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I Want You to Be:

Love as a precondition of freedom in the thought of Hannah Arendt

This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given to us at birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, “*Volo ut sis* (I want you to be)”, without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation. (Arendt 2009, 301)

Love is often depicted in Hannah Arendt’s work as an unworldly and insulating passion that creates a barrier between us and the public world of political action. However, there is a kind of love that, I suggest here, is a necessary condition for the freedom Arendt places at the centre of being human. *Cupiditas*, our passion for the possession of another lies in stark contrast to *caritas*, the love graced by its transcendent character. *Caritas* is the love that is the basis for recognizing ourselves and others as unique individuals, and so makes possible the development and expression of human freedom.

Hannah Arendt is best known for her contributions to political philosophy. She became the focus of controversy for her coverage of the trial of Adolph Eichmann for the *New Yorker* in 1963ⁱ, in which she presented her thesis that “evil” is “banal”. Eichmann, she found, was an ordinary man, with none of the traits of evil thought to be the mark of a person capable of such crimes against humanity. The idea that evil is banal appeared to many to excuse Eichmann, while the real nature of her insight was missed. In fact, much of Arendt’s work from that time onward was a response to the criticism of her portrayal of Eichmann. She argued that if we do not actively think through what we do, we are all susceptible to the norms of the society we live in. I think today we are more able to recognize that people are capable of crimes of all kinds if the conditions are apt. The results of the Milgram experiments in the 1960s showed the world that “ordinary” people can be induced to torture others if asked to by an accepted authorityⁱⁱ. The behaviour of American soldiers in Abu Ghraib has given us a real-world illustration of this susceptibility. Acts of genocide and mass murder throughout history have been the actions of otherwise civilized people.

Given the enormity of the issues here and the bleakness of our history in this respect, a claim about necessary conditions for the possibility of resisting authority when it presses upon us in ways that horrify us, makes no attempt to describe sufficient conditions. However, it is not Arendt’s intention in her work to tell us what we ought to do, but, rather, to explore what it is within our capacity to develop, that which may suggest a way out of the future, described by Orwell, of “a boot stamping on a human face – for ever.”ⁱⁱⁱ That future is the antithesis of one in which “the grace of love” has had a role to play.

I first set out the conception of the political, and its dependence upon our freedom, that is central to Arendt’s political philosophy. I then discuss her account of the individual and the role this plays in underpinning the possibility of our being free. In the third part I look at the accounts of love Arendt herself first explored in her PhD thesis, *Love and Saint Augustine* and referenced in her later work. While both *cupiditas* and *caritas* are explored as kinds of love, I suggest that we can reject the concept of *cupiditas* as intrinsically connected to the love that possesses the grace of transcending the particular moment, *caritas*. *Caritas* is the form of love that underpins our freedom. In part four I explore Arendt’s account of totalitarianism and the dangers of missing the centrality of *caritas* to human freedom.

PART I : THE POLIS

Arendt’s account of the political realm is of a realm which expresses human freedom without the pressures of contingent needs, or particular desires. It is the realm of free beings being heard and seen by others, which constitutes the sphere of human freedom and the construction of a world that lasts beyond the life spans of the individuals who make it up.

Arendt introduces her conception of the *polis* as that which originated in Aristotle’s *bios politikos*. No aspect of human endeavour that is necessary, either for the maintenance of life itself or for the furthering of the social/economic organization under which we live, is a part of this. “Neither labor nor work was considered to possess sufficient dignity to constitute a *bios* at all, an autonomous and authentically human way of life...” (Arendt 1958, 13). Those whose work involves producing what is necessary and useful are not free, since their lives are bound up with human needs and wants. Instead, the *polis* is that sphere in which the participants are free, and have freely chosen to congregate. Any political organization that is not freely chosen and constituted by the freedom of the participants is not, properly speaking, political in Arendt’s terms. To emphasize this point Arendt tells us that “...the despot’s way of life, because it was ‘merely’ a necessity, could not be considered free and had no relationship with the *bios politikos*” (Ibid., 13). The political is the sphere of human freedom.

The freedom found in the *polis* is recognized as a freedom of the human world itself, continuing beyond the lives of the individuals who constitute it. It is this transcendence of the natural life span that characterizes the polis as meaningful:

The *polis* was for the Greeks, as the *res publica* was for the Romans, first of all their guarantee against the futility of individual life, the space protected against this futility and reserved for the relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals." (Ibid., 56)

The political sphere is premised on the assumption that the world will last. What occurs there leaves its trace on humanity itself. It does not die with the death of the individuals who contribute to it. It is the polis that preserves our freedom, in providing the sphere in which we may converse and be known by other free human beings. A world in which there is no public sphere is one in which there is no transcendence of the particular life, in which we "live and die without leaving a trace" (Arendt 2009, 300).

What we call politics now is the social and economic sphere that Arendt views as destructive of the genuinely political. Given the instrumental nature of socioeconomic activity, "the political" now refers to government processes at best, and self-serving or power-oriented machinations at worst. In the case of government legislation, politics is viewed as the art of compromise between competing interests with the aim of meeting the needs and promoting the desires of the citizens. In contrast to this instrumentalist perspective, Arendt's conception of the *polis* as functioning outside of necessity or desire seems an alien concept: she conceives of the political as the highest expression of the best that being human offers us.

The political sphere is characterized by action: action is human by definition. All other movements are mere behaviour, responses to stimuli, not self-determined. While we share our social nature with other animals, the political nature is entirely human. The political nature is a "second nature", so that to be part of the political sphere one must leave the social, or familial sphere, the sphere of relations that are determined by roles and hierarchies, in which we satisfy our wants and needs, rather than express our own free will. The political sphere is characterized by "action (praxis) and speech (lexis), out of which rises the realm of human affairs from which everything merely necessary or useful is strictly excluded." (Arendt 1958, 25). The distinction between the two is clear:

Natural community in the householdwas born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in it... The realm of the *polis*, on the contrary, was the sphere of freedom, and if there was a relationship between these two spheres, it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for freedom of the polis... freedom is exclusively located in the political realm. (Arendt 1958, 30-31)

The *polis* is the essential condition for *eudaimonia*, what we often translate as human flourishing. Flourishing, in Aristotelian terms, requires a good deal of luck regarding health and wealth, so that we might be free from the necessities of life to develop our human characteristics. To be free means to be free from ruling or being ruled, it means being equal among equals. There are certainly resonances here with Kant's ideal of our living as ends-in-ourselves in a Kingdom of Ends.

The *polis* described here remains for Arendt a way of capturing what is essential to human freedom. This is not just an exercise in ontology, but contains a moral claim as well: without our being able to recognize and exercise such freedom we are more susceptible to the threat from totalitarianism, which Arendt saw directly in the form of Stalinism and Nazism, and which remains an issue for us today given the social pressures on freedom we see in modern society.

The freedom of individuals found in such a political realm depends on more than the presence of a *polis*, however. In order for there to be a *polis*, for the expression of human freedom, there must be individuals, "single, unique", and others with whom these individuals are in relationship as equals. Equality is a feature of the public sphere, while difference and diversity are features of the private. Without the latter, however, the former is not possible.

PART II: THE INDIVIDUAL

The individual is a central focus of concern for Arendt. Without individuals, there is no one to take responsibility. She argues, in fact, that there is no such thing as "group responsibility". Only individuals are responsible.

There are two strands in Arendt's thinking on the concept of the individual I will explore here: One is that this individuality is given to us in virtue of our being born. Her account of natality as defining our experience contrasts with Heidegger's account of our being-toward-death. We do not experience our death, she argues, but our birth is given to us in actual experience. We know that we began, and are, therefore, a beginning. This idea of our being a beginning, a new life arising in the midst of a world otherwise shaped by ongoing causal connections, is central to Arendt's conception of our capacity to initiate actions, to shape a world. The idea of our being beginnings is present in her early work on Augustine. Augustine's claim "that a beginning be made man was created" (Arendt 2009, 479) is echoed throughout her writings on thinking of ourselves as originators, having spontaneity, the capacity to be the first step in a new series of actions. Clearly this is important if we are not to be viewed merely as aspects of an already established causal structure, and if we are to make a difference in the world.

Another strand in her thinking on the concept of the individual person is found in her account of the origin of that term:

Persona... originally referred to the actor's mask that covered his individual "personal" face and indicated to the spectator the role and the part of the actor in the play. But in this mask, which was designed and determined by the play, there existed

a broad opening at the place of the mouth through which the individual, undisguised voice of the actor could sound. It is from the sounding through that the word persona was derived: per-sonare, “to sound through,” is the verb of which persona, the mask, is the noun. (Arendt 2003, 12).

We are persons to the extent that we engage in the activity of speaking with our own voice. When this voice is lost, when the mask covers the voice of the person and speaks for it, as in the case of Eichmann, the individual views himself as a “cog in the machine”^{iv}. When the court of law asks the accused to speak it is on the basis that the trial is that of a self-responsible individual, or person. Self-responsibility assumes that one’s speech is one’s own. A self-responsible being is not a mouthpiece for another, not a cog in a machine run by others. A self-responsible person’s speech and actions originate with herself.

In order for us to be self-responsible, speaking and acting from a place that originates in each of us, our persona, we must be free to do so. What gives us the freedom to do so is a central concern for Arendt. Freedom lies in our capacity to think. The freest activities of the *vita activa* turn out to be those that are wholly constituted by the activity of “thought”. Here we can see how Arendt arrives at this notion phenomenologically:

...if no other test but the experience of being active, no other measure but the extent of sheer activity were to be applied to the various activities within the *vita activa*, it might well be that thinking as such would surpass them all. Whoever has any experience in this matter will know how right Cato was when he said: *Numquam se plus agere quam nihil cum ageret, numquam minus solum esse quam cum solus esset* – “Never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself.” (Arendt 1958, 325)

In thought we are two-in-one, not alone, but with ourselves, originating thought and self-reflection, making active our original, originating character.

The account Arendt gives of the person as originator is developed in her metaphor of the “gap” between past and future in which we experience ourselves. She critiques Kafka’s account of the person, K^{vi}, who is squeezed into a gap by the pressures of the past and the future on the point at which he attempts to live, arguing that Kafka does not explore how that “gap” itself is the origin of freedom. On her own understanding of the “gap”, it is ontological of human kind that we originate in a “non-time” space produced by the past and the future, directing ourselves infinitely outward. Arendt illustrates her idea with a geometric metaphor in which our trajectory is produced by the confluence of past and future, which is then refracted, or redirected by our presence, angling us in a new direction that is constituted by our presence as much as by the past or future. How do we, by being present, make this happen? Arendt argues that it is our capacity to think that is both necessary and sufficient for our determining ourselves in this space of freedom:

Only insofar as he thinks, and that is insofar as he is ageless - a “he” as Kafka so rightly calls him, and not a “somebody” – does man in the full actuality of his concrete being live in this gap of time between past and future. The gap, I suspect, is not a modern phenomenon, it is perhaps not even a historical datum but is coeval with the existence of man on earth. It may well be the region of the spirit, or, rather, that path paved by thinking, this small track of non-time which the activity of thought beats within the time-space of mortal man into which the trains of thought, of remembrance and anticipation, save whatever they touch from the ruin of historical and biographical time. This small non-time-space in the very heart of time, unlike the world and the culture into which we are born, can only be indicated, but cannot be inherited and handed down from the past; each new generation, indeed every new human being as he inserts himself between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave it anew. (Arendt 1961, 13)

The “plodding paving” of the lived life is not achieved by the assertion of tradition, or by serving the functions established by our place in our culture. To refer to the activity of thought, the free expression of our individual, self-responsible self as “plodding” calls our attention to the fact that thinking is not easy: we don’t just do as we wish, say as we wish, entertain any fantasy that occurs to us. Arendt’s commitment to “thinking without a banister”, is crucial to our plodding paving of the life anew:

Even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is a beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality. (Arendt 1994, 307)

We must hold ourselves up, self-balanced and self-determining, able to think and rethink, reflect and question, maintaining the ideal of the Socratic internal dialogue, rejecting any easy, pre-established routes along which supports guide us on our the way. And in this way, we might resist the categories imposed by regimes that aim to remove our humanity.

Thinking is the capacity we have for self-originating action, both as speech and deed. Its paradigmatic expression is in the public sphere, where we think, that is speak and act, amongst equal and free people. What role, then is played by ‘thinking with oneself’, the solitude that is never lonely? The being-with-myself, as Cato describes it, seems too isolated, too internal, too easily subsumed within the sphere of the private, to play the role of the expression of freedom which requires a public world of political activity.

While political freedom is prioritized in Arendt’s work as the primary way of grasping human freedom, this political freedom presupposes the capacity for the inner self to recognize itself and to embrace itself. This inner recognition is not freedom, but the precondition for freedom. The question then is what in our nature makes this precondition for freedom possible? “The grace of love” may, I suggest, be the condition that must be in place for individuality and political freedom to arise.

PART III: LOVE

It is easy enough to think of love as involving passion. If one doesn't feel something happening to oneself in the presence of a loved one, where's the love? The indifference William James refers to as a cold intellectual appreciation in relation to fear, when it appears in love threatens to make protestations of one's devotion vacuous: we need to experience the heartfelt warmth shared by those we love. This passion, as passions do, comes upon us. We don't choose to love, but discover our love. We are, it might then seem, passive recipients of love, falling into it, being overwhelmed by it, behaving obsessively in the face of it. But, unlike fear, we don't attribute loving to a cause: no one causes us to love. Despite the language of passivity, we identify ourselves as active when we love: in fact, love gives rise to activity and a sense of purpose, a joy of acting in consort with the loved one for the sheer pleasure of it. We may not choose whom we love, but we seek love out, and claim it as our own, as expressive of ourselves, our individual life.

The way in which love seems to create a world of the lovers, removing us from the greater world, suggests love is a private experience. Hannah Arendt warns that the passion of love isolates us from the public world: "Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others" (Arendt, 1958 242). The "spell" of love can only be intercepted by the child born out of it, and who becomes the way in which the lovers can contribute to the world outside their own. Although the child breaks the spell by contributing to the world, our passion keeps us in a limited, private world. We can neither be related to others, nor, in fact, separated from others through love. The "in-between", the wider world which we engage in when part of the public life is not available to us, to relate and separate us. This can best be understood by recognizing that separation is not isolation, but distinction. If we cannot be distinguished from others our individuality is lost. This understanding of love is that of *cupiditas*, the love that is a passion for a particular object, one which always includes the fear of losing it that arises once the object is possessed. *Cupiditas* is always frustrated love. It turns in on itself and its objects, since it always needs to protect against threats to the possession of the object of desire. It longs for something to be permanently possessed, which can never be permanently possessed, so it longs for an illusion. *Cupiditas* is built on the illusion of possession, while suffering the very real fear that this object will be taken against our will.

Arendt argues that respect is better suited to the worldly appreciation of others than is the passion of love: "...what love is in its own, narrowly circumscribed sphere, respect is in the larger domain of human affairs". "Respect", she says, "is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or of achievements which we may highly esteem" (Ibid., 243). Although we do not respect another in virtue of their qualities, our respect is personal. To understand how this might be, it is worth thinking of this respect as Kantian. For Kant, we are all due respect in virtue of our being persons, not because of a contingent fact about our personhood. Reflecting on the passion of love as the desiring of an object and the ensuing fear of its loss, Arendt concludes: "Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only a-political but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces" (Ibid., 242). There is no role to be played by *cupiditas*, the passion of love, in the foundational conditions for human freedom. A mere passion, a heat, a bond, a world-isolating cocoon of lovers, might even be a threat to our freedom, as, indeed, it often seems in experience to be. Respect, not love, recognizes human beings as uniquely individual and related to each other as ends in themselves, aware of each other as uniquely individual.

But love is also an action, the expression of our persona, our individual voice, an experience that can lead to us appearing more clearly to ourselves, and others appearing more clearly to us. The love that feels like an action does not bind us into a single unit, or cause vacillations between desire and fear. It is the love that, grounded in the recognition of the possibility of the eternal, is shown to be foundational to our experience of freedom. This foundational experience connects us through recognition of the individuality of others and a wish that other individuals will flourish. Such a love does not possess its object, since its object is that another remains individual and exists. Since its desire is not for possession it doesn't fear the loss of its object, although there is grief if the one loved is harmed. The love itself is not shaped by possession and fear of loss, it is shaped by the dynamic character of discovering the other as single, unique and related to oneself in mutual recognition.

Arendt first wrote about love in her PhD thesis, *Love and St Augustine*. She begins her dissertation with Augustine's account of love as "craving": "Augustine writes that 'to love is indeed nothing else than to crave something for its own sake,' and further on he comments that 'love is a kind of craving.'" (Arendt 1996, 9) We are directed toward the object of love, "love is 'a kind of motion'", as a good we seek for its own sake (Ibid., 9). It represents nothing but its own goodness, and we need it because we do not possess it. Arendt sums up the idea of craving as "the will to have and to hold" which will give rise to fear as soon as we possess the object craved (Ibid., 10). This craving is central to being human and makes us each who we are: "'Such is each as is his love.' Strictly speaking, he who does not love and desire at all is a nobody." (Ibid., 18)

Love is a defining constituent of being in a world. Understanding ourselves as needing others, as lacking self-sufficiency, motivates us to form bonds with others, "to break out of [our] isolation by means of love". (Ibid., 19) A dilemma arises within the very experience of loving, however. Without it we are nobody, the persona that marks our uniqueness and presence in the world does not exist, but with it we are enslaved by desire and frustration... and so do not experience the freedom we are born for. Arendt summarizes the view of Plotinus on this point: "...to the extent that we are alive and active (and desire is a form of action), we necessarily are involved in things outside ourselves and cannot be free." (Ibid., 21)

The description of our flight into the temporal, worldly world and away from ourselves, echoes Heidegger's account of *Das Man* as fleeing from ourselves into the world. There seems to be no solution to the problem of our need: either we love the world and lose ourselves by absorbing ourselves in it, or we retreat from the world and find ourselves lost in the question of who we are.

Augustine found love of God was the answer. While *cupiditas* mediates between man and world, with man forgetting himself in the transit to love of worldly things, *caritas* mediates between man and God, with man forgetting himself in the transit to love of Him. Arendt's approach is to locate the realm of the eternal, not in the religious outlook, but in the public sphere, where eternity, or something close to it, resides in its transcendence of the individuals who constitute it.

CUPIDITAS AND CARITAS: A CONTEMPORARY VIEW OF LOVE

Cupiditas is experienced as passion. It comes upon us, it motivates our absorption in each other, often in spite of ourselves, often giving rise to desires we do not desire. When we fail in love, when we are rejected or usurped by another, the loss reminds us how little control we had over the direction of the love. We can feel as if we were overwhelmed by love so that we could not judge well, and the devastation of loss reflects the degree of powerlessness the entire predicament reveals about us. Despite this powerlessness, the passivity, the chanciness of love being good for us, of being returned, and stable, there is also a feeling of activity. But the activity of *cupiditas* is the activity of the addict... it is forced upon us by our need. The activity felt when *cupiditas* appears to dominate, but which is, nonetheless, energizing, and expansive arises, I suggest, from a different kind of love, that of *caritas*. When *cupiditas* feels personal and active, it has elements of *caritas* and it is these elements alone that are necessary and sufficient for the experience of love as powerful, active, meaningful. *Caritas* gives us the experience that our love transcends the particular and does not aim for possession.

Cupiditas without the intermingling of *caritas* is not recognizably love: it is obsessive and power-based, it is an appetite, not an emotion. It is a craving, as in addiction, it is self-involving while destroying the self, and never other-involving. *Cupiditas* does not recognize the singularity or autonomy of the person desired in this way. Lust, for instance, is constituted by an appetite for sexual satisfaction. The common conceptual error is to call this a desire for another person. It is peculiar to think that there is a way in which we can possess another. Short of trapping someone in a room, we cannot possess another. Trapping a person in a room involves a form of possession that refers only to the body. The use of drugs, or psychological manipulation can mask or possibly bring about a mental state in the object desired that does not announce its independence from the possessor, but the mental life of another can never be possessed. Describing what must take place in order to "possess" another makes it clear that lustful desire is not a desire for possession of the other, but a need, or urge, or appetite for a set of sensations which result in the cessation of the appetite. Lust drives people to pursue not a person, but an act. Any pursuit of the person is the means for pursuing the act. Nor does one, in lust, possess the sexual act, one performs it in order to satisfy or lose the appetite for it.

What of more complex desires for sexual involvement with another? Perhaps romantic obsession is a good illustration of a complex form of *cupiditas* which is not so easily shown to be an appetite rather than a form of love.

While obsession feels very far from love, associated with stalking and even harming the object "desired" in some way, romantic obsession contains ideas of caring for the desired object while fearing that one may be rejected. I think if we explore this concept, there will be nothing inherently loving about it. The desired object remains a means to the end of fulfilling needs that belong entirely to the person obsessing. A person who has obsessed about another at one time, has no doubt obsessed about others before and will obsess about others in the future. There is a good chance that they will be obsessive in their approach to desiring others. The other is not a particular, a singular person. Obsession clouds the understanding, it does not clarify. And the energy it produces is destructive not productive. The ways found out of it often involve violence as a way of asserting oneself against the pain produced by the obsessing mind. One could say that the violence done to another about whom one obsesses is mis-directed violence aimed at ending one's own obsessive experiences. If we add the concept of the romantic to the obsession, obsession does not fare better. This is not to say that it is impossible that a person can overcome the obsession and still remain romantically engaged with the other, or with the thought of the other. But the obsession does none of the work of making this an experience of love. If the romantic feelings are not themselves merely disguised obsessions, then they may actually be feelings describable as *caritas*, not *cupiditas*.

What is the 'grace of love', or *caritas*, that makes our experience of love something other than the satisfaction of a desire or appetite? Grace in this context is not the grace found in the love of God, but in something nonetheless sharing in a transcendent nature. Without reference to God, an after life, or a higher purpose, the sense of the transcendent qualities can still be found in the making of a human world. Key features of this world are that we are actors, agents, not just an aspect of a greater causal chain; we are single, unique, we are born, and so are beginnings; and we are related to others who are themselves beginnings. We make a difference to the world we co-construct, a difference that lasts beyond our own life-span.

The activity of love is experienced as the energy of relating to another. The heightened pleasure of the other's voice, of insights, of projects shared, are part of this relational energy. Both people stand out in fuller relief, in technicolour, in four dimensional space. We become interested in the full person, including their past, photos of them as children, details of their lives as they have grown into the present we share with them, knowledge of the people they have cared about, all become part of the person we are coming to know through loving them.

We become more aware of ourselves through coming to know another. We, too, stand out in four-dimensional space, our own past acquires new meanings when another is interested in it. The eyes and ears of the other, their

seeing and hearing us, brings us into full relief to ourselves as well as to them, as do our eyes and ears, our seeing and hearing the other, bring the other to him or herself in a fuller form.

If we view others as means to our own ends, or objects interchangeable with others, the one we purport to love is diminished, not made fuller by our involvement with them. If each of us is diminished by not actually being loved by the person purporting to love, there is no-one fully there. "We drifted" sums up the account of a relationship in which neither actually loves the other. We stopped mattering in a particular way, we stopped enriching the presence of the other, and we stopped being enriched. If this is the pattern of our lives, we need to take note. The lack of love, Arendt says, "strictly speaking" makes us a "nobody". Objects, not people, drift. The lack of love eliminates the individuality, the presence of a persona, the necessary precondition for freedom.

LOVING YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF

Caritas is not the passion of desire, *cupiditas*, but the recognition of another that enlivens both oneself and the other. Love motivates us to deepen our understanding of the other, to live our own lives more fully, to better understand ourselves. *Caritas* adds something to the world.

Love as *caritas* has no connection to possession. Love of our neighbour, that is, of our friends, colleagues, and those who make up our world is central to human flourishing. Our capacity to love others adds light and meaning to the world. The light comes from the many perspectives that shape each of us, when we are seen and heard by others who love us. The meaning comes from this being a good in itself.

We can experience this light and meaning even when it is not a mutually shared love. Love of those in the public world, the artists, the great public figures, those who touch us from outside our immediate sphere of reference, is love in the ways I have suggested above: the greater dimensionality, the enlivening thoughtfulness, the meaningfulness of their presence. We can also love artworks, or nature, or our community, in this way. We can love any number of beings or presences in the world in this way.

A feature of all such experience is that even when we are on our own, we are not lonely. Solitude, Arendt tells us, is not loneliness, but being-with-oneself, active in the presence of one's full life. A love of one's work, of humanity in general, all this is love of our neighbour, and all give rise to this experience. Solitude is there where loneliness, as found in the "loneliness of the mass man" (Arendt 1958, 247), might have been.

In loneliness, we are not special. We are replaceable by others. The only meaning we have is given to us by our role within a system. We, ourselves, have no importance, no resonance. No trace is left after our death. Dying is as useful as living. In such a state we are vulnerable to the control over life that is the hallmark of totalitarianism.

PART IV: TOTALITARIANISM: A THREAT FOR MASS MAN

Totalitarianism is not mere tyranny, in which a powerful ruler or ruling group forces the people into submission for the glorification of its own power or an ideal. Totalitarianism has two central features that distinguish it from tyranny: one is that the populace is not bullied or threatened into submitting, but is in fact so thoroughly absorbed into it that it appears even to itself to be willingly contributing to the aims of the regime. The possibility of an inner life resisting the regime's aims is removed.

...all public manifestations, cultural, artistic, learned, and all organizations, welfare and social services, even sports and entertainment, are "coordinated." There is no office and indeed no job of any public significance, from advertising agencies to the judiciary, from play-acting to sports journalism, from primary and secondary schooling to the universities and learned societies, in which an unequivocal acceptance of the ruling principles is not demanded. (Arendt 2003, 33)

The other central feature is that it is life-denying. There are no ideals, only the aim of removing human dignity altogether. Anyone at any time can be targeted as a criminal. People might even decide to target themselves. Arendt describes what happens to humans in such an environment:

To give but one among many examples: the extermination of Jews was preceded by a very gradual sequence of anti-Jewish measures, each of which was accepted with the argument that refusal to cooperate would make things worse – until a stage was reached where nothing worse could possibly have happened.... We see here how unwilling the human mind is to face realities which in one way or another contradict totally its framework of reference. Unfortunately, it seems to be much easier to condition human behavior and to make people conduct themselves in the most unexpected and outrageous manner, than it is to persuade anybody to learn from experience, as the saying goes; that is, to start thinking and judging instead of applying categories and formulas which are deeply ingrained in our mind, but whose basis of experience has long been forgotten. (Ibid., 37)

The nobody, the human being who loses his recognition of himself as unique, and the recognition of others as unique, identifies himself as a cog in a machine run by others. He is lost in the world he purports to dwell in, and his loneliness is all consuming.

Thinking and judging, and the recognition of our nature as beginnings rather than parts of a system remain throughout Arendt's philosophy necessary conditions for human freedom. This self-awareness is what makes possible resistance to the usurpation of our freedom by regimes that aim to invade the individual at the level of his private life and remove the sources of freedom found there.

A precondition for thinking and judging is the recognition of oneself as an originator of thought, not as a cog in a machine that functions best when functioning to fulfil the aims of the machine. It is a recognition of oneself as unique, and of others as unique. It takes work to resist turning others and ourselves into objects. The warning that we are doing so is that we lose interest, both in others and in ourselves. This suggests that the interest, the primal driving interest that is experienced as love, a desire for someone to be, lies at the heart of wanting ourselves to be, and in so being, be alive, thinking, acting, reflecting, making a difference.

CONCLUSION

What kind of beings can create a common world with the freedom of the *polis*? It seems a precondition for the creation of this world is that we are, to begin with, individual and unique. We are defined by our natality, not our mortality, we are a rupture in the flow of time, beginning something new and making a difference by being born. If our being born is followed by our being overtaken by the instrumental values of the culture into which we then find ourselves absorbed, the difference we make is lost. But if we crave making a difference to the world, to be seen and heard by the infinite perspectives provided by others who see and hear us, then we have found the human equivalent of immortality, which is the freedom to contribute to a world that is greater than the sum total of those alive at any point in time.

“I want you” is finite, limited and consumable. “I want you to be” steps back from possession and recognizes us as individual:

...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. For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life... Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear. (Arendt 1958, 57)

The innumerable perspectives we have on each other as individuals constitute a shared public world that is greater than the particular moments during which each of us lives. Love as *caritas* is the craving for this sphere that extends beyond the lives of each of us, a precondition for freedom.

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END NOTES

ⁱ [Hannah Arendt, A Reporter at Large, "Eichmann in Jerusalem—I," The New Yorker, February 16, 1963, p. 40.](#)

This is the first of a series of articles published in *The New Yorker*.

ⁱⁱ Stanley Milgram set up a series of experiments in which subjects were asked to administer shocks to people who did not answer questions correctly. The 'victims' were actors pretending that the system administered painful shocks to them, while the subjects remained unaware that the 'shocks' were not real. These were set up in response to the controversy surrounding the "ordinariness" of Adolph Eichmann and established the point that we may all be capable of extreme cruelty when submitting to authority.

ⁱⁱⁱ Orwell, George. 1949. 1984. London: Penguin.

^{iv} Arendt wrote: "Recently, during the discussion of the Eichmann trial, these comparatively simple matters have been complicated through what I'll call the cog-theory. When we describe a political system – how it works, the relations between the various branches of government, how the huge bureaucratic machineries function of which the channels of command are part, and how the civilian and the military and the police forces are interconnected, to mention only outstanding characteristics – it is inevitable that we speak of all persons used by the system in terms of cogs and wheels that keep the administration running. Each cog, that is, each person, must be expendable without changing the system, an assumption underlying all bureaucracies, all civil services, and all functions properly speaking. This viewpoint is the viewpoint of political science, and if we accuse or rather evaluate in its frame of reference, we speak of good and bad systems and our criteria are the freedom or the happiness or the degree of participation of the citizens, but the question of the personal responsibility of those who run the whole affair is a marginal issue. Here it is indeed true what all the defendants in the postwar trials said to excuse themselves: if I had not done it, somebody else could and would have." (Arendt 2003, 29)

^v The *vita activa* in this context refers to Arendt's own account of this in *The Human Condition*. This refers to the three levels of human existence, labor, work, and action.

^{vi} Arendt is referring here to a work by Kafka, "HE", a story in a series entitled "Notes from the year 1920". Translated from the German by Willa and Edwin Muir.