

ONE

# Natality

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From very early on in her intellectual career, Hannah Arendt's interest in life and the political implications connected to the fact of being born is significant. The concept of "natality" is central to her overall theory of politics, and perhaps, its most optimistic aspect. Focusing on life and natality, as opposed to death and mortality, raises the political life into a hopeful activity in which one truly displays aspects of the self to the world in meaningful ways. Focusing on natality suggests that individual action is important and earthly events are significant. Connected to her concepts of political action and plurality, natality is at the heart of Arendt's theory of politics.

## Natality and Augustine

Having attended Martin Heidegger's lectures during the period in which he was writing *Being and Time*, Arendt's first significant break from his point of view occurs in her doctoral dissertation, published in 1929 as *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin: Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation*. This work has been translated into English as *Love and Saint Augustine* (published in 1996), and includes later revisions Arendt made to her thesis as she anticipated its English publication during 1964–5. Because of her failure to finish the revision, there is controversy concerning the overall significance of her investigation of Augustine.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, her revisions to the English translation include the term "natality" and indicate that her examination of Augustine's work may have inspired the formation of this concept. Ultimately, Arendt explains

nativity more thoroughly in her later work, especially in *The Human Condition*. Nonetheless, Arendt's thesis and its revision provide interesting clues to the overall significance of nativity to the rest of her theory.

Martin Heidegger's fundamental ontology looms large over her dissertation, although her thesis supervisor Karl Jaspers's *Existenz* philosophy also has an influence. Arendt's analysis of Saint Augustine's theory is a phenomenological exploration of the concept of love in much the same vein as Heidegger's exploration of time. Nevertheless, there are two aspects in particular that break with Heidegger's work. Throughout her career, Arendt's major criticism of Heidegger involves his lack of attention to the active life of politics, in favour of the contemplative life of eternal truths. Although this criticism is expressed more directly in her later work, it emerges in her discussion of Augustine's concept of love and is explored in two different ways in this text. First, there is an analysis of nativity, or what it means to be born, as opposed to Heidegger's emphasis on mortality. Second, Arendt develops a critical analysis of Augustine's discussion of love of the neighbour from the Christian worldview. This criticism extends to Heidegger's work as well, since Heidegger fails to give much attention to positive relations with others in *Being and Time*. Focusing on the solitude of death, as opposed to the potential of birth, may result in a more solitary and less politically oriented philosophy.

Heidegger's *Being and Time* ([1927] 1967) is known for exploring the authentic life of the individual in the mode of being-towards-death. The authentic person faces up to his mortality and does not pretend life is endless. Only through acknowledging that life is limited will one be filled with the urgency to make authentic decisions about one's present life. Often, Heidegger writes about this as a seemingly solitary and individual task, since mortality is uniquely one's own. In ordinary experience, other people distract us and encourage us to be inauthentic, as they are caught up in everyday concerns that refute the idea that death is an ever-present possibility. Heidegger calls other people in the inauthentic mode of engagement with the self *das Man*, sometimes translated as "the they". Engaging with the inauthentic "they" leads one away from facing mortality and towards getting caught up in the idle chatter of everyday concerns. Even though Heidegger mentions the possibility of authentically being-with-others, what he calls *Mitsein*, its discussion is not as emphasized as the seemingly more usual problematic relation with other people that produces inauthentic behaviour based in either distraction or outright denial of the limited time that one has on earth.<sup>2</sup> By examining different forms of love in Augustine's work, Arendt finds problems that may easily extend to Heidegger's ontology.

Arendt rejects the solitary "authentic" existence that seems to be the outcome of both Heidegger and Augustine's work.

According to Arendt, Augustine describes love as involving *appetitus*, or craving, which concerns desiring an object thought to bring happiness (Arendt 1996: 9). However, craving is not unrelated to fear, since all goods can be lost. Arendt notes *appetitus* in Augustine's work is often related to mortality, since mortality can be understood as an enemy to be feared, connected to loss. Typically, mortality is beyond personal control, and humans crave the ability to face the future without fear or loss of life (*ibid.*: 11–12). As Arendt's biographer Elizabeth Young-Bruehl notes, the ultimate goal of craving is a "life without fear" (Young-Bruehl 2004: 491). Yet, to truly satisfy the craving, the right kind of love is required. Through loving God, the fear of mortality is superseded by a love that produces eternal life, which is crucial for the Catholic saint. The wrong sort of love, *cupiditas*, is love for things of this world and in Augustine's framework it is exemplified by those who belong to the city of man, doomed to not be saved. Arendt describes *cupiditas* in Heideggerian terminology as a flight from death. Those who crave for permanence cling "to the very things sure to be lost in death" (Arendt 1996: 17). This produces unsatisfying enslavement to things outside of one's control that *can* be lost against one's will (*ibid.*: 20). Fear of death does not end with *cupiditas* because one is still tied to temporal things that can be lost (*ibid.*: 23). Arendt describes this phenomenon as a type of "flight from the self" and parallels it to Heidegger's description of inauthentic life (*ibid.*). Through *cupiditas*, one is distracted from fear of mortality, but the self gets lost in earthly things and the anxiety about death is not resolved (*ibid.*: 23–5).

Augustine's cure for this state differs from Heidegger's, largely due to Augustine's overtly Christian concerns. *Caritas* is the right kind of love that pursues eternity (*ibid.*: 17). The correct kind of love, *caritas*, finds eternity through rejecting the objects of the temporal world and closes the gap between the individual and God (*ibid.*: 20). Through *caritas*, God, or the beloved "becomes a permanently inherent element of one's own being" (*ibid.*: 19). The true happiness of the eternal life of the soul emerges through this love, by transcending human, mortal nature (*ibid.*: 30). Unlike for Heidegger, being and time are opposed for Augustine. Arendt states that in Augustine's work, to truly *be* "man has to overcome his human existence, which is temporality" (*ibid.*: 29). In effect, "Death has died" (*ibid.*: 34). Humans are essentially liberated from mortality because of an eternal afterlife. The love of life on this earth is a sinful temptation, or at best, secondary and derivative, as compared to the rewards of *caritas*.

In order to explain how temporality works in Augustine's thought, Arendt turns to natality. Heidegger emphasizes the future eventuality of death, but for Augustine, it is the past that is more crucial for influencing the present and the future (*ibid.*: 47). In her revision to the dissertation for its English translation, Arendt changes her discussion of the importance of the past for Augustine to include the word "natality". By this time, she has already elaborated upon natality in *The Human Condition* and other works. She includes the following statement in her revision of her thesis: "the decisive fact determining man as conscious, remembering being is birth or 'natality,' that is, the fact that we have entered the world through birth" (*ibid.*: 51). In her original dissertation, Arendt discusses only the phenomena of "beginning" and "origin" but adds the word "natality", which signifies that some of the inspiration for this idea can be found with Augustine (Scott & Stark 1996: 132–3). In fact, Arendt usually quotes Augustine whenever she discusses natality or birth. In relation to Heidegger, mortality is still important for Arendt, but not as emphasized because natality and the potential that humans have for living has greater significance for political action. Jeffrey Andrew Barash argues that the difference in temporal emphasis between Arendt's examination of Augustine and Heidegger's temporality is fundamental to her criticism of Heidegger as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Barash describes Heidegger's ontology as being a type of existential "futurism", whereas Arendt stresses the importance of memory and remembrance more greatly than Heidegger (Barash 2002: 172–6). For Arendt, memory and origin are fundamentally related to the capacity for humans to act politically.

Arendt connects the notion of natality within Augustine's thought to gratitude for all that has been given. This links natality with Arendt's idea of *amor mundi*, or love the world. Whereas so much philosophical analysis in Western philosophy emphasizes abstract and eternal realities, Arendt insists that a love of this world is needed. In the Augustinian framework, remembrance and gratitude quiet the fear of death (Arendt 1996: 52). Arendt describes the love that seeks eternity as a kind of recollection, a return to the self and to the Creator who made the self, linking it with origins (*ibid.*: 50, 53). This appreciation of the past is an appreciation of God's part in the creation of the universe and of the self (*ibid.*: 50). Arendt then connects the awareness of the origin to the potential for human action. It is because humans know and are grateful for their origin that they are able to begin and act in the story of humanity (*ibid.*: 55). Arendt notes that Augustine uses two different words to describe the difference between the beginning of the universe and human beginnings. *Principium* refers to the beginning of

the universe, while *initium* refers to the human beginnings as they act in the world (*ibid.*). The remembrance of the origin involves both facets, although Arendt notes that for Augustine, it seems that the *initium* of a human being is equally, if not more, important (*ibid.*: 55; Arendt 1958: 177 n. 3). Augustine is on to something with his examination of the importance of remembering origins for Arendt. Because of his interest in birth and gratitude for the world, there is the potential for a real connection to the importance of things in this world and an understanding of the meaningfulness of each individual life. However, Augustine's Christian ideology forecloses this possibility for Arendt due to the way that Christianity understands the world, the individual's role in it and the proper relationships to other people. The Christian world-view prioritizes the eternal and heavenly over earthly events affecting mortal humans.

Arendt asserts that for Augustine, human beings have a crucial temporal role. The existence of mortals who live life sequentially means that time and change can be marked and events in the universe can have a purpose when viewed sequentially. Different from God's time of eternal simultaneity, humans mark what occurs in the world, and contribute to it through action. She concludes in her English revision that "it was for the sake of *novitas*, in a sense, that man was created" (Arendt 1996: 55). Although Heidegger also examines humanity's relation to time, he does not emphasize the fact of birth in *Being and Time* except to say that we are thrown towards our deaths, since being born and dying are beyond our free choice.<sup>4</sup> Arendt specifically points to Heidegger as someone who promotes expectation of death as unifying human existence (*ibid.*: 56). In contrast, she asserts that it is remembrance of the origin that is important, giving "unity and wholeness to human existence" (*ibid.*). She states "Only man, but no other mortal being, lives toward his ultimate *origin* while living toward the final boundary of death" (*ibid.*: 57, emphasis added). It is not only mortality, but natality, that leads to action.

Arendt's English translators, Scott and Stark, emphasize that it is Augustine who guides Arendt in abandoning Heidegger's death-focused phenomenology, by focusing instead on birth and origin (*ibid.*: 124). However, Arendt is not entirely uncritical of Augustine, and the last third of the dissertation examines a problem that arises out of Augustine's Christian and Platonic worldview. In his own way, Augustine also prioritizes eternal things, such as the eternity of the soul and the eternal nature of the universe as God's creation. Therefore, he does not acknowledge the importance of acts on this earth. The greater importance of the whole of creation and its eternal nature means that

the individual life has little significance, especially outside of its potential for heavenly existence (*ibid.*: 60). Arendt states that for Augustine “life is divested of the uniqueness and irreversibility in which temporal sequences flow from birth to death” (*ibid.*). All of creation is deemed to be good as part of God’s creation. Actions only *seem* evil if one does not adopt the perspective of the whole and looks at events as sequential, instead of simultaneous in God’s time. Unique events are not good because of their individual distinction, but only because they are part of God’s universe. Consequently, the individual is “both enclosed and lost in the eternally identical simultaneity of the universe” (*ibid.*: 62). Human life does not possess autonomous significance outside of the eternal plan. Arendt believes that Augustine’s failure to acknowledge the importance of an individual life is Platonic in origin and is another instance of emphasizing the eternal and abstract at the cost of the earthly. In this sense, humans are not “worldly” and do not love this world (*ibid.*: 66).

In fact, to be saved, humans must pick a love that is outside of the world, *caritas*, as opposed to *cupiditas* that clings to the worldly (*ibid.*: 78). *Cupiditas* or covetous, sinful love detaches individual things from God’s creation and sins by doing so (*ibid.*: 81). Alternatively, choosing God through the right kind of love, *caritas*, makes the actual world a “desert” for Arendt, since the saved person can live in the world only because they have oriented themselves towards God and eternity (*ibid.*: 90). Those who will be saved view the world as God does, which raises questions for Arendt about neighbourly love. Love of the neighbour comes from *caritas*, but as such, is not a love that acknowledges the neighbour’s worldly existence (*ibid.*: 93–4). To love a neighbour in the proper way for Augustine, one must renounce oneself and worldly relations in order to imitate God. Instead of loving neighbours for their uniqueness, love of the neighbour “leaves the lover himself in absolute isolation and the world remains a desert for man’s isolated existence” (*ibid.*: 94). Every human is the same, as part of God’s creation, and not loved for any other reason. Humanity is alienated from the world and from each other. As Elizabeth Young-Bruehl describes it, since humans love neighbours for the sake of God, “love of our neighbors for their own sakes is impossible and ... our neighbors are *used*” (Young-Bruehl 2004: 493). In this case, neighbours are loved as vehicles to gain salvation and to satisfy craving by enjoying the love of God (*ibid.*: 492). The common traits of humans, like their being part of God’s creation and their need to imitate Christ are emphasized by Augustine, rather than what is unique and distinct about them. Within this

context, Arendt’s criticisms of Augustine’s love of the neighbour imply a needed shift in focus to the positive relation one could have with others by acknowledging the significance of their lives in this world. Arendt’s criticisms of Augustine’s love of the neighbour can be applied to Heidegger’s philosophy as well because both Heidegger and Augustine prioritize an authentic self or authentic relation to God, over engagement with others in the political realm.

The importance that Arendt places on natality and the fact that humans are born with such potential for individual distinction is paramount in her political philosophy. Although her concept of political action is not examined in relation to Augustine, it seems that both in the original dissertation and through her English revisions, her criticisms about Western philosophy typically ignoring natality emerge and are restated. By ignoring natality, those who focus on the eternal and emphasize contemplation above all else, miss the significance of this realm. For this reason, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl argues that Arendt’s interest in natality has its roots in her thesis on Augustine, but also in her personal political experiences as a displaced German Jew during the Second World War (*ibid.*: 495). To ignore the political, earthly realm because of ideological or intellectual concerns could result in deadly earthly consequences. For Arendt, it is not always problematic to be interested in things of this world, but rather, quite the reverse. To ignore this world at the expense of some ideal vision of politics allows for untold evils to occur. Furthermore, it misses what is precisely important about humanity: their potential to act and to be distinct individuals whose earthly lives are meaningful. Arendt argues that in both Christian and Platonic worldviews, the emphasis is on non-earthly matters, making efforts to distinguish oneself in this realm futile (Arendt 1958: 21). In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt connects Augustine’s discussion of “beginning” with freedom and the ability to act. She states “Because he *is* a beginning, man can begin; to be human and to be free are one and the same. God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom (Arendt [1961] 1968: 167). As Scott and Stark note, if Arendt had not examined Augustine’s work, “it is difficult to imagine the context out of which her analysis of freedom and its relationship to politics may have emerged” (Scott & Stark 1996: 147). Similarly, Young-Bruehl comments that despite her criticisms of Augustine’s philosophy, it is through the writing of her thesis that Arendt begins to retrieve natality from its neglect by philosophy (Young-Bruehl 2004: 495). Although the seeds of Arendt’s concept of natality emerged in her thesis on Augustine, her later work describes the concept in much more detail.

## Natality fully formed

Arendt's notion of natality is more fully developed in arguably her most important work, *The Human Condition*. This book lays out the framework for Arendt's political theory in which political action is central. The activity of labour, which is the unending effort to sustain the survival of human life, and the activity of work, which builds a world of permanent things, are necessary preconditions for political action. For Arendt, the activities of labour and work are connected to natality "in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers" (Arendt 1958: 9). Since natality grounds all initiative, it is related to labour and work. However, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality. She states that "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting" (*ibid.*: 9). Of all parts of the active life, political action is most connected to initiating something new, and that capacity is the result of natality, or the fact that humans are born with untold potential.

Action is grounded in natality, but it also relates to the human condition of plurality. Arendt describes plurality as "*the condition – not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but specifically the *conditio per quam* – of all human life*" (*ibid.*: 7). Plurality concerns the fact that all human beings are unique and different from one another, but also political equals. With the idea of plurality, Arendt is not focused upon the physical differences between humans, which she calls otherness (*ibid.*: 176). Although otherness is connected to plurality, otherness is shared with all organic life, and even inorganic objects. Therefore, otherness is not distinctly human (*ibid.*). On the other hand, plurality concerns *who* a person is. The plurality that is displayed in human political action is the fact that "nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (*ibid.*: 8). Plurality is inherent in the human condition and Arendt's politics are attentive to the important differences between humans. Whereas Platonic-inspired political theory shapes the political community based upon participants conforming to a true ideal of the most just state, Arendt expects disagreement in politics based upon legitimate differences in points of view. It would be anti-democratic to get rid of plurality, but also, it would replicate the Platonic or Christian model which minimizes the significance of earthly events. Plurality is exemplified in political action, through what individuals accomplish and what they reveal about themselves to the world.

The most important trigger for political action is natality. To act means to begin something new and it is because they are "*initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action" (*ibid.*: 177). Arendt quotes Augustine, once again showing how her ideas about natality are reflected in Augustine's thought. She translates Augustine's Latin into "that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody" (*ibid.*). For both Arendt and Augustine, each birth is unique and brings something new into the world. New political actions are grounded in the fact that each person can begin. Someone's effect on the world cannot be predicted or controlled, but what can be assured is that it will be different due to human plurality. Arendt calls political action the actualization of the condition of natality, which answers the question: "Who are you?" (*ibid.*: 178). It is through action in words and deeds that "men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities" (*ibid.*: 179). Acting and beginning allow humans to disclose who they are to others. Arendt's difference from Heidegger is quite clear on this point. Although natality affects labour and work as well, Arendt thinks "natality, and not mortality may be the central category of the political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought" (*ibid.*: 9). Arendt agrees with Heidegger and Jaspers that death is an important limit on human life, and represents an existential boundary condition, but she ultimately thinks that birth is more crucially connected to politics. Therefore, to ignore birth, may very well result in philosophical theories that ignore the active life as well. Her difference with Heidegger's approach is demonstrated in the following. She states:

The life span of man running toward death would inevitably carry everything human to ruin and destruction if it were not for the faculty of interrupting it and beginning something new, a faculty inherent in action like an ever-present reminder that men, *although they must die, are not born in order to die but in order to begin.* (*Ibid.*: 246, emphasis added)

Action is what is distinctive about humanity and it interrupts the natural life cycle with something new and surprising. A focus on mortality, instead of natality, ignores the hopeful beginnings that occur within a mortal life. In her last work, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt suggests that if Augustine could draw out the correct consequences of his view, he would have defined humans as "natals" as opposed to "mortals" (Arendt 1978b: 109). It is what occurs by virtue of birth that defines who human beings are. Furthermore, in contrast to Heidegger, a focus on natality

implies a more positive relationship to others, since it is Arendt's view that action is not evaluated on its own, but needs other people for its meaning to be assessed. It is the spectators and witnesses who judge human action and decide its meaning. Who a person is cannot be disclosed in isolation but requires a community into which the action falls. Ultimately, death happens alone, so focusing on the phenomena of death is much more isolating. It is not surprising that by prioritizing mortality, as opposed to natality, the result would be a largely negative analysis of interpersonal relationships, as in Heidegger's case.

Arendt often discusses the miraculous nature of action that is grounded in natality. Arendt suggests that the "new" appears as though it is a miracle, because it seems to arise against all odds (Arendt 1958: 178). In *The Human Condition* Arendt states that action is the "only miracle-working faculty of man" (*ibid.*: 246). She continues:

The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, "natural" ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. (*Ibid.*: 247)

For Arendt, the potential that humans have by virtue of being born allows humans to have faith and hope for the world because new possibilities for action occur with each new birth (*ibid.*). When discussing the miraculous nature of action, Arendt often references Jesus of Nazareth. Arendt is not concerned with the divine qualities of Jesus, but the philosophical implications of his worldview. She believes that the "glad tidings" of the Gospels can be viewed as relating to the miraculous nature of action. Moreover, Arendt connects the statement that a "child has been born unto us" from the book of Isaiah explicitly to natality. Arendt allegorically extends this saying beyond the birth of Jesus, to being an expression of faith and hope for the world generally, since the birth of a child signifies a new hope (*ibid.*). For Arendt, "miracle working" can be understood as being within human capacities because humans can interrupt the world with new beginnings (Arendt [1961] 1968: 169). These beginnings cannot be predicted and are surprising, lending to the seemingly miraculous nature of the event. This does not mean one should wait for specific miracles to cure society's ills, but one could "expect" the unforeseeable and unpredictable in human affairs because of the arrival of new actors and their plurality (*ibid.*: 170). In fact, Arendt thinks political action is like a "second" birth by beginning something new and disclosing who one is (Arendt 1958: 176). She states

that the impulse for this second birth "springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative" (*ibid.*: 177). Unlike our initial birth, this metaphorical re-birth is chosen and confirmed by human actors through their action. By acting, actors reveal who they are and are remembered.<sup>5</sup> This "re-birth" springs from our natal condition and our ability to begin something new.

In contrast to her analysis of Augustine who seeks immortality in the realm of the afterlife, Arendt thinks there is the possibility for immortality in the actions of political actors on this earth. She models this idea after the views of the pre-philosophical Greeks, whose memorable actions are described in the works of Homer and Herodotus. For Arendt, the pre-philosophical Greeks admired political action most of all. The primary concern of politics was not legislating, but acting memorably before a community. Largely, this was because human actions in words and deeds have an immortality to them that can be remembered after the actors die. Arendt claims that all that remains after death is the stories that can be told about that individual (*ibid.*: 193). For the pre-philosophical Greeks, to not be remembered is equivalent to living and dying like animals (*ibid.*: 19). It is through political action that humans appear to each other as distinctly human. Entering the common, public world allows persons to outlast their mortal lives and be remembered (*ibid.*: 55). Arendt states that when the agent is disclosed in the act in a profound way, the act shines in brightness and in glory (*ibid.*: 180). This act is remembered, in memory, in narratives, or more officially in monuments, documents or art (*ibid.*: 184).

Arendt insists that the actor cannot control what will be disclosed in his act and, therefore, it should not be thought of as a mere means to an end, which would allow the actor to fabricate his public persona (*ibid.*). Actions reveal an agent, but one who is not the author or producer of his own life story, because one cannot control how others will remember particular actions (*ibid.*). In fact, the narrative about an action can change over time, if new facets of the act are later revealed or if the community itself changes, and therefore, the public reception of the act may change. Unlike objects, which can be shaped and controlled through human fabrication, human beings are not materials to be managed (*ibid.*: 188). Actions are unpredictable, and result in disclosures of individuals without their total pre-knowledge or control. In contrast to some philosophical, economic or religious theories that tend to view history as being made by individuals who can pull the strings or direct the play, Arendt rejects this type of manipulation and alternatively grounds history on the memories of the community

(*ibid.*: 186). Consequently, action requires courage, since the reception of action cannot be controlled and one risks negative exposure (*ibid.*). One must be willing to leave the protection of private life and expose oneself to the judgements of others in action. For Arendt, the reason that action is unexpected and cannot be predicted is because of natality (*ibid.*: 178).

Although one can readily recognize the need for the individual life to be disclosed and remembered, a troubling aspect of Arendt's analysis is that it appears that this occurs only through political action. Recognition and remembrance occur privately for everyone in our relationships with others, however. Arendt states that all lives can be told as a story and she names this fact as the pre-political and prehistoric condition for history (*ibid.*: 184). Publicly, however, immortality and distinction occur primarily for those interested in politics. Arendt comments that not everyone would want to participate in politics. In fact, she describes herself as a political thinker, not a political actor. Additionally, even if one acts politically, the likelihood that one's acts will be remembered are not good (*ibid.*: 197). Arendt does not discuss this issue, but it seems that public self-disclosure is possible if one is interested in politics, perhaps in other areas of public engagement, but it will not occur for all and more often than not, the acts themselves will be forgotten. It is understandable that the greatness of action is not egalitarian and many acts are forgettable. Yet, since actual self-disclosure of "who" one is seems inextricably linked to public, political life, it is troubling that it will not occur for most. Nonetheless, Arendt's criticism that the respect for political action has been lost because modern life fails to recognize the importance of individual actions is notable. Politics is important. Arendt thinks that politics should not be thought of as a game of manipulation by those involved, but as a stage upon which an actor courageously relinquishes control and reveals himself. Since politics has come to be understood as being like controlled fabrication, Arendt asserts that there has been "almost complete loss of authentic concern with immortality" (*ibid.*: 55). This means there is failure to recognize the unique importance of individual life as well as the importance of specific earthly events.

### Conclusion

Hannah Arendt was interested in birth, and what she would later call natality, from the very beginning of her career. Her interest in political action and plurality are rooted in the concern for natality and events

that occur throughout one's life on earth. Plato famously compared philosophy to practising for death, since he thought philosophers are well versed at separating the soul from the body when they use their minds to ascertain the truth (Plato 1995: 235). Arendt rejects this approach by keeping her mind attuned to the appearance of life. For Arendt, interests in eternal truths or political or philosophical ideologies should not always take precedence over more worldly actions. It is through the fact of birth, so easily ignored by the tradition of philosophy, that a more deeply held appreciation of individual and collective life can emerge.

### Notes

1. Scott and Stark (1996) argue that the seeds of many of Arendt's concepts like the pariah-parvenu as well her distinctions between the public, private and social, come from her work on Augustine (Arendt 1996: 125–34). Other thinkers are less focused on the importance of the work with Augustine. Margaret Canovan stresses Arendt's rejection of many parts of Augustine's thought. Canovan observes Arendt's need to change so much of the original thesis during the translation process so that it more greatly resembled her later theory (Canovan 1992: 8). It should also be noted that since Arendt did not complete the revision for translation into English, it suggests she was in some way dissatisfied with the work.
2. Frederick A. Olafson (1998) argues that Heideggerian ethics could be grounded in his concept of *Mitsein*, even though Heidegger does not discuss this directly.
3. It should be noted that Arendt also thinks that Augustine is guilty of over-emphasizing the future, because of his interest in eternal salvation (Arendt 1978b: 109).
4. Anne O'Byrne argues in *Natality and Finitude* (2010) that Martin Heidegger's work can be viewed as suggesting numerous implications for natality.
5. Ann W. Astell (2006: 376) links the "second birth" to Saint Augustine's second birth when he was reborn in Christ.