

THREE

Hannah Arendt on the world

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Introduction

Hannah Arendt's concept of the world captures the centrality of the world over the self and the sentiment that one should not run away from the world, but cherish and preserve it. In order to understand why the world is such an important concept for her, we need to see how she thought both with and against the tradition of philosophy. In particular, it is important to stress Arendt's attitude towards the world as *amor mundi* or love of the world (Young-Bruehl 2004). Her reflections on the concept of the world are influenced by many thinkers – among them Saint Augustine, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche, Immanuel Kant and Karl Jaspers. But it was, above all, her own experience as a German Jew in Germany, France and the United States, as well as her many years of statelessness, that influenced her concept of the world.

This chapter weaves together five themes that characterize Arendt's concept of the world. Because these themes overlap in different texts, the chapter moves in chronological order of publication. While Arendt's concept of the world is most fully examined in *The Human Condition*, her ideas have greater coherence when seen in conjunction with her other writings. Beginning with her doctoral dissertation on Augustine and ending with her posthumous *The Life of the Mind*, the concept of the world remains an integral part of Arendt's political philosophy. Her concept of the world is, first of all, rooted in her lifelong dialogue with Augustine and Heidegger about being at home in the world. This question of belonging to the world has important consequences for her subsequent reflections on metaphysics, ethics and politics. Arendt

is inspired by Augustine's argument that man lives in two realms. Likewise, her early thought is influenced by Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world. Her existential reflections on belonging to the world shift to her second theme of political exclusion. In some places in her writings, questions of inclusion and exclusion manifest themselves in the historical categories of pariah and parvenu. In other places, she turns her attention to modern phenomena of loneliness, world alienation, statelessness and the superfluousness of the individual. Existential questions of belonging crystallize into Arendt's third theme that modern mass society and totalitarianism encourage individuals to escape from the world, rather than to engage with it. This theme of escape and rejection of the world is mirrored in the fourth theme of the conflict between philosophy and politics. As we shall see, the conflict between philosophy and politics is related to a particular attitude of the self towards the world. In her examination of the phenomenal nature of the world, Arendt emphasizes the importance of action and speech over contemplation and retreat from worldly affairs. As individuals become increasingly worldless and alienated, Arendt wishes to cultivate the public realm as the fragile space in-between people. And yet, in spite of her sharp criticism of philosophy, it is her sense of gratitude that a world exists at all that becomes increasingly relevant. Throughout Arendt's work, she returns to the ancient idea of wonder that there is a world at all. Moreover, in this fifth theme, she redirects wonder from philosophical reflection on eternal truths outside the everyday world to gratitude for appearances and opinions in the world.

Finding a home in the world: worldly and worldless love

Arendt first began to think about the world as a physical and existential place that one belongs to in her dissertation. Written under the supervision of Karl Jaspers, *Love and Saint Augustine* (Arendt 1996) asks how one can live simultaneously in two realms: the city of man (Babylon) and the city of God (Jerusalem). In her dissertation, Arendt asks how it might be possible to love both God and one's neighbour. She argues that love (*amor*) as desire (*appetitus*) can be both worldly and non-worldly. *Cupiditas* is worldly love because the object of desire is not eternal, but in the world. *Caritas*, on the other hand, as charity, takes place between individuals and is worldless because such love is linked to an eternal God. The question of how to reconcile the worldly love of neighbour with a worldless God is the starting point for Arendt's fascination with the concept of the world: "It is through love of the

world that man explicitly makes himself at home in the world, and then desirously looks to it alone for his good and evil. Not until then do the world and man grow ‘worldly’” (Arendt 1996: 67). Although her concept of the world is most fully developed in *The Human Condition* (1958), her dissertation demonstrates how the world, rather than the solitary self is a central category of human experience.

Simultaneous existence within two worlds, in conjunction with Augustine’s emphasis on man as a beginner (*initium*) has a profound influence on Arendt’s mature thinking. Origins and beginnings signify entrance to the world and are full of possibility. Moreover, the world both precedes and outlives our individual existence. New beginnings inspire Arendt – whether in the most dramatic sense of revolution or in the seemingly more mundane ability to promise and forgive. She resists the tendency to escape from worldly affairs into philosophical contemplation. Instead, we are compelled to make ourselves at home in the world. As she quotes Augustine: “For we call ‘world’ not only this fabric which God made, heaven and earth ... but the inhabitants of the world are also called ‘the world’ ... Especially all lovers of the world are called the world” (Arendt 1996: 17). Augustine inspired Arendt to think of how the self has different attitudes towards others, the world and God. What she began noticing is that the feeling of homelessness leads to the desire to find a better home away from the world. Hence the physical world becomes a transitory place on the way to something higher.

Pariah and parvenu

Arendt’s sense of the duality of the world that she discovered in the philosophical writings of Augustine shifts to questions of inclusion and exclusion into the public realm with her biography of Rahel Varnhagen. After the publication of *Love and Saint Augustine*, Arendt began writing what would have been her *Habilitationsschrift* enabling her to teach in German universities. The manuscript on Rahel Varnhagen was completed in 1933, except for the last two chapters, which she wrote while in exile in France in 1938 and subsequently published in 1958. What links *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman* to her dissertation on Augustine and later writing is her preoccupation with being at home in the world. Varnhagen (1771–1833) was a German Jewess in Berlin noted for her vibrant salons. What does being at home in the world mean for a late-eighteenth-century, early-nineteenth-century German Jewish woman?

Arendt uses the categories of pariah and parvenu from the French journalist Bernhard Lazare to describe the situation of Jews in European society. If a pariah is a permanent outsider, excluded from society, the parvenu is assimilated and granted marginal acceptance. The collapse of Rahel’s salon coincided with the collapse of the ideal of the German Enlightenment that assimilated Jews believed in. As Rahel wrote: “We have been created to live the truth in this world ... We are *alongside* of human society. For us no place, no office, no empty title exists!” (Arendt [1958] 1974: 205). The worldly character of the salons that Jewish women such as Rahel created in the nineteenth century stood in contrast to the stateless and worldless people that the Jews became in the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, the salons were not public, but took place in the privacy of the home. For Arendt, nineteenth-century Jews were the best examples of parvenus who aimed for inclusion in European society. In many ways, Rahel was just such a parvenu. And yet, Arendt was fascinated by the fact that Rahel, although aware that she was never quite at home in the world, decided to remain a pariah: “Rahel had remained a Jew and a pariah. Only because she clung to both conditions did she find a place in the history of European humanity” (*ibid.*: 227). This sense of being torn between two different worlds that Rahel describes becomes a central motif in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. Indeed, Seyla Benhabib argues that Arendt’s concept of the world is an important link between Rahel’s worldless existence as a Jew and Arendt’s own desire to cultivate a public realm through action and speech (Benhabib 2003: 11–12).

Loneliness, statelessness and totalitarianism

With Hitler’s rise to power and Arendt’s emigration from Germany, her focus changed from philosophical and sociological questions of being at home in the world to how totalitarianism, as a new political phenomenon, changed the very contours of our understanding of the world. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), originally published in Britain with the title *The Burden of Our Time*, Arendt applies the existential categories of loneliness and homelessness to an analysis of totalitarianism. Loneliness and isolation are in themselves not new; however Arendt argues that totalitarianism would not have been possible without such deep loneliness characteristic of individuals in modern “mass” society with no sense of their place in the world: “But totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content

with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man" (Arendt [1951] 2004: 612). What links Arendt's interest in Rahel Varnhagen to her existential and phenomenological reading of totalitarianism is an acute sense of homelessness and exclusion.

Loneliness is connected with uprootedness and the process of making individuals inhuman and superfluous. Uprootedness is directly linked with the rise of mass society, imperialism and mob rule. Arendt, however, concentrated on the devastating consequences of being superfluous and unnecessary. She writes: "To be uprooted means to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others; to be superfluous means not to belong to the world at all" (*ibid.*). One of the hallmarks of totalitarianism was the labelling of individuals as unwanted, subhuman and unnecessary. In this sense, Arendt argues that concentration camps crystallized the rational process of eliminating those deemed unworthy of sharing the world with others.

Influenced by Heidegger's notion of angst and Kierkegaard's notion of despair, Arendt's conception of loneliness expresses the alienation of one who is not at home in the world, of one whose very existence has nothing in common with others. Loneliness is not solitude, but a feeling of not belonging with others: "What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever growing masses of our century" (*ibid.*: 615). Her existential language demonstrates how the extremes of worldlessness, loneliness and superfluosity made totalitarian movements possible. In telling the story of totalitarianism as a new political phenomenon, Arendt also searched for ways in which to rekindle a common world. Indeed, one might say that Arendt's conception of the world is connected to her larger understanding of modernity. Taken together, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition* trace elements of worldlessness, world alienation and loneliness amid the modern world.

From being-in-the-world to being-in-the-world with others

It is especially in *The Human Condition* that Arendt delves politically and philosophically into what it means to live in the world with other people. In conjunction with two earlier essays, "What is Existential Philosophy?" (1948) and "Concern with Politics in Recent European

Political Thought" (1954), Arendt increasingly distinguishes her concept of the world from that of Martin Heidegger. By developing his existential insights and transforming his concept of the world, she opens up new avenues for political engagement. Critics such as Seyla Benhabib, Elizabeth Young-Bruehl, Margaret Canovan and Dana Villa argue that Arendt does not simply apply Heidegger's categories, but transforms them. Moreover, since Arendt shifts the terrain from the existence of the self to plurality, her concept of the world is far richer than Husserl's or Heidegger's. Husserl was still in the Cartesian framework of the subject as it encounters objects in the world. Likewise, Heidegger's being-in-the-world (*in-der-Welt-sein*) and care (*Sorge*) are centred on the self. As Arendt glosses Heidegger's position, "The basic mode of being-in-the-world is alienation, which is felt both as homelessness and anxiety" (Arendt 1994: 179), she further develops his insight that being in the world is always being with others. She does not emphasize authentic existence in opposition to the masses or *das Man*, but existence with others in a shared world. In contrast to Heidegger, Arendt is interested in the political and moral consequences of what he calls *Mitsein* or being in the world with others. "It may be", she suggests, "that Heidegger's concept of 'world,' which in many respects stands at the center of his philosophy, constitutes a step out of this difficulty" (Arendt 2005: 443).

For Arendt, it is the fact of plurality, not death, that distinguishes our humanity. Thus Heidegger, like Augustine provides Arendt with starting points for her own political philosophy: "Heidegger's is the first absolutely and uncompromisingly this-worldly philosophy. The crucial element of man's being is its being-in-the-world, and what is at stake for his being-in-the-world is quite simply survival in the world" (Arendt 1994: 179). Although Arendt is influenced by Heidegger's phenomenological description of human existence, she does not remain fixated on the self, but instead argues that philosophy has traditionally privileged authentic experience as solitude and man in the singular. In reflecting on this idea in her posthumous publication, *The Promise of Politics*, she writes that for ordinary men, solitude is an essential but nonetheless "marginal experience" (Arendt 2005: 443).

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt states that her task is "to trace back modern world alienation, its twofold flight from the earth into the universe and from the world into the self" (Arendt 1958: 6). By dividing the world into public and private realms, corresponding to the Greek concepts of *polis* and *oikos*, she also traces how the rise of the social accompanies the shrinking of the public realm and deformation of the common world. In spite of the fact that Heidegger's name is

not mentioned once in the book, Arendt is radically transforming his existential concept of being-in-the-world. Heidegger's sense of world is rooted in care, anxiety, being-towards-death, the sense of being thrown into the world, *das Man* and everydayness. As he explains, "'Worldhood' is an ontological concept, and stands for the structure of one of the constitutive items of Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger [1927] 1967: 92). Arendt's love, by way of Augustine and Jaspers has aspects of *cupiditas*, *caritas*, friendship, gratitude, life, natality and new beginnings. Arendt's love (*amor*) differs from Heidegger's care (*Sorge*) because *Sorge* still emphasizes the self as a singular subject. Likewise, his call to conscience is self-oriented and seems more in opposition to the world, rather than involved with it. Arendt takes Heidegger's being-in-the-world very seriously and puts the emphasis on plurality in the world, rather than on abstract Being.

It is in *The Human Condition* that Arendt also distinguishes between the earth and the world, as well as between public, private and social realms. World alienation means the loss of shared experiences and action. Earth alienation, on the other hand, denotes the concrete desire to leave the earth through science and technology. World alienation and the rise of the social occur roughly between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Earth alienation, in contrast, is a specific feature of the twentieth century. World alienation threatens the very continuity of the shared world in the modern age. For Arendt, the modern age is characterized by three events: the discovery of America, the Reformation and the invention of the telescope. The discovery of the New World and mapping of new lands expanded the modern understanding of the physical world. Likewise, the invention of the telescope enabled space exploration and the possibility to leave the earth. The Reformation ushered in the Protestant ethic and spirit of capitalism as a global development. Influenced by Weber, Arendt laments the innerworldly asceticism of modern capitalism and notes: "World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age" (Arendt 1958: 254). Alienation from the world leads to the rejection of everything that is shared in common – the plurality of languages, traditions, cultures and worldviews. Arendt is interested in how world alienation affects politics and morality. Moreover, world alienation is characteristic of modernity and has greater destructive consequences than self-alienation.

Worldliness and plurality: the space in-between people

Arendt's distinction between the earth and the world has clear political implications. Human beings live on earth, but dwell in the world. Her view of nature is influenced by ancient Greek ideas of life, growth and decay. Hence civilization provides stability against the uncertainty of nature. Because there are many different human beings – "Men, not Man live on the earth and inhabit the world" – a space opens up in between them for discussion and action (Arendt 1958: 7). Given the fact that plurality is such a basic part of everyday life, Arendt seeks ways to encourage people to share and care for the world. This leads her to a discussion of action and the space in between people. The plurality of men therefore creates the public realm or *polis* as a flickering space between people. As Margaret Canovan suggests, such a worldly space is similar to Heidegger's *Lichtung* or clearing where Being discloses itself (Canovan 1992: 112).

Worldliness is an important aspect of the human condition. The world is comprised or furnished by man-made products, such as building, bridges, houses and art (Arendt 1958: 7–11). But these things themselves are not the world as such; rather it is what happens *in-between* people that constitutes the world. The public is the world that is shared among people. The private realm cannot be common to others, but remains private. Moreover, for Arendt, the world is the space in-between people:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. (*Ibid.*: 52–3)

Originally entitled *Amor Mundi*, *The Human Condition* describes the relationship between the *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*. One needs the capacity to engage with the world, as well as the ability to stand back from worldly affairs, in order to think and judge. Arendt laments the expansion of the social and atrophy of the political realm. Society is not the same as the public realm or the *polis*. Nor is society synonymous

with the world. Likewise, the public signifies two interrelated aspects: public appearances and the world: “For us, appearance – something is being seen and heard by others as well as ourselves – constitutes reality” (*ibid.*: 50). Reality is what is shared between individuals. While each person has a private realm of intimate experience and feelings, only the public realm comprises experiences that can be spoken about and seen by others.

Arendt asks how we might cultivate the space in-between people to counter the increasing encroachment of the social. Historically, early Christianity tried to create a bond strong enough to replace the world. Yet Augustine’s “brotherhood” and charity are worldless because they focus on a transcendent God, rather than on earthly appearances. Arendt insists “Worldlessness as a political phenomenon is possible only on the assumption that the world will not last; on this assumption, however, it is almost inevitable that worldlessness, in one form or another, will begin to dominate the political scene” (*ibid.*: 54). In Arendt’s opinion, the world transcends changing generations and possesses a kind of immortality.

The common world, *polis* and reality

Arendt looks to ancient Greece for examples of the common space between people. The *polis* is the imaginary space in between people. Similar to the table metaphor mentioned earlier, the *polis* is linked with the action and speech of individuals. It is “the space of appearance”. Although the *polis* is not permanent, to be deprived of this shared experience is however to be deprived of reality: “To be deprived of it means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance” (Arendt 1958: 199). Arendt emphasizes the impermanence and fragility of the *polis* as the common world. Is the *polis* a kind of Holy Grail or Camelot? Is it a flickering image or utopia? If anything, Arendt is deeply critical of utopian blueprints for a better society. Time and again, she returns to the fact that men, not (an ideal) man live in the world. Plurality and new beginnings, spontaneity and action are all founded on a deep respect for each person (*ibid.*: 243). The world is held together by the continual birth of new people. Hence action is “ontologically rooted” in natality, not mortality (*ibid.*: 247).

Although human beings make durable things in the world, such objects do not, in themselves, comprise the world. Rather, action, storytelling and remembrance weave the space in between people. Arendt’s concept of the world is built on speech and deeds: “The whole factual

world of human affairs depends for its reality and its continued existence, first, upon the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember, and second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things” (*ibid.*: 95). What is needed for the world to continue is thinking, willing, judging, acting and remembering. Arendt’s fondness for Homer and Herodotus reminds us that the poet and the historian remember the deeds of the immortal heroes. The heroes are immortal only so long as we remember them. Moreover, the world is not defined by labour and work. It is, above all, comprised of the symbolic and imaginary space of action and plurality.

Arendt writes that the “common world is what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die. It transcends our lifespan into past and future alike; it was there before we came and will outlast our brief sojourn in it” (*ibid.*: 55). Such a durable common world is only possible if it appears in public. Because it is common, it cannot be secret or private. Immortality is exemplified in Homer’s *Iliad* when the tales of both the winners and the vanquished are told for future generations. Thus, the Athenian *polis* was the place of immortal appearance. Yet modern mass society and loneliness destroy the sense of reality that is common to people in the world. Retreat into the private realm means that individuals “are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their singular experience” (*ibid.*: 58). Furthermore, philosophical solipsism from Descartes onwards lessens the importance of the world by privileging the solitary subject. Such a tendency, coupled with mass society and consumerism shrinks the world that we share in common. Does this mean that Arendt was against privacy and the private realm? Particularly for liberals, privacy is one of the most important values. Likewise, does Arendt’s plea for the centrality of the common world render her a communitarian? No, she was neither a liberal nor a communitarian. If anything, she emphasized republicanism – or the importance of *res publica*. It is mass society and the rise of the social that destroys the ancient distinctions between public and private, *polis* and *oikos*.

The conflict between philosophy, politics and the world

Arendt’s concept of the world is linked with her life-long criticism of traditional philosophy. If philosophy studies man in the singular and downgrades the world in favour of the mind, politics is based on the plurality of human affairs: “Politics is based on the fact of human plurality. God created *man*, but *men* are a human, earthly product, the product of human nature” (Arendt 2005: 93). In addition to the distinction

between man and men, Arendt argues that the realm of philosophy is distinguished spatially from the arena of politics. From Plato onwards, philosophy tends to reject the everyday life of appearances for the higher reality of contemplation. In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt reflects on the prejudice within philosophy to “turn away” from the world and wonders how it might be possible to re-direct philosophical wonder towards it (Arendt [1961] 1968: 25). Moreover, she interprets the philosophical emphasis on death as a problematic exit from this world. Particularly in light of the destructive twentieth century, she argues for the need to cherish the world of appearances and opinion, rather than to reject it.

In her final book, *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt argues for “the world’s phenomenal nature” (Arendt 1978b: 19–23). Arguing against the two-world theory that contrasts appearance with Being, Arendt asks how thinking as a non-thing appears in the world. Taking her cue from Heidegger’s notion of truth as *aletheia* or disclosure, truth appears to individuals in the world. It is not located spatially in a different realm of existence, but truth itself is also an appearance: “In this world which we enter, appearing from a nowhere, and from which we disappear into a nowhere, *Being and Appearing coincide*” (*ibid.*: 19). Arendt returns to earlier questions about the role of thinking in the world and pleas for the primacy of the phenomenal world. Appearance is not a deception or illusion leading away from truth. Rather, one needs to understand the “phenomenal nature” of the world as that which seems to appear differently to each person. We live in the world of appearance, but may choose to think of our “true” home in philosophical abstraction, religious faith or political ideology. However, Arendt stresses that each person is born into the world of appearances. Thus, the world is defined by plurality and appearance. It is not reality *versus* appearance. Rather, reality *is* appearance. The world is a stage for thinking, willing, judging, speaking and acting with others. Moreover, it is a place between people that will outlive our brief entrance and exit: “The stage is common to all who are alive, but it *seems* different to each species, different also to each individual specimen” (*ibid.*: 21).

Arendt admires Nietzsche’s affirmation of life and criticism of the two-world theory. In particular, she is influenced by Nietzsche’s account of “How the ‘True World’ Finally Became a Fable” from *Twilight of the Idols* (*ibid.*: 10–11). In this brief parable, Nietzsche outlines how the history of philosophy has denigrated and even forgotten the world. Beginning with Plato “the true world – attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, he is it” – is equated with a transcendent realm behind or above the merely apparent. As the fable progresses to

Christianity, the true world becomes unattainable, but promised for the sinner who repents. The Kantian true world is then noumenal and unattainable. With positivism, the true world of thought is unattained and unknown. Nietzsche’s parable ends with Zarathustra: “The true world – we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one” (Nietzsche 1968: 485–6). Like Nietzsche, Arendt argues that most philosophers have been too eager to leave the everyday world for a higher realm of existence beyond appearances. She emphasizes how escapes from the world are a rejection of responsibility and a dangerous privileging of the solitary mind over other people.

Gratitude for the world and humanity

In addition to Arendt’s critique of the philosophical tendency to reject the world and cultivation of the public realm between people, she was grateful for the sheer existence of the world. In her acceptance speech for the Lessing Prize in 1959, she expressed gratitude as a kind of love of the world. Even more than Heidegger’s *Sorge* or Augustine’s *amor*, Lessing felt gratitude for the very existence of the world. Such gratitude, however, did not deter him from criticizing it. But, Arendt insists, “it was also an attitude that remained indebted to the world, never left the solid ground of the world, and never went to the extreme of sentimental utopianism” (Arendt 1968: 5). The same could also be said of Arendt herself. The concept of the world goes hand in hand with humanity. In her opinion, if eighteenth-century thinkers such as Lessing and Kant praised humanity, the nineteenth century celebrated history and ideology. For Arendt, Lessing embodied *Selbstdenken* or thinking for oneself. Yet his thinking was not the same as that of Heidegger. He did not privilege philosophical solitude. Rather Lessing linked his gratitude for the world to an appreciation of humanity and friendship.

For Arendt, like Lessing, humanity is not an abstract concept, but is linked concretely with friendship. Communication, spirited dialogue and engagement with others about the world are central to being human. It is especially from Aristotle, but also from Karl Jaspers that Arendt develops the political relevance of friendship. Friendship is similar to public debate. It is not the same as intimate conversation or a retreat into the modern self: “In discourse the political importance of friendship, and the humanness peculiar to it, were made manifest” (*ibid.*: 24). It is precisely discussion and passionate debate over different opinions that Arendt cherishes.

Arendt poses the question most clearly, when she asks: “To what extent do we remain obligated to the world even when we have been expelled from it or have withdrawn from it?” (*ibid.*: 22). Given her biography and writings on totalitarianism and evil, this question of why “we remain obligated to the world” is far from abstract. The fact that technology enables men to leave the earth and to completely destroy it makes the world even more fragile than before. Likewise, the destruction of two world wars and the power of totalitarian ideologies underscore tendencies towards violence and nihilism. Hence, horror and wonder are part of Arendt’s concept of the world. Horror might lead one to withdraw in cynicism away from the world, but wonder is linked with gratitude: “For the speechless horror at what man may do and what the world may become is in many ways related to the speechless wonder of gratitude from which the questions of philosophy spring” (Arendt 1994: 445). In German, the word for thinking (*denken*) is closely related to thanking (*danken*). Gratitude for humanity and the world means stepping back from everyday affairs to pause and think. Arendt’s concept of the world stems from one of the oldest philosophical questions: why is there something and not nothing? However, when Arendt asks this question, she highlights that it is raised from a condition of modern worldlessness, which is to be distinguished from the other worldliness of religion. The question of why there is something and not nothing is an old one. However, the context from which this question is raised is a new one. As Arendt explains, “out of the conditions of worldlessness that first appeared in the modern age – which should not be confused with Christian *otherworldliness* – grew the question of Leibniz, Schelling, and Heidegger: Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?” (Arendt 2005: 203–4). In addition, she asks why is there somebody and not nobody in the world. Totalitarianism tried to create a realm of nobodies, who were superfluous and incapable of thought. In her opinion, Adolf Eichmann was a prime example of this tendency. Hence, Arendt raises old philosophical questions from a very modern context.

In addition to existentialism and early Christianity, Richard Bernstein suggests that Judaism is an additional source of Arendt’s *amor mundi*: “Arendt’s faith, like that of so many Jews before her, is directed more to creation than to the creator” (Bernstein 1996: 188). By cherishing creation, as well as, or even above the creator, she draws not only from European philosophy and theology, but also from her own life experience and Judaism to argue that the philosophical gaze of wonder should be redirected towards the changing world, not turned away from it. In a letter to her friend, Gerschom Scholem, Arendt writes:

“There is such a thing as a basic gratitude for everything that is as it is; for what has been *given* and was not, could not be, *made*” (Arendt quoted in *ibid.*: 188).

Conclusion

Although Augustine was an early influence for Arendt’s concept of the world, she emphasizes the beauty of creation rather than the creator. She appropriates Augustine’s love of God and love of neighbour, as well as his sense of living between two worlds, the city of God and city of man. Yet, while Augustine preferred an eternal God to the mortal world, Arendt redirects his love towards the world. Likewise, she appropriates Heidegger’s concept of being-in-the-world. While reflecting existential unease in the world and the simultaneous desire to be home in it, she develops a richer understanding of being-with-others (*Mitsein*). In contrast to Heidegger’s privileging of thinking and Being, Arendt restored wonder (*thaumazein*) to its origin in the world. Moreover, if he tended to view the everyday world as full of idle chatter and inauthenticity, she searches for moments when freedom, spontaneity and plurality might appear between people, not simply to the solitary thinker.

Arendt’s concept of the world is deeply relevant in the twenty-first century as we struggle with violent cultural differences, scarce resources and unprecedented technological change. Her writing reminds us of the important fragility of the world that we share in common. In addition, she calls our attention to the political and moral connections between the self, others and the world. “In the last analysis, the human world is always the product of man’s *amor mundi*, a human artifice whose potential immortality is always subject to the mortality of those who build it and the natality of those who come to live in it” (Arendt 2005: 203).

Acknowledgement

I am grateful to the Estonian Research Council for funding (grant no. IUT3-2).