa Disch describes, “is ‘more truth’ than fact.”²³¹ In so doing, Arendt attempts to communicate not an objective fact, but a critical understanding of the meaning of certain set of facts. This storytelling, particularly the narration of the historical recurrences of the councils, is intimately connected to a love of the world. This is because it is through these historical narratives that we become able to judge the world, neither despairing of our freedom nor forgetting its possibilities.²³² In other words, when we reflect on the judgments of the storyteller, their stories, their narrations, we experience a “reconciliation with reality” that helps us to accept the world as it is and gain the capacity to judge freely in turn. This is the reason that Ronald Beiner specifically ties Arendt’s description of this type of storytelling to her notion of a love of the world.²³³ He argues that the judging involved in Arendt’s storytelling serves, on her account, to affirm the world and our place in it—that without stories like the councils and other exemplars of “the miraculousness of human freedom,” we might perceive the present as meaningless and the future as futile.²³⁴

To this end, both Arendt and Baldwin act as “storytellers,” piecing together relevant facts to create narratives that help us to understand and judge events in the world. However, with the history she describes of grassroots councils, Arendt goes further than Baldwin in describing a

²³¹ Lisa Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 140.

²³² “The political function of the storyteller—historian or novelist—is to teach acceptance of things as they are. Out of this acceptance, which can also be called truthfulness, arises the faculty of judgment...” (*BPF*, 258).

²³³ Beiner quotes from Arendt’s unpublished lectures stating, “This formulation [of judgment as storytelling that reconciles us to the world] is suggested by a phrase that recurs several times in Arendt’s unpublished lectures, ... ‘Amo: volo ut sis,’ to love is, in effect, to say ‘I want you to be’...It is by judging that ‘we confirm the world and ourselves’; with the faculties given us, ‘we make ourselves at home in the world’” (*LKPP*, 154).

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

concrete scaffold upon which to enact a love of the world. While Baldwin does write about his involvement with specific social movement organizations like the NAACP, the Nation of Islam, the Black Panthers, and CORE, he remains agnostic on the form politics guided by a shared love of the world might take. He contends that his role is that of the artist, one that must remain individual and critical as opposed to being “responsible” for the world. He writes, “I love America more than any country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually” (CE, 9, 670).²³⁵ It is as if the key difference between the two on the question of love’s political form is that Arendt consistently searches for the necessary worldly conditions for shared freedom whereas Baldwin searches for those conditions’ necessary affective underpinnings.²³⁶

Arendt’s judgment of the councils helps bridge the gap Baldwin describes between the artist and the responsible citizen, and in this manner they help explicate a concrete political form that grows spontaneously between people who are no longer alienated from the world. This is the significance of Arendt’s use of René Char’s poetry: “*Notre héritage n’est precede d’aucun testament*—‘our inheritance was left to us by no testament’” (BPF, 3). Arendt’s judgment of the councils shows that our heritage is our ability to begin anew, that our ability to act and to judge,

²³⁵ “The artist is distinguished from all the other responsible actors in society—the politicians, legislators, educators, scientists, et cetera—by the fact that he is his own test tube, his own laboratory, working according to very rigorous rules, however unstated these may be, and cannot allow any consideration to supersede his responsibility to reveal all that he can possibly discover concerning the mystery of the human being” (CE, 670).

²³⁶ Even when Baldwin discusses the concrete organizing of a specific social movement organization as he does when he interviews and recounts meetings of CORE members in Tallahassee, Florida, his emphasis is not, primarily, the way the group was organized, the way the meetings were run, their fundamental principles, or other institutional characteristics. He focuses primarily on the backgrounds of participants, the manner in which they approach problems across clear racial tensions, the psychological barriers to black and white students coming to see one another truly as equals. See “They Can’t Turn Back” (CE, 633–37).

our political freedom, remain possible, even in the darkest of times (*BPF*, 3). Armed with this world-redeeming set of histories, Arendt is perhaps romantically enthusiastic, but this hope remains tempered by her analysis of modernity and its conditions. Nonetheless, she claims these events as meaningful reminders of our democratic heritage, our ability—if we dare—to make ourselves at home in the world. A love of the world, borne of these reflections, keeps her optimistic. As she puts it “...if you ask me now what prospect [the council-state] has of being realized, then I must say to you: Very slight, if at all. And yet perhaps, after all—in the wake of the next revolution” (*CR*, 233).

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

A Love of the World: Necessary but Not Sufficient

This study began as an attempt to understand the relationship between Arendt's at times equivocal discussions of love with her freedom-centered political thought. Inspired by the at times puzzling ways Arendt writes about love—both its importance and its dangers—I have attempted to not only uncover and articulate what her approach was to love and politics but to examine as well both its importance and important drawbacks to contemporary politics. By using this lens to examine Arendt's political thought, not only do her thoughts about love become more coherent, but her overall approach to political freedom becomes more readily apparent. Indeed, beginning with my examination of Arendt's concept of world, I locate a normative ethos of love towards the political world as the fundamental assumption and animating perspective of her thought. This helps to explain the centrality of the world as a space of appearances to her conception of politics, and it provides a rationale for Arendt's varied descriptions of the multiple threats against that space.

In the process of uncovering and examining this normative ethos of love, a love of the world, I have ultimately moved away from an attempt to just make sense of Arendt's concept. While evaluating both her vigorous warnings and her limited praise of love's political relevance, I have also attempted to critically assess the theoretical and practical value her concept might offer. Theoretically, I argue that Arendt's concept helps to provide important normative clarity to the way we think about political institutions and the many barriers to active political participation in modern liberal democracies. Practically, I argue that the concept helps us judge more astutely

the roots of contemporary democratic malaise and authoritarianism.

However, using the work of her contemporary James Baldwin as a guide, I also offer an important immanent critique of Arendt's approach to love and the political world. Namely, I argue that her approach presupposes an agreement about what the world looks like—who gets seen and heard—that belies the deep divisions that continue to frustrate pluralist politics. The work of James Baldwin is thus particularly significant for my study. Baldwin acknowledges in many ways Arendt's understanding of the role of love and its attendant passions for politics, both their importance and their risks. As such, he is uniquely situated to use the question of racism as a critical test not only to help us see the misplaced assumptions of Arendt's approach, but to attempt to extend it in ways that make it both more cognizant of the affective underpinnings of political recognition and more legible to contemporary political movements.

I argue that Baldwin does this by helping us rethink and reorder the way we form political judgments. I offer a reading of Baldwin that articulates an account of judgment emphasizes the role of feeling, of imaginatively reckoning with the tragic contingency and historical oppression that characterizes our shared world. Armed with this critical perspective I then inspect specific sites that Arendt illustrates where a love of the world is made manifest: education, protest, and grassroots political councils. When examined in this way, I argue that these sites become even more powerful illustrations of the possibilities that a love of the world can make to contemporary political contestation. That is, when viewed with Baldwin's insights, a love of the world can serve both to imagine and sustain new political movements and new political forms.

Following this trajectory, I have argued here that a love of the world is necessary in order to enable the types of politics—the world-building action and judgment—that maintain a space

of political freedom. On the one hand, a love of the world is necessary because it motivates the mutual promising and forgiving Arendt identifies as the practices that create and sustain political communities (*HC*, 243–44). On the other hand, it is also crucial in inspiring principled action that politically builds up the world and also endures its uncontrollable outcomes while continuing to act. Baldwin’s political love shares similarities to Arendt’s, and I have argued that it extends her account by showing how love helps to sustain the articulation and re-articulation of a shared community sense. Such a community sense, a common taste, forms the context of our political judgments, and by interrogating it in light of a love of the world, our political possibilities can change and evolve. I have also shown how this political love can be deployed through progressive education practices, political protest and organizing, and through grassroots councils and other forms of direct deliberative institutions. However, even if what I have argued in this study is persuasive, that there is a form of love crucial for democratic politics, surely such a form of love is not sufficient, in and of itself, to the great task of re-building and re-animating participatory politics in late modernity.

I maintain then, following both Arendt and Baldwin, that there is a form of love that lies at the heart of pluralist, democratic politics, that it animates and preserves a world in which freedom can appear and endure. However, this love, an internal desire for a public space of shared politics, is certainly not the only ingredient of political action. It needs political actors who share it, who make it manifest, who act in the world. A love of the world can be sparked in the imagination; it can begin to be felt as we “think what we are doing” (*HC*, 5). It can be fanned and kindled through the experiences of educating students toward a common world and in organizing around common interests. However, a love of the world can only truly shine forth through action in public. *Amor mundi* serves as the inspirational background for the type of

action that builds up the world, but that does not mean that politics is simply coterminous with a love felt in its most elevated affective register. As Arendt says, “to *be* free and to act are the same,” so we need not simply think of politics as wholly circumscribed by those acts which directly embody a love of the world and invoke world-building principles (*BPF*, 151). What Arendt calls “the web of human relations” is too large and variegated, its plurality too deep to consider political action only in its highest ideal.

Moreover, what motivates us to act can come in many guises: a feeling of moral outrage, a new idea, a desire to stand out, even the love of friends or family. Arendt herself concedes that “every deed has its motives as it has its goal and its principle” (*OR*, 88). The new beginning that action provides, no matter what its intent, provides a window for a space of freedom to appear. My argument here has been to show with Arendt (and further with Baldwin) that in order for that window to be remain open, the action that opens it must build upon a shared world. For Arendt this means we must reconstitute new institutions to facilitate the direct engagement and participation of citizens. As I have tried to show with Baldwin, it also means the cultivation of new, shared tastes. It may of course also require new interventions into the economic relationships that can invariably condition both citizen participation and tastes.²³⁷ In any case, enduring political freedom requires a space, a desire, and others who share in these, but most of

²³⁷ Arendt argues that one option could be further workplace democratization such as seen in worker-owned cooperatives, but she is equivocal about them. In “Totalitarian Imperialism,” published in 1958, she says that while worker’s councils can have a very important political role, their economic role—whether or not workers can run and own their own factories—is an open question. Here she says, “it is quite doubtful whether the political principle of equality and self-rule can be applied to the economic sphere as well,” that historically the economic sphere has been bound up with necessity and that this required masters to function well (29). However, by 1970, when she gives the interview with Adelbert Reif that would be published in *Crises of the Republic* as “Thoughts on Politics and Revolution,” she sounds rather more sanguine. Here she cites East Germany and Yugoslavia as experiments, which, though she admits her impressions are based on “scanty information,” may represent progress towards redefining ownership, to making either capitalism or socialism compatible with freedom (*CR*, 216–17).

all, it requires action.

Barbara Ransby, describing the development of the Black Lives Matter Movement, notes a particular gathering of activists having been titled “Now that We Got Love, What are we going to do?”²³⁸ She uses this as an illustration of the limits of feelings like love (or rage or other affective dispositions)—even when they are invoked as political principles—in the absence of meaningful political action. It is these activists, organizers, and politicians—people willing to build a movement who, in turn, build a world. Arendt likens their efforts, their capacity to bring something utterly new and unique into the world, to what she calls the “power of performing miracles” (*HC*, 247). This power to act, to begin something new, she argues is a power we all possess by virtue of being born, each of us, as new beginning in the world. However, without people willing to actively and publicly engage, advocate, and demonstrate, our politics would give way to unchecked and unquestioned systems of social control.

Seen in this way, political life necessitates a leap of faith into the unknown. This is both its blessing and its curse. How many of us would be able to summon the courage necessary to act, to join with others, if we knew in advance all the possible outcomes our action might effect? Particularly if, realistically speaking, no measurable result (at least in the short-term) is the outcome of the vast majority of political initiatives, we might forever remain paralyzed by inaction, and the gap between mental reflection and action in the world—what Arendt calls “the abyss of freedom”—might appear too wide to bridge (*LOM*, 195–217). And though political actors “know not what they do”—can never know what the outcome of their ventures will be—making mutual promises also adds “islands of certainty” into the future (*EIU*, 23; *HC*, 244). Together, Arendt argues that it is possible to enjoy acting and judging in a shared world, that we

²³⁸ Barbara Ransby, “The Class Politics of Black Lives Matter,” *Dissent* Fall 2015.

need not succumb to paralysis or escapism. This is part of Baldwin's message as well, that too often we evade a reckoning of ourselves in the world, accepting "totems" and "taboos" that insulate us from the real freedom we possess (*CE*, 339).

In addition to this courageous leap of faith and the faculties that support it, it is also important to acknowledge other components or conditions of political life that are not directly related to a love of the public world. Arendt, for instance, discusses the role of privacy as a necessary balance to the glare of public life. She argues that privacy has two key "non-privative aspects" (*HC*, 70). The first of these aspects is the simple fact that the private goods we use and consume are more urgently necessary—our lives depend on it—than anything commonly shared in the public sphere (*HC*, 70). The second is that it provides a shelter from the light of the public realm. She says "the four walls of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world," and that without it our lives would become "shallow" (*HC*, 71). These comments go hand in hand with Arendt's view of the need for political actors to be able to balance their public lives with the rhythms of what Ayten Gündoğdu, citing Arendt's descriptions of the benefits of labor, calls "the settled, recurrent, and familiar patterns of ordinary life."²³⁹ No matter how much we love the public, political world, our lives would become one dimensional if we were to attempt to live them always in the public realm.

These further questions into what other values, principles, and actions *fully* constitute political life lie outside the scope of my project and would require much more thought. Instead, what I hope to have shown here is that, even though a love of the world is insufficient by itself, such a love is both a principle and a feeling that animate a world founded for political freedom. As an ideal, our world is constructed as a normal outgrowth of living together in ways that

²³⁹ Ayten Gündoğdu, *Rightlessness in an Age of Rights: Hannah Arendt and the Contemporary Struggles of Migrants* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 135.

maintain spaces where everyone is called to action and judgment in concert. It comes into existence through the articulation of common interests among people whose needs are not so urgent as to overwhelm them and whose inequalities are not so great as to overpower them. Of course, such an ideal is so rare that, historically, it appears rather anomalous. Instead, what typically passes for a politics of freedom is participation by proxy, oligarchic deliberation, and the displacement of common interests by party contestation. Arendt, haunted by the historical experience of totalitarianism, was prescient in articulating both the systemic vulnerabilities that modern, mass politics produces and its effects on our ability to act and judge in the world. Baldwin, I argue, helps to expand these observations by revealing how our evasion of feeling lies at the heart of our inability to judge well and to gain our bearings in the world. He argues that only when we allow ourselves to reckon with tragedy in the world—the avoidance of which he sees illustrated most forcefully in our ongoing histories of racism and racial oppression—will we begin to be able to share fully in the love of freedom Arendt argues require. For both authors this form of love remains the lynchpin of political life. Without it we are held captive by our individual inefficacy and remain at the mercy of increasingly arbitrary institutional authorities.

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