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Amor mundi: Hannah Arendt's political phenomenology of world

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Summary

In this dissertation, I defend an interpretation of the work of Hannah Arendt that integrates its various dimensions, such as political theory, philosophy, historiography, literary theory and her journalistic work, by elaborating and explicating her joining of hermeneutic-phenomenological sources and methods, on the one hand, 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. This implies both a politicization of hermeneutic phenomenology, and the development of a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective within political theory.

The current scarcity of integrated and truly interdisciplinary perspectives on Arendt's work has several reasons. It has been overwhelmingly interpreted within established separate disciplinary frameworks, such as political theory, historiography or philosophy, each time one 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, usually refuse to derive generally valid assertions from particular historical and political situations. Another important reason 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. One such notable example is the highly influential debate between so-called modernist and postmodernist scholars of her work. Earlier examples include the debate between liberals and communitarians, and the one concerning the alleged aestheticism of her political thinking.

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. What renders Arendt's work unique and highly original 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 argue, most fruitfully seen as containing phenomenologically informed reflections on the political and politically informed phenomenological exercises. 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 those 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 political phenomena.

In this dissertation, I 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'. Any reading that reduces Arendt's notion of world to either a phenomenological or a political figure, disregards the richness and originality of Arendt's thought.

Part I of this book is entirely devoted to methodological issues: Arendt's hermeneutic-phenomenological method and its implications for her phenomenological anthropology. In part II and III, I 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). In each part, I demonstrate how these analyses arise from reflections on the totalitarian experience and highlight the fresh insights enabled by an interpretation of Arendt's analyses of the political as a hermeneutic phenomenology.

In part I, I discuss Arendt's method. Whereas in chapter 1, I reconstruct Arendt's hermeneutic-phenomenological method; in chapter 2, I focus on its consequences for her phenomenological anthropology. 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. The pervasiveness of distinctions and paradoxes in Arendt's work results from this attention to experiences.

Arendt's method is a *hermeneutic* phenomenology, because of her orientation to understanding the meaning of phenomena and events in their very uniqueness and contingency. The exercises in understanding, as she called them herself, are double-sided in her view. First, they are critical. Arendt's aim is to do justice to the original, non-derived character of political life, the *vita activa*, and to save it from metaphysical prejudices and fallacies and the imposition of the rules of the *vita contemplativa*. Arendt's way of deconstructing these prejudices is not through negation. Instead, she insists on

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genealogically investigating the way in which the history of political experiences and phenomena is condensed and sedimented in our language, that is, either revealed or concealed in traditional political concepts. Second, Arendt's hermeneutic exercises are experimental, consisting in understanding and storytelling. Stories have the potential to remain faithful to the phenomenal nature of the political, namely to its character of appearance. By narrating phenomena and events, we may start to understand them and initiate processes of reconciliation with past events and of reorientation towards the future.

Finally, Arendt's is a hermeneutic phenomenology *of the political*, since she is mainly interested in understanding political phenomena, events and experiences, that is, more concretely, in that which happens in public space and in facts.

Because of her orientation to understanding and interpretation, 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 her view, the explanatory approach to history and the political skips the patient and detailed work of understanding, risks lapsing into scientific and metaphysical constructions. As such, they are ideological constructions, posing political problems. By, for instance, identifying laws, which determine the course of human history and from which predictions about the future can be derived, they 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 the capacity of resistance.

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 deeply and acutely felt sense that, as she puts it, 'the thread of tradition is broken'. The rise of totalitarianism had accomplished a decisive rupture with tradition. More than just regretting this fact, Arendt emphasizes that the loss of tradition also provides us with the opportunity to regain a sense of reality, through casting off the ballast of metaphysical and scientific traditions, which foster and cultivate a disengaged attitude.

Additionally, unlike more conventional research paradigms, Arendt's method is not external to the topics she investigates. The scientific or empiricist methodic ideal of objectivity prescribes that the scholar takes the position of a disinterested observer vis-à-vis the topic under investigation, while applying a method that is equally detached from this topic. This so-called Archimedean point is an abstract or (quasi-)universalistic point of view, that is presupposed to transcend all particular points of view. The Arendtian phenomenological scholar, on the other hand, is an engaged spectator or an addressee, that is, someone who lets herself be addressed by what she investigates, for the third-person position of the observer precludes access to meaning, which is the very aim of hermeneutic phenomenology. The scholar-as-engaged-spectator abandons the subject-object dualism of

the scholar-as-disengaged-observer. The objectification of human action is replaced by its inherent meaningfulness. The spectator's judgment is neither universal or detached, like the disengaged observer's perspective, but appeals to imagination, that is, to taste and to representative thinking (*erweiterte Denkungsart*), i.e. to representing in imagination for oneself others' possible views on a particular situation. This imaginative process bestows on judgment a special validity that could be called situated impartiality.

Arendt's method has raised a number of very persistent and ever recurring objections and caused much confusion. Her appeal to experience and her appreciation of facts, some say, are crudely empiricist or even scientific mistakes. And the ubiquity of the many distinctions she makes, is often seen as a sign of essentialism. I argue that these objections are misunderstandings, which can be resolved through explicating the frequently poorly understood hermeneutic-phenomenological background of these notions and distinctions in Arendt's work. Moreover, I make the case that Arendt's adherence to experience, facts and concise distinctions is informed by sensible political deliberations. Through repairing these common misunderstanding, I try to rescue the appreciation of experience, factuality and making distinctions for a critical and responsible study of the political.

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). Issuing from her reflections on the totalitarian experience, I argue, Arendt's phenomenological anthropology is an excellent example of situated, contextual and experience-based political research. The totalitarian experience of loss of world informed the development of her phenomenology of the worldly human condition. I discuss the development of her phenomenological anthropological account in *The human Condition* and *The life of the mind*. Arendt's analysis of the worldly human condition focuses on the way in which human experience and existence are shaped in relation to a number of human conditions, i.e. life itself, worldliness, plurality and natality. Human conditions are the features of the common human situation that determine human existence and are determined by it in return. Human beings and their natural and worldly environment are mutually conditional. The phenomenological background of the idea of conditionality ensures that conditions are both constants of human experience and existence and historically variable in their particular constellation and meaning. 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 a universal and eternal human nature.

From this anthropology emerges a phenomenological topology of reality, describing the various lived perspectives on the environment we inhabit: nature and the material, respectively intersubjective, dimensions of the world. The material and the intersubjective

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aspects together install the world as a dwelling-place. The material dimension of the world provides stability and an artificial environment, which protects human beings somewhat against nature. The intersubjective dimension, on the other hand, enables meaningfulness.

As a phenomenologist, Arendt typically argues that plurality is a paradoxical condition that deals with different and even conflicting experiences that are nonetheless related and even mutually interdependent or conditional. I discuss four phenomenally different aspects of the paradox of plurality: difference and equality; difference and commonality; isolation and fusion; and communication, interaction or intersubjectivity, and conflict, agonism and individuality. Contrary to the consensus in the Arendt scholarship that these pairs constitute dualisms, the two aspects actually presuppose each other. These paradoxes also imply that plurality and worldliness are mutually conditional and co-original. Hence a loss of plurality also means a loss of worldliness. A loss of world leads to a loss of differences between people, a loss of equality, commonality, meaningfulness and sense of reality.

This hermeneutic and anthropological phenomenology of the political is critical with respect to metaphysics, to strong empiricism and scientism, and to poststructuralism. Arendt's phenomenology of the human conditions challenges metaphysical presuppositions concerning human nature. Metaphysical thinking is dualistic, for presupposing a subject-object dualism. Man, like the scholar-as-disengaged-observer according to the Archimedean ideal of objectivity, is seen as a rational sovereign subject that is opposed to the world. The metaphysical tradition is also essentialist or naturalist, since by defining and determining the constants of human nature, a generalization and objectification occurs, that is blind to differences between people and to historical variations. Finally, it is deterministic because it tends to ignore the contingency of factual truths and to replace it by coercive logical truths. Like poststructuralists, Arendt believes in the historical variability of particular constellations of human conditions. However, these conditions also provide constants. The epistemological skepticism of poststructuralist leads them to a wholesale rejection of the meaning of experience, of facts and of the ideal of impartiality. If experiences, facts and impartiality are seen as nothing but ideological, scientific constructions, any criterion for making normative distinctions is lost.

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 permanent maintenance, that comes about whenever people relate to each other through words and deeds and which ceases to exist when people no longer relate to each other. It concerns the *res publica*, that which is of concern to everyone, as distinguished from one's private affairs. The main dimensions of the intersubjective world, in Arendt's own terms, are respectively the *inter-esse* or in-between, the space of appearances and the web of

relationships. The most general qualities of the intersubjective world which connect these dimensions, are, on the one hand, its phenomenal or public quality, and, on the other hand, its communal quality. I will address these in part III and II respectively. The intersubjective world is both a public space and a common world. The public space is a common world as a matter of fact. The world is public since it contains everything that appears in public and because it is common to all its inhabitants. Since the world is visible to all, it is also a common world. This commonality is a pluralistic, because everyone has a different perspective on the same world we share.

In part II, I explore the aspect of the commonness of the world, that is, the relationship between citizens, community and world. Community is a question rather than an answer for Arendt. Her starting point differs considerably from many other political philosophers investigating the problem of community, who are worried about society's disintegration or fragmentation. Arendt, on the contrary, is worried about the social tendency towards, and the coercion into, homogenization. Her philosophical readers have largely ignored the fact that her reflections on political community are rooted in her analysis of the totalitarian experience. First, the national-socialist ideology of *Blut und Boden* generated a deep distrust of ethnic or otherwise naturalist foundations and justifications of community and made her favor artificial citizenship instead. Additionally, Arendt's account of totalitarianism led her to identify two totalitarian, anti-political predicaments, namely, first, the condition of all encompassing isolation, and, second, the fusion of plural men into single Man. The totalitarian experience taught Arendt that people need both temporary solitude, and a shared worldly space or being-together. Solitude turns into the pathological condition of isolation, when people become distinct without being together; being-together turns into fusion, when people are together without being distinct. Therefore, Arendt rejects both traditional communitarian answers to the question of community, and radical individualist responses. Due to the paradoxical nature of plurality, the individual and the common world are not antithetical. Truly political community is non-given, artificial and heterogeneous. It is a being-together which emerges not before citizens publicly display their plurality of views and opinions. Its purpose is not to achieve agreement, consensus or harmony by homogenizing or equalizing differences, as in traditional, communitarian community. Rather, it is to do justice to the multiplicity and divergence of individual views, in order to establish a common world. Community is never a given for it lacks an ultimate foundation. But what, then, do people as citizens have in the common, positively defined? How do people build such a common world if there is no foundation? 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).

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In chapter 3, 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. The political appeal to respectively interest and the will, has disastrous political consequences in Arendt's view, due to four properties they share: subjectivism or solipsism; unity, homogeneity and immediacy; sovereignty; and naturalism. Arendt's key objections to both Hobbes' and Rousseau's political thought concern their hostility to plurality and the blindness with respect to worldliness to which their theories testify. Their shared hostility to plurality is related to their negligence of the paradoxes of plurality. Therefore, they also represent two influential ways to do away with plurality, through either one-man rule in Hobbes, or through the fiction of the people as many-in-one, in Rousseau. Both regard plurality as a problem, a regrettable condition to be solved in order for the polity to subsist. For Rousseau, plurality is associated with selfish particular wills, for Hobbes with unrestrained and still-irrational aggressive self-interests in the civil war-like state of nature; i.e. with a mere conflictual multitude of isolated individuals. Similarly, they represent two ways to bypass and hence undermine the world. Rousseau's suggestion to reduce unique individuals' plural perspectives to a general will, and his introduction of compassion as a principle of public affairs, ignore political institutions which lie outside of, that is, between, people and serve as media in their relationships. Compassion abolishes the distance between people, i.e. the common world. Hobbes' defense of enlightened self-interest means that the individual through 'reckoning with consequences' concludes that her long-term interest is served best when all people transfer their freedom to the sovereign.

Rather than interest or will, I argue, Arendt's model is in contrast predicated upon opinion, the promise and action-in-concert. She adopts a civic concept of community, which assumes an essentially horizontal bond between citizens. In this view, community refers to a common world, not to a common human nature, for example reason, as in Hobbes, or compassion, as in Rousseau. This common world is not given, nor natural, but an achievement of the concerted action of citizens, by means of opinionating and of making contracts based on promises. Opinions as a rule require the presence of others, i.e. they are typically generated between citizens, in the course of their exchange, rather than inside of peoples' minds. Arendt situates her thinking about the common in a different tradition within social contract theory, loosely associated with Locke: the horizontal contract between independent individuals, who mutually bind themselves. The horizontal contract presupposes the equality of its constituting members, as opposed to the vertical relationship between the people, or ruled, and the government, or ruler. The social contract

based upon the promise is institutionally embedded in covenants, treaties, constitutions, the law, etc. These institutions lie in-between men, i.e. in the shared common world. It is exactly these intermediary institutions that are conspicuously absent in the Rousseauan and Hobbesian social contracts. Unlike the essentially short-sighted self-interest and the general will, these institutions constitute elaborate frameworks with bonds and ties for the future, without, however, destroying the fundamental contingency of action. Next to its longer-term orientation, the law, unlike compassion and the sum of, even enlightened, self-interests, is impartial. The promise and the horizontal contract are the basis for Arendt's very different model of power, which she does not conceive as sovereignty but as action-in-concert.

In chapter 4, I discuss debates on Arendt's reflections on 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*, a common feeling for the world. 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; a fact which has been largely ignored in scholarship on Arendt's account of judgment. Common sense, Arendt found, is related to our sense of the real, and its operation is opposed to totalitarian ideological thinking. The operation of common sense is inductive and intersubjective. In contrast to metaphysical thinking do the insights of common sense proceed inductively from sense experience. Common sense as intimately tied to sensation is the basis of political insight and remains permanently in touch with the common world. Intersubjectivity is another important feature of common sense, since it requires the presence of others to operate properly. Common sense coordinates private sensations so as to produce a single world and to transform the utter subjectivity and partiality of these sensations into intersubjectivity, though without producing objective knowledge according to Archimedean yardsticks. I argue that 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 reflections on judgment. Is it an empirical or an a priori notion? If one takes into account Arendt's hermeneutic-phenomenological background, I argue, it becomes apparent that for her 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, I discuss civic friendship by means of a political-philosophical debate I stage between Arendt's, respectively Derrida's, politics of friendship. Starting point of this

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chapter is that though both Arendt and Derrida are critical regarding the dominant conception of community, they do not reject community *per se*. Both Arendt and Derrida are opposed to communitarian notions of community and relate this to the classical figure of brotherhood. On the other hand, both reject radical individualism. 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 alternative. Besides criticizing classical metaphysical assumptions regarding politics, their need to rethink political community is also raised by particular political developments, especially the increasing hold of nationalistic and other (quasi-)naturalist views on the general conception of political community. Following an extensive comparison of their respective perspectives on civic friendship, I conclude that for Derrida, the political community, the non-communitarian friendship, is always yet 'to come'. Thus, the community is rendered transcendent, since it will come from outside of our human and civic being-together. Therefore, it is worldless, in the Arendtian sense of the word. Such a messianism does not appeal to Arendt. An Arendtian notion of friendship is oriented towards the maintenance of the common world that lies between us and which is the effect of our common action and speech in relation to that world. Political, that is, non-natural and non-homogenous, but pluralistic, community only emerges when citizens display their plurality of perspectives and opinions in public space. Its aim is to play out the multiplicity and diversity of individual perspectives, so a common world comes into being. This is exactly what happens in the dialogue between friends. This common world is not reflected in the dominant conception of community, and neither in the 'coming community'.

In part III, I discuss the visible or public quality of the intersubjective world, in Arendt's terms the space of appearances. Anthropologically, Arendt's focus on appearance and visibility draws upon a dismantling of the metaphysical two-world theories, which privilege Being over appearance. Politically, Arendt's privileging of appearance and visibility implies an approach of the political which foregrounds action and speech in public space, that is, civic participation. It is rooted in a phenomenological analysis of the (pre-) totalitarian experience of expulsion from the public and the destruction of the private spheres.

Typical for Arendt's account of the space of appearances is her phenomenological and normative distinction between the private and the public spheres, 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, from those which are politically harmful and adverse to human dignity.

In chapter 6, I 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. Arendt calls upon this trope in order to provide insight into the artificial, constructed quality of citizenship. Who should become visible in public space is not natural man, but men-as-citizens. This I call the paradox of citizenship, the fact that revealing and concealing, or disclosure and closure, are only seemingly opposed, but, upon closer inspection function as two sides of the same coin. Critically discussing two feminist readings of Arendt's mask, I argue that its function is not to cover up social man, that is, membership in a social group, for example women or Jews, but natural man, that is, membership in the human species.

In the last two chapters I discuss distinct political pathologies of in/visibility, respectively public invisibility and private visibility (chapter 7) and social in/visibility (chapter 8), because the pathologies show more clearly why public visibility and natural invisibility are important aspects of the political. Arendt quite consistently maintains throughout her work that public invisibility constitutes the true inhumanity of a number of regrettable political and social predicaments, including poverty, slavery, displacement and internment in concentration camps, because it deprives people of the possibility to live a meaningful life. These people are withheld the opportunity to appear in deeds and words, be seen by others and thus be remembered as individuals with unique biographies. Like public visibility and private invisibility, the pathologies are interrelated. Like disclosure in public and the protection of private life together enable participation, obscurity and exposure prohibit participation. Both are therefore politically harmful conditions. 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 no less damaging to political action and citizenship. When someone is deprived of the possibility of retreat into invisibility and of the mask of legal personality, disclosure of who one is, the political actor or citizen, gives way to exposure of what someone is to the public eye, natural man, who is for that very reason no longer able to participate. Disclosive appearance of who one is requires initiative in public space to achieve recognition and participation. Exposure, on the other hand, is passive, hence non-participatory and has therefore very little to do with publicity. Both pathologies are modes of blindness, due to

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too much light in the case of exposure, or to too little in the case of obscurity. Obscurity and exposure are pathological modes of in/visibility, because they are disabling and disempowering conditions and bring about the breakdown of the paradox of citizenship, that is, of disclosure and concealment. Devoid of both the protection and security of the private sphere and of legal personality, the disclosure of who is replaced by the exposure of what people are.

This is illustrated by the fate of stateless people, among others, as I demonstrate in chapter 7. Arendt's reflections in the 1940's and early 1950's on stateless aliens in inter-war Europe show that the predicament of the stateless features the simultaneity of both pathologies of political action and citizenship, namely obscurity and exposure. The stateless refugee is the exemplary non-citizen, the exact opposite in every respect, of the citizen, since she cannot participate in public space. First, because she is deprived of her legal personality and her ability to show herself through words and deeds in the space of appearances, which renders her publicly invisible. And, second, because she is susceptible to the naturalistic reduction, i.e. the reduction to organic life, and hence is doomed to natural visibility. Arendt's critical deconstructions, I argue, call for a rethinking of the Enlightenment discourse of human rights. By juxtaposing her account to current Dutch policies and practices concerning undocumented aliens in the last section, I demonstrate the relevance and currency of the Arendtian politics of in/visibility. I point out disturbing parallels between the successive measures that Arendt observed that Western-European nation-states took against stateless refugees in the first half of the twentieth century, and the way in which the Netherlands and other Western-European countries currently deal with asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants. The politics of in/visibility again, or still, produces a large number of non-citizens within Dutch society who are simultaneously obscured and exposed. Moreover, biotechnological regimes of surveillance and exposure have emerged that Arendt neither has nor could take account of, undermining even further the already precarious political status of the nation state. No amount of policing, increasing the exposure of *all* people in its territory, citizens as well, is going to solve the political problem of the nation state: the contradiction between its *de jure* guarantee of universal human rights and its *de facto* protection of only its legal residents.

In chapter 8, I 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. The best-known form of the struggle for recognition is identity politics, that is, the demand of disadvantaged groups for recognition of their particular group identity, the very ground on

which recognition had been withheld before, instead of their inclusion in some universal common humanity. I defend an alternative Arendtian perspective on these problems. For this alternative option I draw inspiration from Arendt's council-model of political action. Although Arendt acknowledges that collective identities 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, she advocates a struggle for political 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 social movements and their related social conflicts, modes of social invisibility and struggles, 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 or Zionism (the 'Jewish question'); and patriarchy and the feminist movement (the 'woman question') in the case of the politics of recognition. In each of these cases, I show what a social, and subsequently a political, Arendtian outlook on these groups' in/visibility could mean. Poverty, oppression and discrimination do not only refer to social invisibility and injustice, that is, misrecognition or maldistribution, but also, and in Arendt's view primarily, to a lack of political freedom of those affected, due to the inaccessibility of the public sphere which allows people to be seen and heard by their fellow citizens and to exercise their common freedom. Poverty, oppression and discrimination in particular circumstances do constitute politically relevant issues, because they not just cause social, but public invisibility too. Arendt argues human dignity is not brought about through attaining social visibility and justice alone, but requires the freedom to participate as well. For Arendt, the meaning of political freedom entails the right to be seen and heard in the world, that is, to access to the space of appearances. So she understands the wrongs inherent in the situation of the (extremely) poor, slaves and discriminated groups in political, rather than in socio-economic or socio-cultural, terms. 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 controversial Arendtian distinction between the social and the political, I argue, is actually a phenomenological clarification, which allows us to distinguish between social and political dimensions of one and the same problem, conflict or event. Problems are not in themselves social or political, but depending upon the perspective one takes upon them, appear as either social or political. The distinction between the social and the political and, subsequently, the struggle for political visibility, are important, since according to Arendt, the political itself, and consequentially political freedom, are at stake.

Summary

As a conclusion, I argue that the scholarly, or more generally the existential pathos or ethos, which permeates Arendt's work is *Amor Mundi*, love, or care for the world. This ethos expresses a paradox of distance and engagement and corresponds to Arendt's phenomenological understanding of the world as the in-between. *Amor Mundi* is expressed in a plethora of human activities that I described in the preceding chapters, such as speech and action; judging; understanding; storytelling and the formation and exchange of opinions; seeking, exploring and telling factual truths; and marginalized groups' struggle for political visibility. Likewise, *Amor Mundi* is expressed in practices and phenomena such as civic friendship, power, action-in-concert, and common sense. Additionally, *Amor Mundi* is expressed in the world-building activities of the fabrication of utensils, institutions, laws, works of art, etc., that together constitute the material world. It also becomes manifest in contracts, which are an effect of mutual promising, and which are subsequently materialized and institutionally embedded in covenants, treaties, constitutions, the law, etc. The attitudes, activities and practices of *Amor Mundi* enable stability; reality; meaningfulness; commonality; publicity, visibility and the appearance of who we are; and public freedom. The paradox of distance and engagement is exemplarily played out in the attitude of the Arendtian scholar-as-engaged-spectator. This attitude appeals to the cultivation and exercise of a radical openness to, and engagement with the factual, that is, contingent and unpredictable, nature of events and phenomena. The ethos of *Amor Mundi*, I argue, is Arendt's version of humanism. This humanism is worldly and non-sentimental, and refers to the cultivation of taste as the very starting point of the hermeneutic process of common sense, understanding and judging. By contrast, the in between that *Amor Mundi* cultivates as the condition of citizenship, is destroyed in two attitudes that are antithetical to *Amor Mundi*, i.e. *Contemptus Mundi* and *Amor Hominis*. One of the most important insights that Arendt provides is her acknowledgment that not just plain hatred for the world, but also love of Man, can inflict harm and catastrophes in politics. Examples of *Contemptus Mundi* include the totalitarian experience, metaphysics, ideologies, and modern subjectivism. *Amor Hominis*, comprising both care for life itself and care for the soul, is exemplified in phenomena such as conscientious objections, the politics of brotherhood, the politics of compassion and charity, and the moralization and sentimentalization of the political.

In the second half of the conclusion, I demonstrate the urgency and relevancy of the ethos of *Amor Mundi* and its current challenges. Current examples of practices that breathe the ethos of *Amor Mundi*, in other words, of practices of freedom, include, among others, forms of civil disobedience, civic discussion and grassroots civic initiatives, ranging from neighborhood committees to movements of concerned citizens organizing around civil rights issues. *Amor Mundi* is also reflected in the classical ethos of journalism. Important

aspects of *Amor Mundi* are expressed in its standards and principles. Truthfulness and accuracy correspond to commitment to disclosing factual truth. Fairness and *audi alteram partem*, hearing both sides, correspond to *erweiterte Denkungsart* or situated impartiality. On a meta-level, the ideal of pluralistic media fosters *Amor Mundi* as well. The first thing that strikes me, is that the adverse effects of contemporary modes of *Contemptus Mundi* are frequently met by modes of *Amor Hominis*. The prime contemporary example of *Contemptus Mundi* is the undermining of an important dimension of the material world, namely the constitutional state or *Rechtstaat* and the rule of law. Well-known examples include the de-juridification of particular groups of people, such as of enemy combatants of the war on terror and of irregular migrants in many countries, including constitutional democratic states; and the increasing infringement of the civil right to privacy. The weakened legal identity of particular groups of people is increasingly met by various forms of *Amor Hominis*, such as charity and compassion with (illegal) aliens and the poor.

Next, I argue that the values of safety and health, which belong to what Arendt calls the care for life itself, are increasingly given priority to the civic right to privacy, the care of which is an important dimension of *Amor Mundi*, which in the end will affect our public freedom. Arendt demonstrates that when the private sphere is no longer shielded against the public eye, not only is the private sphere affected, as the liberal paradigm holds, but the public sphere as well. The protection of privacy, the person's private invisibility, or the integrity of the private sphere, is a necessary condition for sound citizenship, public freedom and the flourishing of the public sphere. An example of a process in which care for the soul links up with *Contemptus Mundi*, finally, is the current moralization of the political, as it takes shape in the Netherlands in the discourse of 'civic responsibility', at the expense of citizens' legal status. These are all examples of what Arendt would call world alienation. As soon as safety, security, convenience and health become absolute and unquestioned values, the political is replaced by the social. And as soon as conscience, norms and values, and educating and disciplining citizens become the prime objects of concern of governments, the political gives way to the moral. In both cases, which are largely intertwined, we see a withering away of the common, public world, that is, of the very condition of our freedom. Critical, independent and pluralistic media committed to truthfulness and hearing all sides, as well as citizens' initiatives confronting civil rights violations and mobilizing to maintain the institutions of the *Rechtstaat*, might serve as an antidote against the world-alienating tendencies of *Contemptus Mundi* and *Amor Hominis*.