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Amor mundi: Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of world

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Introduction

Integrating phenomenological philosophy, historiography and political theory

At present, few interpretations of Hannah Arendt's work exist that integrate its various dimensions, such as political theory, philosophy, historiography, literary theory and her journalistic work. In this dissertation, I defend an interpretation of her work that does so by elaborating and explicating, on the one hand, her joining of hermeneutic-phenomenological sources and methods, and analyses of individual and shared historical-political experiences, on the other hand. This explication focuses on the pivotal concepts of 'world' and 'worldliness'. My thesis is that Arendt's work contains a mostly implicit but strong and convincing outline of an as yet not elucidated perspective that I call a 'hermeneutic phenomenology of the political'. This perspective may be provisionally described as consisting in concrete analyses of political-historical experiences aiming at understanding the meaning of these experiences. As such, it integrates political theory, historical analysis and phenomenology. This implies both a politicization of hermeneutic phenomenology, and the development of a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective within political theory.

For various reasons, there are few integrated interpretations of Arendt's work.¹ The fact that her oeuvre contains journalistic essays as well as philosophical treatises may be part of the reason. As a consequence of the growing popularity of Arendt's work in academia, many partial studies of particular aspects of her work have emerged, that do not situate them in a broader historical-intellectual framework, nor in the context of her whole oeuvre. Examples include articles on such topics as 'the banality of evil' (*Eichmann in Jerusalem*), Arendt's work on statelessness and human rights (in *The origins of totalitarianism*) and her account of judging.

Another reason for the lack of integrated interpretations is the existence of strong local (national) traditions of scholarship. In his overview of the reception of Arendt's work throughout the world, in particular the US and the European countries, but also in the

¹ One of the few notable exceptions is Canovan, 1992.

Latin-American countries and Japan, Wolfgang Heuer demonstrates that in the US, Arendt's self-chosen country of residence, attention has been largely directed to Arendt's political theory and political science, in particular public space theory, and far less to the philosophical aspects of her work.² For example, in American academia, and in the UK, I would add, Arendt's work is nearly exclusively studied and taught in departments of political science, hardly ever in philosophy departments.³ The near-exclusive stress on analytical philosophy in Anglo-American philosophy departments certainly contributes to this situation. The French reception, on the contrary, has been of a highly philosophical nature.⁴ Finally, although Arendt's thinking is clearly founded in the German philosophical tradition and 20th century German history, German scholars have always had much difficulty with Arendt's work. The main reason, Heuer argues, is the multidisciplinary and eclectic nature and style of Arendt's thinking. Indeed, her style does not exhibit the typical features of the German philosophical style, which is systematic, conceptual and methodic. Also, in particular during her life, her fierce criticism of Marxism did not gain her many friends among the adherents of Critical Theory, the then dominant school of politically engaged philosophy.⁵ And the controversy about her Eichmann-book has raged most passionately in Germany.⁶ Apart from some very exegetical, i.e. Husserlian, articles on Arendt's embeddedness in the phenomenological tradition, we find no integrated hermeneutic-phenomenological interpretations of her work in the country in which this philosophical approach was born.⁷

These local differences point to a more general state of affairs, namely the scarcity of truly interdisciplinary perspectives on Arendt's work. It has been overwhelmingly interpreted within established separate disciplinary frameworks, such as political theory, historiography or philosophy, each time at the expense of other perspectives. Most of the time, philosophers, even those critical of any claims to universality, shy away from contextualizing philosophers' work, since they fear this will affect its general validity. More empirically oriented scholars in political science and historiography, on the other hand,

2 Heuer, 2005.

3 See for example Benhabib, 1996; Barnouw, 1990; Bernstein, 1996; Hansen, 1993; Kateb, 1983; Isaac, 1992; Kohn, 1990, 2002, 2004; Ring, 1998; Pitkin, 1998; Passerin-d'Entreves, 1994; Disch, 1994; Honig, 1993 a; Bickford, 1996; Wolin, 2001; Markell, 2003; Villa, 1996, 1998; Cohen, 1996; Zerrilli, 2005a, etc.

4 Ricoeur, 1983, 1989a, 1989b; Taminaux, 1997 [1992]; Reveaux d'Allonnes, 2006; Tassin, 1987; Kristeva, 2001; Collin, 1999; Leibovici, 2006; Nancy and Lacoue Labarthe, 1997; Lefort, 1988; Lyotard, 1993, etc.

5 See, among others, Benedict, 1968.

6 See ZP; Krummacher, 1964; Mommsen, 1986.

7 The most significant exception is Vollrath, 1977, 1979a, 1979b. However, like Arendt, Vollrath (1932-2003) was a German émigré in the USA.

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usually dismiss assertions based on particular historical and political situations that claim a validity that transcends those situations.

A third and most important reason of the lack of integrated interpretations of Arendt's work is, I think, is of a more ideological nature. Probably due to the often polemical nature of Arendt's own writings, especially in the US her work has been appropriated in highly polarized debates that transcend its context, by proponents of both sides of these debates and by advocates of a middle ground or reconciliation of the two sides. Examples include the debate between aestheticist versus ethical interpretations of Arendt's work and between liberals and communitarians in the 1980s. Because of the many examples and metaphors Arendt borrows from the world of theatre, some charged her thinking of the political with aestheticism, voluntarism and decisionism, that is, with a morally dangerous criterionlessness or anti-foundationalism and irrationalism.⁸ Others, though, celebrated her successful deconstructions of the monopoly of 'rationality' in political philosophy. However, to reckon Arendt's theory among decisionist strands of political thought, among which the Conservative Revolution ranks most prominently, would be to ignore the hermeneutic-phenomenological rather than aestheticist nature of her interest in appearance, visibility and taste and many of her fundamental assumptions, not in the least her radical critique of sovereignty and the will. The opposite reaction, which considers Arendt as the champion of an ethical conception of the political, is equally misleading.⁹ Proponents of participatory democracy¹⁰; discourse ethics and communicative action¹¹ praised Arendt for her prioritizing of 'the good' or communicative rationality over 'the just' or instrumental rationality. Therefore, they applied her thinking as an alternative to dominant liberal political philosophy.¹² Others consider her as happily mediating between the extremes of liberalism and communitarianism.¹³ However, Arendt has always been very suspicious about the place of 'the good' and moral considerations in politics. The political has its own principles and form of responsibility. This should be kept apart from the moral codes and norms proper to ethical life. Failure to do so would, according to Arendt, lead to the ruin of the political sphere of life.¹⁴

8 In particular Jay, 1985 and Wolin, 1990. Cf. Villa, 1996, 115, 155-57.

9 Villa calls it a 'domestication' of Arendt's thought (1996, 3).

10 Barber, 1984.

11 Habermas, 1977, and, more critically, Benhabib, 1996.

12 Villa, 2000, 3-8.

13 See Calhoun, 1997, introduction.

14 On Arendt's rejection of morality or what she calls the 'care for the soul', in the political sphere, see the Conclusion.

In the next section, I will discuss the latest large-scale example of such a polarized debate, the highly influential one between so-called modernist and postmodernist scholars of her work. To avoid misunderstandings, I do not think it generally inappropriate to apply a philosopher's insights to debates that are not contemporary to her or his work. On the contrary, such an application might introduce fresh insights in somewhat stalled debates and, conversely, throw new light on the work that is applied. However, in this particular case, the application of Arendt's work to contemporary political-philosophical debates has often, though not necessarily so, turned into wholly de-contextualized readings of her work, neglecting pivotal aspects of her method and more importantly, their philosophical, political and historical backgrounds and the stakes it serves as a consequence. This means I propose a more contextual reading of Arendt's philosophical insights and a more hermeneutic-phenomenological reading of her historical and political accounts. This is exactly what a hermeneutic phenomenology of the political aims at.

The debate between modernists and postmodernists in recent Arendt-scholarship

The debate between those who defend a modernist or humanist, respectively a postmodernist reading of Arendt's work is highly polemical, as is the more general debate on humanism.¹⁵ This is evidenced by the terms of abuse and the caricatures both parties ascribe to each other, such as 'foundationalism and 'essentialism' for modernism and 'relativism' for postmodernism. Like most polemical debates, this one has turned into an impasse and has led to many positions taking a predictable middle ground.

To what do the container terms 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' refer, if we try to avoid stereotypical or caricatural characterizations? Obviously, it is not feasible to give a comprehensive summary, if only because hardly anybody describes him or herself as a postmodernist or a modernist without further qualification. For the interpretation of Arendt's work, however, a number of relevant general features can be identified.

Pulkkinen defines the term postmodernism as 'a non-foundational orientation in thinking. More precisely, unlike the modern, the postmodern does not aspire to uncover the origin, the basic level, the true essence, or the pure core of the phenomena that it studies. While modern thought is motivated by the aim of exposing some authentic level of reality, the postmodern, on the contrary, adopts the view that there is no foundation to be unveiled. Instead of concentrating on the possibility of unveiling, a postmodern thinker in

¹⁵ In this book, I will use the general term 'postmodernism' as an umbrella term for related philosophical schools of thought such as poststructuralism (Foucault, Butler and others), social constructivism, deconstructivism (Derrida, Deleuze and others), difference thinking (Irigaray, Lyotard and others) and the thought of for example Richard Rorty. I think this is legitimate because these scholars share the features I will describe below.

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this sense pays attention at the constructed nature of the layers in phenomena and the decisive role that action and power plays in the construction.¹⁶ For example, postmodernists hold that facts are constructs, and do not refer to a given substance, independent from culture and language. Additionally, they in particular criticize humanist or modernist notions of identity and thus identity politics, subjectivity and experience. They challenge the legitimacy of predetermined, essentialist categories of identity, to which they feel modernist thinkers appeal unreflectively; whether this is true is an issue of debate. Usually they are skeptical of essentialist and universal, transcendent validity claims with respect to moral and political judgments and truth. About the strong relationship between postmodernist theory and the concept of 'performativity', Pulkkinen states: "The concept of performativity has in the (...) postmodern discussion (...) begun to function as a sign for the crucial role that imitation and repetition plays within all productions of meaning and within the construction of identity in general."¹⁷

Another way to distinguish between modernism and postmodernism is by looking at the value attached to respectively autonomy or its opposite, heteronomy.¹⁸ Autonomy refers, first, to capacities and properties such as freedom of choice, self-reflexivity, individual and collective self-determination, intentionality and moral self-legislation. Modernists presuppose agency, the capacity to determine ends and purposes and to realize them in such a way that I recognize myself as the author, origin or maker, of my actions, deeds, experiences and judgments. Also, modernist thinkers assume that the subject is essentially of one piece and homogenous, identical with itself, as it were. Inner conflicts, contradictions and differences, so they hold, are of a contingent nature that does not affect the non-contingent core. Finally, the modernist concept of the subject refers to the idea of human nature, that is, some essence human beings share, which determines their common humanity, as opposed to, for example, other animals or computers. Like contradictions and conflicts within the subject, those between subjects are considered contingent phenomena as well. The assumption is that subjects, underneath cultural differences, share the same rationality, the same emotions and passions and the same yearning for the Good.¹⁹ Heteronomy, on the contrary, refers, first, to all those processes, instances or factors that challenge autonomy: God's power, inner drives and unconscious desires (Freud), disciplining discourses (Foucault), human vulnerability and situatedness, that point to embodiment and irreducible human interdependency. Second, postmodernist thinkers reconsider the subject's unity and identity. Inner conflicts and contradictions are

16 Pulkkinen, 2003, 3.

17 Pulkkinen, 2003, 5.

18 Van der Hoek, 2000.

19 See, for example, Nussbaum, 1999a.

inescapable and irreducible, because we are and cannot be identical to ourselves. The undivided self which is transparent to itself, is considered a ridiculous, even dangerous, illusion. Finally, the similarity and homogeneity of subjects has been challenged. The modernist presupposition of a universal humanity and human nature, an essence that all people share, is exposed to represent a particular mode of being human in disguise and thus to cover up differences between people. 'Human nature' turns out to be predicated on Western, white, wealthy males.

A subsequent relevant point of differentiation between postmodernist and modernist perspectives concerns the distinction between 'agonism' and 'associationism'²⁰. In line with their appreciation of performativity, postmodernists tend to adopt an agonistic or adversarial view of the political as a space of conflict, competition, struggle, and differentiation.²¹ Conflict, they hold, is central to the political and cannot, nor should be, closed definitely. They fear that consensus will always have the effect of denying and suppressing difference and plurality. Modernist thinkers, on the contrary, are usually attracted to associationist, communicative or dialogical models, in which politics is viewed as the pursuit of intersubjective agreement, cooperation and mutual understanding.²² A final significant difference pertains to the validity of truth claims and judgment. Modernists strive for universal validity, lest the possibility of communication is lost in relativism and subjectivism. Postmodernists, on the other hand, reject any claim of universal validity or foundation.

The debate on humanism in particular abounded in the feminist scholarship on Arendt's work. Since the end of the 1980's feminist theorists have appropriated her conceptual framework as a resource in critical debates on gender identity and feminist identity politics.²³ Let me give a short overview of the modernist, respectively postmodernist appropriation of Arendt's work, listing some key terms and issues. Some regard Arendt as a postmodernist *avant la lettre*, because of her critique of unity, homogeneity, essentialism and sovereignty on the level of the person; her insistence on the contingency, unpredictability and uncontrollability of action; her acknowledgement of the groundlessness of judging and hence the rejection of claims to universal truth and validity of political and moral judgment; her embracement of rhetoric and the aesthetical moment in politics; her apparent appraisal of action as performance; and her critique of Jewish identity politics.²⁴ For others, however, Arendt is a sophisticated humanist, even a 'post-

20 Benhabib (1992) has coined the term 'associationism' as a contrast to 'agonism'.

21 Mansbridge (1980) has coined the term 'adversarial'. She calls its opposite 'unitary'.

22 Benhabib, 1990, 1992; Honig, 1992, 1993; Van der Hoek, 2000, 41.

23 See chapter 8, §5.

24 In particular Dana Villa, 1996; and Bonnie Honig, 1992, 1993a.

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post-humanist²⁵. Modernist thinkers praise her for her communicative concept of action and power²⁶, her account of action as interaction and her narrative and intersubjective notion of embodied identity.²⁷

In its most radical form, the debate between modernists and postmodernists could not but lead to an impasse. This fact has, indeed, been noticed frequently in Arendt scholarship. It gave rise to many attempts to reconcile the two interpretations by joining the best of both worlds.²⁸ Like the postmodernists, these reconciliatory thinkers are sensitive to the problems of collective identity and to the impossibility of universal validity; and like the modernists, they are interested in rethinking the foundations of the political so as to enable citizens to live together under egalitarian conditions. However, the solution proposed by most perspectives trying to achieve a middle ground, leaves the very opposition of modernist and postmodernist readings of Arendt's work unquestioned.

Arendt indeed has something on offer for modernists and postmodernists, both Van der Hoek and Pulkkinen argue. The first praises Arendt for maintaining a balance between these two tendencies in her work; the latter deplors its inconsistency. The preservation of a conflictual balance of modernist and postmodernist tendencies, in particular the value of autonomy and heteronomy, lends Arendt's work its topicality, Van der Hoek argues. She praises Arendt for her rethinking of the humanist political tradition. In her view, Arendt's work contains an internal criticism of humanism that challenges self-determination, freedom of choice and the unified subject, though without denying the possibilities of action and judgment. Pulkkinen, however, argues that Arendt's work is inconsistent, sometimes pointing in a postmodernist, performative, sometimes in the opposed modernist, foundationalist direction. The latter, she argues, can be traced to Arendt's training in the modern German existential-phenomenological tradition.²⁹ If Van der Hoek and Pulkkinen are right in pointing out that Arendt's work is characterized by two opposing tendencies; the one pulling it in a modernist, the other in a postmodernist direction; then the modernist and postmodernist interpretations of her work are one-sided, for ignoring the other, opposed tendency in her work. My criticism, however, is different and pertains to the very application of Arendt's thought, either in an affirmative or critical, deconstructive sense, to the debate on humanism.

Arendt did not partake in the current debate between modernists and

25 Bickford, 1997.

26 Habermas, 1977.

27 Such as Habermas, 1977; Passerin-d'Entreves, 1994; Isaac, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2002; Benhabib, 1996, Cavarero, 2000; Kristeva, 2001.

28 For example Disch, 1994, 158, 162-163; cf. idem, 1993.

29 Pulkkinen, 2001, 61.

postmodernists, and, more importantly, the stakes and the historical and political context of her work are alien to this debate. Consequentially, it is hard to make her thought fruitful to this debate without trivializing it. Arendt nowhere engages in debates concerning identity, action, judgment, etc. in the way modernist and postmodernist thinkers do. Unlike the postmodernist affirmation of the contingency and groundlessness of action and judging, which is motivated by their skepticism of necessary foundations and claims to universality, Arendt's affirmation of contingency has hermeneutic-phenomenological reasons, namely saving understanding and meaning and as a consequence, human freedom.³⁰ And although she rejects the ideal of universal validity, she is committed to a particular ideal of impartiality. Next, though Arendt's notion of plurality, action and public space certainly involves an agonistic view of politics, she held that the agonistic moment presupposes a communicative moment.³¹

Although there is reason to question the postmodernist caricature of modernist thinking, as being foundationalist and essentialist, we indeed usually see among modernist thinkers a shared concern with positive conceptualizations of collective identity, subjectivity and finding universal sources of validity. This agenda is reflected in modernist interpretations of Arendt. Arendt's notion of natality is often turned into a quasi-naturalist and universalistic notion of common humanity.³² However, Arendt rejects the assumption of a human nature, adopting the idea of human conditions instead.³³ Her notion of 'plurality' is often misinterpreted as 'difference', that is, as a positive notion of collective identities, such as gender. Plurality, in the Arendtian sense, however, is not identical with difference, but refers to an entirely different political-theoretical framework. Plurality in Arendt is radically individuating and does not refer to collective identities.³⁴

Although she certainly shares particular motifs and topics with both modernism and postmodernism, treating Arendt as either, in Benhabib's words, a 'reluctant modernist' or, in Villa's words, a 'postmodernist *avant la lettre*', is equally missing the point of Arendt's work. In both cases, readers fail to see what to my mind renders Arendt's work unique and highly original, which is the relationship she establishes between a historical-political and a philosophical sensibility, through a consistent hermeneutic-phenomenological approach of the political. Arendt's work is, I think, most fruitfully seen as containing

30 I will elaborate these hermeneutic phenomenological reasons in part I. In particular, see the conclusion to chapter 2.

31 I will call this the 'paradox of conflict and communication' in chapter 2.

32 See for example Cavarero, 2000, chapter 5.

33 I will explain Arendt's arguments against the assumption of human nature and the difference between human nature and human conditions in chapter 2.

34 See chapter 2 and chapter 8.

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phenomenologically informed reflections on the political and politically informed phenomenological exercises. Reflections on the totalitarian experience in particular are pivotal. The totalitarian loss of world taught her to appreciate what is at stake, experientially and politically, in the world and to consider human beings as worldly beings in the first place. By means of an analysis of the aspects of human existence totalitarianism disables, that is, belonging to a lawful, political community, spontaneity, indeterminacy, plurality and common sense, Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism thus offers clues to a diagnosis of the political human condition that centers around plurality and freedom. Her aim is to save the appearances, most notably the political.

I will investigate Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology through the lens of a notion that lies exactly at the intersection of political theory and hermeneutic phenomenology, i.e. the notion of 'world'.³⁵ While firmly embedded in the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition, 'world' simultaneously refers to phenomena that are familiar to political theorists, such as public space and political community. Any reading therefore that reduces Arendt's work in general and the pivotal notion of world to either a phenomenological or a political figure, disregards the richness and originality of Arendt's thought.

Structure of this book

Part I (Political phenomenology) of this book is entirely devoted to methodological issues: Arendt's hermeneutic-phenomenological method and its implications for her phenomenological anthropology. I reconstruct Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenological anthropology, including her notion of world, and its foundation in her reflections on the totalitarian experience. In Part II and Part III, I will investigate its implications for Arendt's analyses of political phenomena and events, grouped under the two main dimensions of her phenomenological notion of the intersubjective world that is, its commonness (Part II) and its publicity or visibility (Part III). Again, I demonstrate how these analyses arise from the totalitarian experience. In each part, I will highlight the fresh insights enabled by an interpretation of Arendt's analyses of the political as a hermeneutic phenomenology.

In chapter 1 (*Arendt's hermeneutic phenomenology: understanding and deconstruction*), I situate Arendt's work in the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition. The phenomenological impulse of Arendt's work is visible in her approach of political events through the lived, that is, shared intersubjective, perspectivist and worldly, experience of these phenomena. Arendt's method is a hermeneutic phenomenology because of her orientation to understanding and disclosing the meaning of phenomena and events in their very

³⁵ I will explicate the hermeneutic-phenomenological notion of 'world' in chapter 1.

uniqueness and contingency. The exercises in understanding, as she called them herself, are double-sided in her view. They are, first, critical, for they deconstruct metaphysical fallacies and prejudices. Second, Arendt's hermeneutic exercises are experimental, consisting in understanding and storytelling. Finally, Arendt's is a hermeneutic phenomenology of the political, since she is mainly interested in understanding political phenomena, events and experiences. As decisive for her method as its phenomenological inspiration is its historical and political background. Arendt's rejection of metaphysical and scientific methods refers to a deep and acutely felt sense that totalitarianism has accomplished a decisive rupture with tradition. More than just regretting this fact, Arendt emphasizes that the loss of tradition also opens up a space to regain a sense of reality, through casting off the ballast of metaphysical and scientific traditions, which fostered and cultivated a disengaged attitude. Arendt's method has raised a number of persistent and ever recurring objections and has caused much confusion, especially with respect to her appeal to experience, her appreciation of facts, and the ubiquity of the many distinctions she makes. I argue that these objections are misunderstandings, which can be resolved through explicating the frequently poorly understood hermeneutic-phenomenological and critical-political relevance of these notions and distinctions in Arendt's work.

Since Arendt's hermeneutic-phenomenological approach of the political is first and foremost directed at understanding the worldliness of human existence, I present it as a phenomenological anthropology of the political (chapter 2, *Phenomenological anthropology*). Issuing from her reflections on the totalitarian experience, I present Arendt's phenomenological anthropology an excellent example of situated, contextual and experience-based political research. Arendt's analysis of the human conditions, especially the human condition of plurality challenges metaphysical and scientific conceptions of what makes a human being a human being, expressed in definitions of universal and eternal human nature. From her anthropology emerges a phenomenological topology of reality, describing the various lived perspectives on the environment we inhabit: nature and the material and intersubjective dimensions of the world. The material and the intersubjective aspects together install the world as a dwelling-place. Because of the hermeneutic-phenomenological aim of understanding, Arendt's method differs from conventional methods and paradigms within both the humanities and the social sciences that aim at explanation, i.e. finding causes, motives and regularities. In Arendt's view, these methods tend to be deterministic. The fostering of determinism goes hand in hand with a lack of sensitivity to the new which may lead to normalization and the evaporation of agency and resistance.

In Part II and III, I elaborate the various dimensions of the intersubjective world: the immaterial, relational, dynamic and fragile space of meanings and stories in need of

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permanent maintenance, that comes about whenever people relate to each other through words and deeds and which ceases to exist when people stop doing so. It concerns the *res publica*, that which is of concern to everyone, as distinguished from one's private affairs. The most general qualities of the intersubjective world are, on the one hand, its phenomenal or public quality and, on the other hand, its communal dimension. I will address these in part III and II respectively. In Part II (Common world, community and the citizen), I explore the aspect of the commonness of the world, that is, the relationship between self, community and world. Community is a question rather than an answer for Arendt. She is worried about the social tendency towards and the coercion into homogenization. Her reflections on political community are rooted in her analysis of the totalitarian experience. The totalitarian experience taught Arendt that people need both temporary solitude, and a shared worldly space of being-together. Therefore, she rejects both traditional communitarian answers to the problem of community and radical individualist responses. Due to the paradoxical nature of plurality, individual and the common world are not antithetical. Community is never a given for it lacks an ultimate foundation. But what, then, do people as citizens have in the common, positively defined? Arendt points out a number of activities, practices and conditions which shape our relation to the common world: exchanging opinions and making promises (chapter 3), common sense (chapter 4) and civic friendship (chapter 5).

In chapter 3 (*Political community and the contract*), I explicate Arendt's view on community by opposing it to two classical political-philosophical positions within social contract theory, i.e. the quasi-liberal model of the social contract, grounded in enlightened self-interest, associated with Hobbes; and organic models of community grounded in a sovereign people's general will and appealing to generalized compassion, associated with Rousseau. Arendt's key objections to both Hobbes' and Rousseau's political thought concern their hostility to plurality and the blindness with respect to the phenomenon of world and worldliness to which their theories testify. In contrast, Arendt's model is predicated upon opinion, promise and action-in-concert. Her horizontal model of the social contract based upon the promise, is institutionally embodied in covenants, treaties, constitutions, the law, etc. These institutions, according to Arendt, propose standards which lie in-between men, i.e. in the shared common world.

In chapter 4 (*Common sense*), I discuss debates on Arendt's theory of common sense and judgment. Much of what Arendt has to say about the common world is asserted in the context of accounting for common sense or *sensus communis*. She first raised the issue in the context of her analysis of totalitarian ideology as a tentative response to the question which loss turns people away from the common world and how this process works. Common sense has both a world-building and world-disclosive effect, thereby enabling our sense of

reality. And it has an integrative effect, by integrating our five senses it fits us into a common world. One of the most hotly debated issues in Arendt scholarship concerns the status of the notion of common sense in Arendt's theory of judgment. Is it empirical or a priori? If one takes into account Arendt's hermeneutic-phenomenological background, I argue, it becomes apparent that for Arendt common sense is neither an a priori faculty, nor refers to a particular community, but it is co-original with the common world. Common sense both presupposes a common world and fits human beings into it.

In chapter 5 (*Arendt and Derrida on friendship and the problem of political community*), I discuss Arendt's view on civic friendship by means of a political-philosophical debate I stage between Arendt's, respectively Derrida's politics of friendship. For both, the problem of community comes down to the question how to conceptualize a civic bond or political being-together which cannot be reduced to the communitarian notion of community, that is, brotherhood. Both suggest a particular conception of friendship as a promising perspective. I will discuss why Arendt offers a politically more fruitful interpretation of the civic bond than Derrida.

In Part III (Politics of in/visibility: world as space of appearances), I discuss the phenomenal or public quality of the intersubjective world, in Arendt's terms the 'space of appearances'. Typical for Arendt's account of the space of appearances is her phenomenological and normative distinction between the private and the public realms, on the one hand, and the one between the social and the political, on the other hand, as distinct but related dimensions. These distinctions provide the framework within which to tell good from bad forms of visibility and invisibility, i.e. politically sound or appropriate forms of in/visibility which are conducive to human dignity versus those which are politically harmful and adverse to human dignity.

In chapter 6 (*Public visibility and private invisibility*), I will demonstrate that Arendt regards public visibility and private or natural invisibility as two sides of the same coin of sound political action, i.e. participation, and citizenship. Citizens not only need protection of their natural qualities by means of the private personality that the private sphere enables. Even in the public sphere, citizens need some further concealment of their natural qualities, by means of legal personality, which Arendt compares to a mask, covering up the actor's face on stage, while still disclosing, and even amplifying, her or his unique voice. This I call the phenomenological paradox of citizenship: the fact that revealing and concealing, or disclosure and closure, are only seemingly opposed, but, upon closer inspection, operate as two sides of the same coin.

In the last two chapters I discuss distinct political pathologies of in/visibility, respectively public invisibility and private visibility (chapter 7); and social visibility (chapter 8), because the pathologies show more clearly why public visibility and private / natural

Introduction

invisibility are important aspects of politics. Public invisibility is pathological, since without access to a public space, the concealment which the private sphere has on offer for natural man turns into obscurity. Natural visibility is equally pathological, since without the concealment of private man, which the retreat into the private sphere and of the mask of legal personality guarantee, disclosure of who one is, the political actor or citizen, gives way to exposure of what someone is. Obscurity and exposure bring about the breakdown of the paradox of citizenship, that is, the paradox of disclosure and concealment. This is illustrated by the fate of stateless people, among others, as I will demonstrate in chapter 7 (*The pathologies of in/visibility I: public invisibility, natural visibility. On stateless refugees and undocumented aliens*). Arendt's reflections in the 1940s and early 1950s on stateless aliens in inter-war Europe shows that the predicament of the stateless features the simultaneity of the two pathologies of political action and citizenship, namely obscurity and exposure. The political problem of the nation state consists in the contradiction between its *de jure* guarantee of universal human rights while it *de facto* only protects its legal inhabitants citizens. Arendt's deconstructions, I will argue, call for a rethinking of the Enlightenment discourse of human rights.

In chapter 8 (*The pathologies of in/visibility II: social in/visibility. The social question, the race question and the woman question*), I will discuss another pathology of in/visibility, namely social in/visibility in public space. The problem of exclusion, domination or exploitation of groups is often diagnosed in terms of social invisibility; its remedy is formulated in terms of social visibility. Social invisibility then refers to social injustice and inequality along two axes, respectively a socio-economic axis, i.e. redistribution; and a socio-cultural axis, i.e. recognition. In this chapter I defend an alternative Arendtian perspective on these problems. Although Arendt acknowledges that collective identity may be politically relevant, she diagnoses exclusion not exclusively in terms of social invisibility, but in terms of political invisibility. Subsequently, as a strategy for emancipation or empowerment, it advocates a struggle for participatory rather than social visibility, i.e. for participation, political equality, empowerment and freedom. I exemplify the issue of social, respectively political in/visibility through four cases of social movements and the social conflicts, social invisibility and the struggles they are concerned with, namely poverty, the labor movement and its contemporary twin, the alter-globalization movement (the 'social question') in the case of the politics of redistribution; racism and the black civil rights movement (the 'race question'); anti-Semitism and Jewish pariah politics (the 'Jewish question'); and patriarchy and the feminist movement (the 'woman question') in the case of the politics of recognition. In each case, I will show what a social, and subsequently a political, Arendtian outlook on groups' in/visibility could mean. This takes something like a *Gestaltswitch*. A particular problem may have both a dimension of freedom and of justice. The social and

the political are best seen as two, only analytically distinct, dimensions that are inextricably linked up in reality. The distinction between the social and the political and, subsequently, the struggle for political rather than social visibility are important, since according to Arendt, the political itself and consequentially political freedom are at stake.

In the Conclusion (*Amor Mundi*), I will synthesize the arguments of the previous chapters under the heading of *Amor Mundi*, love or care for the world. I argue that Arendt's work is inspired by an ethos of *Amor Mundi*, which is opposed, on the one hand, to *Amor Hominis*, love for Mankind, and, on the other hand, to *Odiium Mundi*, the ideological hatred of the world that totalitarianism and metaphysics breed. The ethos of *Amor Mundi* expresses a paradox of distance and engagement, which springs from her hermeneutic-phenomenological take on the human affairs and her understanding of the world as the space in-between people. This ethos gives rise to a particular worldly humanism. In the second half of the conclusion, I demonstrate the urgency and relevancy of the ethos of *Amor Mundi* and its current challenges.