



Hannah Arendt and Augustine of Hippo : On the Pleasure of and Desire for Evil

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Article abstract

Hannah Arendt wrote two volumes on thinking and willing in *The Life of the Mind*, but due to her untimely death her work devoted to judgement, especially political judgement, was never completed. We do, however, have a significant amount of writings on this theme as evidenced by her lectures on Kant's *Third Critique*. Judgement and thinking are critical in order to prevent what Arendt calls the "banality of evil". Drawing on Augustine and Arendt's work on Augustine, this paper seeks to argue that another form of serious evil has its root in what Augustine calls the *libido habendi* and the *libido dominandi*, the desire or drive to dominate and possess. It will be argued that Arendt's solution to the problem of evil as banal can also be applied to the very human desire and pleasure to cause or inflict evil.

HANNAH ARENDT AND AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO : ON THE PLEASURE OF AND DESIRE FOR EVIL *

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RÉSUMÉ : *Arendt a écrit deux volumes dédiés à la pensée et la volonté qui sont réunis dans le texte La vie de l'esprit, mais en raison de sa mort inopportune, son travail consacré au jugement, et plus spécialement au jugement politique, n'a jamais été achevé. Cependant, nous disposons d'une quantité significative d'écrits sur ce thème, provenant de ses conférences sur la troisième Critique de Kant. Le jugement et la pensée sont essentiels pour empêcher ce qu'Arendt appelle « la banalité du mal ». En s'inspirant de saint Augustin et du travail d'Arendt sur Augustin, cet article entend démontrer qu'une autre forme de mal sérieux trouve sa racine dans ce qu'Augustin appelle la libido habendi et la libido dominandi, le désir ou la pulsion de dominer et posséder. Nous essaierons de montrer que la solution d'Arendt au problème de la banalité du mal peut aussi s'appliquer au désir et au plaisir très humains de causer ou d'infliger du mal.*

ABSTRACT : *Hannah Arendt wrote two volumes on thinking and willing in The Life of the Mind, but due to her untimely death her work devoted to judgement, especially political judgement, was never completed. We do, however, have a significant amount of writings on this theme as evidenced by her lectures on Kant's Third Critique. Judgement and thinking are critical in order to prevent what Arendt calls the "banality of evil". Drawing on Augustine and Arendt's work on Augustine, this paper seeks to argue that another form of serious evil has its root in what Augustine calls the libido habendi and the libido dominandi, the desire or drive to dominate and possess. It will be argued that Arendt's solution to the problem of evil as banal can also be applied to the very human desire and pleasure to cause or inflict evil.*

In her treatment of "Willing" in part two of *The Life of the Mind*, Hannah Arendt notes that Augustine of Hippo was the first philosopher of the will to connect willing with the problem of evil.¹ Much contemporary research devoted to Arendt's

* I would very much like to thank Kathy Daymond for her invaluable assistance and comments in preparing this article for publication. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their invaluable suggestions.

1. Hannah ARENDT, "Willing", Part II in *The Life of the Mind*, New York, Harcourt, 1978, p. 84.

thought focuses on judgement, especially in terms of its potential to aid us in avoiding and preventing what she calls “the banality of evil”.² This paper focuses on the problem of evil as elaborated by both Augustine and Arendt. The latter’s well-known treatment of Eichmann as incarnating a failure to think and judge properly creates an impression, for better or worse,³ that one way of resolving or responding to the problem of evil, both in terms of understanding and avoiding it, is by actualising or making use of the uniquely human faculties of the mind, including thinking, willing and judging. Arendt’s early treatise on Augustine⁴ demonstrates an alternative way of understanding and avoiding evil, namely, through the Christian conversion of heart and love. God’s grace and love, which were present at the beginning (*initium*), call us to return to the source of love, God Himself.⁵ God’s love can redeem evil human acts and restore a fallen, sinful or evil human nature. Returning to the love of God brings about the possibility of, to borrow a phrase from Saint Paul, a new creation. In her doctoral dissertation, Arendt demonstrates that, for Augustine, evil is caused not only by the original fall of Adam and Eve but also by a turning toward the self that severs one from a fuller vision of the self — a self intimately connected with created nature, the world, one’s neighbour and God.⁶

What is fascinating about Arendt’s treatment of Augustine, however, is her discussion of desire. Desire, especially selfish or misdirected desire, can be properly directed by the weight of love — God’s love for human beings and the love of human beings for self, one another and God : *Pondus meum, amor meus*.⁷ In short, desire can be reformed by love. While this generally holds true in Augustine’s philosophy, he also, as I read him, brilliantly describes a kind of evil that is intimately connected with desire itself, an evil that is pleasurable. Arendt does not, however, take up this idea to any great extent. Although she does describe Augustinian love as being capable of rightly ordering disordered desire or concupiscence, she does not focus on desire itself as evil. The early writings of Saint Augustine point to the possibility of such evil, whereas his later writings maintain that this kind of desire marks a lack of being or a privation⁸ of what ought to be present, namely, a directed and well-ordered love of self, others and God. Augustine describes this evil desire as *concupiscentia*, *cupiditas*, *libido dominandi*, *libido nocendi*, *libido habendi* — concupiscence, greedy

2. See L.S. BARTHOLD, “Towards an Ethics of Love : Arendt on the Will and Saint Augustine”, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 26 (2000), p. 1-20 ; R.J. BERNSTEIN, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1996 ; E. YOUNG-BRUEHL, “Reflections on Hannah Arendt’s *The Life of the Mind*,” *Political Theory*, 10 (1982), p. 277-305.

3. Leah BRADSHAW, *Acting and Thinking : The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1989, p. 65-68.

4. Hannah ARENDT, *Love and Saint Augustine*, tr. J. Vechiarelli Scott and J. Chelius Stark, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996.

5. See ID., *Love*, Part II, ch. 1 ; see also, “Willing”, p. 104.

6. ID., *Love*, Part II, ch. 3 ; see also, Part III, on life in society.

7. ID., “Willing”, p. 102-104.

8. Recall that evil, for Augustine, is essentially an absence of a good, a *privatio boni* that ought to be present, but is not.

desire, the drive or instinct to dominate, to possess, to render life noxious or to kill.⁹ This desire presents itself not only as evil but also as intensely pleasurable. Misdirected desires or drives simply arise, without willing or thinking; they just are. And we enjoy them. The episode of the pear tree recounted in the *Confessions* admirably confirms this insight.¹⁰

Arendt describes Eichmann, who resorted to stock phrases and clichés to justify his actions, as passionless, mediocre, unimpressive. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt is careful to distinguish will from desire.¹¹ The two are related but not identical and, ultimately, she argues that desire can be subsumed under or directed by the faculties of the mind. According to the Augustinian doctrine of grace, this is never possible. The control of desire by the mind is not an exclusively human prerogative; only God can accomplish this. Hence, we arrive at Augustine's and Saint Paul's conflicted view of the unredeemed will that is itself divided. Even Kant recognizes this tension when, in the "Canon of Pure Reason" at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he distinguishes the animal, sensuous or pathological will (*arbitrium brutum*) from the human freedom of choice of the will (*liberum arbitrium*), which he goes on to investigate in the *Critique of Practical Reason*.¹²

Given Augustine's insight about desire and pleasure in evil and Arendt's distinction between willing and desiring, the question becomes: Can Arendt's conceptual framework, particularly as it is developed in *The Life of the Mind* and her writings on judgement, account for an Augustinian view of evil as pleasurable desire, understood as concupiscence or the drive/*libido* to dominate and possess? I argue that there are indeed cases when the Augustinian *libido* can successfully be brought under the influence and control of the faculties of the mind, indeed Arendt shows how this is possible in her *Responsibility and Judgment*¹³ and *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*¹⁴, but I also maintain that there are cases when the life of the mind cannot overcome the force of such instinctual human desires, desires that have deep roots in the human condition. In fact, to the extent that the human being's desire/drive for evil can escape the force/strength of the faculties of the mind, I defend Augustine's view. The desire for evil exposes a limit to the power of the life of the mind. This limit is reminiscent of Kant's limits of reason with respect to philosophical questions of cosmology, ontology and religion. The Christian philosophical tradition understands the limits of the mind's ability to account for evil and accepts it, both in relation to human behaviour and to God, as a mystery — the *mysterium inaequitatis*.

9. See AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, tr. H. Chadwick, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, III, viii, 16, p. 47-48.

10. *Ibid.*, II, iv, 9, p. 29: "Now let my heart tell you what it was seeking there in that I became evil for no reason. I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it."

11. ARENDT, "Willing", p. 89.

12. Immanuel KANT, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. Kemp Smith, London, Macmillan, 1964, p. 633-634.

13. Hannah ARENDT, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. J. KOHN, New York, Schocken, 2003.

14. Ed. Ronald BEINER, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989.

The contribution of this paper, then, lies not so much in trying to extend Arendt's treatment of judgment as it relates to evil, but to point to a source of evil that lies within the very nature of human beings, namely, in human desire. What Augustine shows is that desire/drive or *libido* is so powerful that it can trump and overpower our other faculties, including will, reason and judgement. The object of desire can be both good and evil, and we can have desire for both. The Augustinian treatment of evil as it connects to desire makes a distinction between human desire that can in itself be good and evil, and objects of desire that can be both good and evil. What Augustine shows and what Arendt is reticent to admit is that human nature can be evil. Love certainly can correct this, as both Augustine and Arendt show, but Arendt never starts with the claim of a fallen human nature that desires and, therefore, is evil.

I. AUGUSTINE, DESIRE AND WILL

A cursory review of the scholarship on Augustine reveals an intimate connection between will and desire.¹⁵ Misdirected desires that intend evil ends turn away from their natural end, namely, God. Augustine wonders whether our desires are evil not only in and of themselves, but also in relation to their intended ends, especially when one yields to them. A famous example is that of the unwilling or involuntary movement of the genitals, a sexual desire that is certainly pleasing but also evil.¹⁶ Here, both the natural occurrence of the desire itself and its intended end — that is, sexual pleasure — are considered illicit.

Generally, the above-mentioned scholarship can be divided *grosso modo* along two lines. The first, which includes thinkers such as John Rist, argues that one can never escape these desires. Rist maintains that concupiscence is “all-pervasive”. He maintains that our will, particularly when confronting desires and concupiscence, is weak. For Rist, weakness of the will, or *akrasia*, is part of the human condition.

Aristotle thinks that some of us are *acratice* some of the time, and a few of us may be *acratice* all the time (at least about something), while Augustine's position is rather that all of us are *acratice* all the time, and that while we may think we have overcome a particular moral weakness, there is always the real possibility that it will return.¹⁷

Ann Pang-White notes that Aristotle's treatment of *akrasia*, which Arendt follows in part, implies that the “akratic agent is morally blameworthy for choosing to act against his or her better judgment”.¹⁸

15. See, for example, R. SARRINEN, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought: From Augustine to Buridan*, New York, E.J. Brill, 1994; Gerald BONER, “*Libido* and *Concupiscentia* in St. Augustine”, *Studia Patristica*, 6 (1962), p. 303-314; T. HOFFMAN, J. MÜLLER, M. PERKAMS, ed., *Das Problem der Willensschwäche in der mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, Leuven, Peeters, 2006.

16. AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, tr. M. Dods, New York, Modern Library, 1994, Book XIV, ch. xix.

17. JOHN RIST, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 137.

18. ANN A. PANG-WHITE, “The Fall of Humanity: Weakness of the Will and Moral Responsibility in the Later Augustine”, *Mediaeval Philosophy and Theology*, 9 (2000), p. 53.

The second line of scholarship, which is aligned with the later work of Augustine, distinguishes naturally occurring desires after the fall of Adam and Eve from the assent/consent to such desires. So, although we may have inordinate and evil desires that surge naturally within us, these in and of themselves do not render us morally culpable. It is only when we consent (with the will) and assent (with reason) to immoral desires that we become morally culpable. Here, we have a reprehensible *akrasia* in need of redemption.

The person is, however, very much mistaken who, while consenting to the concupiscence of the flesh and definitely deciding to do what it desires, still supposes that he ought to say, It is not I who do it. After all, a person consents, even if he hates the fact. For these two coexist in one person : both the hating it because one knows it is evil and the doing it because one decided to do it.¹⁹

Ann Pang-White notes that there is a marked distinction between the surging of desire within us and our consent to it.²⁰ But she also remarks that there is, as well, a struggle between diverse and divided wills, namely, the will of the flesh and the will of the spirit.

[...] [A]t the moment of making a moral choice, there may well be two competing desires (or, metaphorically, as Augustine frequently says “two wills”) at war in a person. That is, part of the person’s will consents to his knowledge and desires to do the good, whereas the other part of the will consents to concupiscence and desires to do evil. This is pre-choice consent, or consent in the sense of giving approval or permission. What is finally chosen depends on which of the divided wills (or desires/loves) wins the battle. Final consent, which represents the person’s ultimate choice, is the result of the stronger will, or more properly, the stronger desire or love. In the case of the mental state of a non-akratic choice, the spiritual will healed by grace is stronger. In the case of an akratic choice, the carnal will is stronger. But, the spiritual will might still carry a certain weight in the person’s mind, even if it is not powerful enough to overcome the carnal will. The agent thus feels displeased with his or her akratic choice.²¹

God continuously offers his grace (that is, divine love) in order that such moral weaknesses can be redeemed, thereby fortifying the individual in his or her quest for the good life with God. The failure to take advantage of God’s grace is a “voluntary negligence to seek out remedy for the inherited weakness”.²² Augustine is quick to point out that humanity cannot heal or redeem itself. Naturally occurring disordered desires, as well as consenting to them through the will (that is, *akrasia*), can only be corrected by cooperating with God’s love ; God gives us the grace to help us turn our hearts away from immoral desires, converting our bodies, minds and souls to the God

19. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Marriage and Desire*, tr. Roland J. Teske, SJ, Part One, vol. 24 of *The Works of Saint Augustine : A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Roland J. TESKE, SJ, Hyde Park, New City Press, 1998, p. 47. The Latin reads as follows : “Multum autem fallitur homo qui consentiens carnis suae et quod illa desiderat decernens facere et statuens putat sibi adhuc esse dicendum : non est utrumque : et ipse odit, quia malum esse novit, et ipse facit, quia facere statuit” (*De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, I, xxviii, 31, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, XLII, p. 243).

20. Ann A. PANG-WHITE, “Augustine, *Akrasia*, and Manichaeism”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 77 (2003), p. 151-169.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

22. ID., “The Fall of Humanity”, p. 67.

of love. Augustine admits that his “mind” is weak and divided. Plagued by doubt, he cannot redeem himself. He must appeal to a force outside of the self, namely, God.

The allurements of perfumes is not a matter of great concern to me. When they are absent, I do not look for them. When they are present, I do not reject them. I am ready to go without them all the time. That is how I see myself, but perhaps I am deceived. For there are those deplorable blind spots where the capacity that lies in me is concealed from me. My mind on examining myself about its strengths does not regard its findings as easy to trust. What lies within is for the most part hidden unless experience reveals it. No one should be complacent in this life which is called a “total temptation” (Job 7:1). Anyone who could change from the worse to the better can also change from the better to the worse. There is one hope, one ground of confidence, one reliable promise — your mercy.²³

The struggle not to succumb to immoral or culpable desires is also a battle of different loves. One can choose to love one’s inordinate desires over a richer and more complete version of the self, which completes its fullness, as Arendt points out in her dissertation, by loving an ordered self that is in communion with self, others and God. Augustine admits that inner conflicts and inconsistencies over loves and desires cause one to question oneself. The human condition is conflicted and divided; although humans long for unity and consistency of self, the self is never a complete unity. The *Confessions*, for example, can be read as Augustine’s attempt to give an account of himself; in giving such an account, he strives to make greater sense of all that he is — he seeks an ordered, unified account of himself. It is not so surprising, then, that Arendt, after studying Augustine, insists that one of the philosophical tasks of human beings is to give a coherent account of themselves. Both thinkers take seriously the oracular pronouncement, “Know thyself!” One comes to know oneself by becoming a question to oneself, “*quaestio mihi factus sum*”. It is, says Augustine, in questioning oneself that one becomes aware of one’s own inconsistencies, failings, talents, gifts and utter dependence upon God. For Arendt, this self-scrutiny is translated into the language of judgement. In the prologue to *Responsibility and Judgment*, Arendt maintains that it is impossible to judge oneself; one must always look to the larger community to inform our accounts and judgements of ourselves.²⁴

Arendt certainly reads Augustine within the second tradition of Augustinian scholarship, according to which a failure to will and judge correctly, to question oneself thoroughly in relation to others and God, lies at the source of evil. Eichmann’s banality can be read as the failure to become a question to himself within what Arendt calls the public sphere. But what about the first tradition’s reading of Augustine? How do we deal with evil in terms of a persistently akratic will that is always fallible? One could argue that though this akratic fallibility is ineluctable, one can employ judgement and will to curb the shortcomings of an akratic will. Mary Midgley argues that evolution has produced in human beings the capacity for reflection and deliberation on action that may potentially be noxious or evil. She maintains that we can use what she calls “inner dialogue” — what Arendt denotes as judgement

23. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, X, xxxii, 48, p. 207.

24. Hannah ARENDT, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. J. KOHN, New York, Schocken, 2003, p. 7.

— to make decisions about our actions before we execute them.²⁵ We have the ability to see both the clearer side and the “shadow side” of our actions and their consequences. Midgley argues that we can employ inner dialogue to minimize and even prevent “wickedness”.

Though both Augustine and Arendt identify a connection between evil, which includes desire, and judgement, Augustine’s description of very powerful, immoral or inordinate desire acknowledges the pleasure of the desire for evil. Moreover, Augustine astutely observes that an uncontrollable desire for pleasurable evil is stronger than the mind : “I fear [...] uncontrolled desire.”²⁶ The desire for evil and its associated pleasure are so strong and vital that they may reject the good that is God’s love ; in fact, the pleasure aroused by evil desire is more immediately gratifying than God’s love, which is experienced as remote. “Grant me chastity and continence, but not yet.”²⁷ The implication is that what Arendt calls the “life of the mind” is insufficiently strong to control or prevent such evil from manifesting itself. A stronger force, a force beyond the human — namely, the divine — is required. Only divine love can temper and transform this pleasurable desire/love for evil, which Augustine describes as *concupiscentia* (greedy desire or cupidity), *libido habendi* or *libido dominandi*.

Beside the lust of the flesh which inheres in the delight given by all pleasures of the senses (those who are enslaved to it perish by putting themselves far from you), there exists in the soul, through the medium of the same bodily senses, a cupidity which does not take delight in carnal pleasures but in perceptions acquired through the flesh. It is a vain inquisitiveness dignified with the title of knowledge and science. As this is rooted in the appetite for knowing, and as among the senses the eyes play a leading role in acquiring knowledge, the divine word calls it the “lust of the eyes”.²⁸

Desire and the desire for pleasure through evil are described by Augustine as a psychological phenomenon or a phenomenon of the soul. In the passage cited above, it is not only the eyes that are misdirected ; there is, as well, a fundamental disorder of the soul as the seat of knowledge. There is a greedy desire for knowledge that animates the eyes to seek more and to delight in evil, ugly things.

II. ARENDT AND THE LIFE OF THE MIND

“Willing”, the second book of the *Life of the Mind*, remains incomplete. Arendt, does, however, provide a brief history of the will, from its relatively short treatment in Greek philosophy, to its distinct emergence and role in Christian philosophy, to its intimate connection with freedom in Enlightenment thought. She identifies Augustine

25. Mary MIDGLEY, *Wickedness*, London, Routledge, 2001, ch. 6.

26. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, X, xxxi, 46, p. 206.

27. *Ibid.*, VIII, vii, 17, p. 145.

28. *Ibid.*, X, xxxv, 54, p. 211.

as the first philosopher of the will, the first to connect the will, understood as *liberum arbitrium* or the free decision of the will, to the problem of evil.²⁹

Acutely aware of the conflict or “tension” between willing and thinking,³⁰ Arendt situates this conflict within a temporal framework, operative within the domain of mental activity. A willing ego looks forward, whereas remembrance (recall that memory and willing are two faculties of the Augustinian mind) can only look back. Augustine recognises that such a conflict exists, but, according to Arendt, he roots it not only in a tension between memory or thought and willing, but also in the tension between *liberum arbitrium voluntatis* (free choice of the will), desire and reason.³¹

Arendt’s analysis of the Augustinian will suggests not only that the will is in conflict with the other faculties of the soul, but also that it is itself divided. We saw this earlier in the discussion of the tension between the carnal and the spiritual wills in Augustine’s later writings. Arendt cites Saint Paul as the source of Augustine’s theory of the doubly conflicted will. She argues that the conflict of wills in Augustine is not to be confused with deliberation, where one considers various possibilities and positions of the will. Rather, the conflict inheres in the power of the will. By its very nature, the will can command action. For example, I will to go to the store, and my will pushes me to go. But the nature of power is that it can also be resisted. The will has the power to resist as well as to actualise. The classic characterisation of the will as *velle-nollo* (willy-nilly), as willing and not willing, becomes the locus of the tensions within the will itself. Arendt argues that, for Augustine, the healing of this conflict can only be accomplished by divine love.

Love is the “weight of the soul”, its law of gravitation, that which brings the soul’s movement to its rest. Somewhat influenced by Aristotelian physics, he holds that the end of all movement is rest, and now he understand the emotions — the motions of the soul — in analogy to the movements of the physical world. For “nothing else do bodies desire by their weight than what souls desire by their love”. Hence, in the *Confessions*: “My weight is my love, by it I am borne whithersoever I am borne.” The soul’s gravity, the essence of who somebody is, and which as such is inscrutable to human eyes, becomes manifest in this love.³²

Arendt ends her treatment of Augustine with four conclusions.³³ First, the split within the Augustinian will is not a dialogue; rather, it is a conflict. She also notes that the power to actualise or resist the will is not dependent upon the content that is willed. Second, the will is conceived as the “executive organ” of the mind and it commands the body. “The body obeys the mind because it is possessed of no organ that would make disobedience possible. The will, addressing itself to itself, arouses the counter-will because the exchange is entirely mental; a contest is only possible between equals.”³⁴ Third, because it is the nature of the will to command and demand obedi-

29. ARENDT, “Willing”, p. 33 and 34.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 37-38.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 95-96.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

ence, it is also the nature of the will to be resisted. Fourth, the will cannot heal itself ; it can only be unified and, thus, healed or redeemed from its inner conflicts through love, God's love. Arendt notes that, in the *Confessions*, the healing or salvation of the will is a *deus ex machina* operation that comes as a surprise at the end of the text, but she recognises that this is only apparently surprising in light of Augustine's writings on the Trinity, which complete his propositions at the end of the *Confessions*. The same point can be found in Arendt's doctoral dissertation, especially if we accept her exposition of the role of *initium*, a love that is a beginning, a love without end, in which one always returns to the beginning.³⁵

Arendt's treatment of Augustine demonstrates that she is aware of the power of the will ; it can actualise as well as resist. It has a force of its own. The will can actualise or resist desire, even when the desire is associated with pleasure. Though Arendt acknowledges the conflict of divided will, she turns her attention to the power of reason and, finally, judgement, as that which can temper the will, even the will that desires to act against the mind's better judgement. We see this progression in the belief in the potency of reason in her elaboration of history. Her shift to Thomas Aquinas and eventually to modern thinkers, who emphasise rational deliberation and judgement, helps Arendt articulate her own position concerning the role of judgement in aiding us to avoid evil.

What I have just quoted from Thomas shows, I think, to what an extent his concept of the appetitive faculties is still indebted to the notion of a desire to *possess* in a hereafter whatever may be lacking in the earthly life. For the Will, basically understood as desire, stops when the desired object is brought into its possession, and the notion that "the Will is blessed when it is in possession of what it wills" is simply not true — this is precisely the moment when the Will ceases to will. The Intellect, which, according to Thomas, is a "passive power", is assured of its primacy over the Will, which is extinguished, as it were, when the object has been attained.³⁶

Ultimately, for thinkers such as Thomas, Kant and Arendt, evil can be understood and controlled through the right use of reason and judgement. Arendt capitalises on the deliberation implicit in Augustine's notion of *liberum arbitrium voluntatis*, as one must arbitrate the conflict in the divided will, which necessarily implies some sort of judgement. Arendt appeals directly, however, to judgement — the faculty that unites reason and willing — but she accords greater strength to reason.

In her treatment of the banality of evil, Arendt depicts Eichmann as passionless ; he can account for his actions only in clichés and stock phrases.

I spoke of the "banality of evil" and meant with this no theory or doctrine but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was perhaps extraordinary shallowness.³⁷

35. Hannah ARENDT, *Le concept d'amour chez Augustin*, tr. A.S. Astrup, Paris, Payot et Rivages, 1991, p. 102.

36. ID., "Willing", p. 123.

37. ID., "Thinking and Moral Considerations", in J. KOHN, ed., *Responsibility and Judgement*, New York, Schocken Books, 2003, p. 159.

Arendt describes Eichmann as lacking thoughtfulness. “[...] [I]t was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think.”³⁸ Given Eichmann’s testimony at his trial, Arendt wonders, “Is our ability to judge, to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly, dependent upon our faculty of thought?”³⁹ She responds affirmatively. Arendt believes that thinking must not be merely pragmatic, focusing narrowly on the functionality and instrumentality of things in the world. Rather, thinking is one of the primary ways that human beings fashion themselves and their worlds, giving meaning not only to human beings themselves but also to the worlds they create and shape. Furthermore, humans desire and need to think ; thought need not have an object or yield answers. We need to think and enjoy thinking for the sake of thought itself.

The activity of knowing is no less a world-building activity than the building of houses. The inclination or the need to think, on the contrary, even if aroused by none of the time-honoured metaphysical, unanswerable “ultimate questions”, leaves nothing so tangible behind, nor can it be stilled by allegedly definite insights of “wise men”. The need to think can be satisfied only through thinking, and the thoughts which I had yesterday will satisfy this need today only to the extent that I can think them anew.⁴⁰

Arendt posits a distinction between thinking and knowing. Knowing is directed toward the acquisition of practical knowledge that may be used to build one’s world ; it is essentially instrumental. Thinking is practised for itself ; it is a human need and desire. It does not have to produce concrete results ; it can be inspired by the great metaphysical questions of philosophy, but it need not provide definite and absolute answers to such questions.

Arendt claims that thinking, as activity of the mind, is interruptive.

[...] [I]t interrupts all doing, all ordinary activities no matter what they happen to be [...]. For it is true that the moment we start thinking on no matter what issue we stop everything else, and this everything else, again whatever it may happen to be, interrupts the thinking process ; it is as though we moved into a different world.⁴¹

Following Kant, Arendt believes that thinking is for everyone and not the exclusive domain of professional thinkers. Thinking operates like Socrates, who constantly interrupted people’s living and doing ; thus was he known as the gadfly. Arendt describes him as a stingray, paralysing action by forcing people to think. Thinking itself cannot guarantee the delivery of moral systems or values that allow the definitive determination of things as good or evil, bad or ugly. It essentially deals with invisibles. Thinking, claims Arendt, makes us aware of ourselves ; it makes us self-conscious. We become aware that we are thinking beings, self-reflective beings. Thought interrupts our habitual way of being in the world, leading us to question and think about why and how we do things, why and how we live. Thinking may deliver no singular answers, but it unveils the possibilities and consequences of thought it-

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 164-165.

self. Conscience is described as a side-effect of thinking.⁴² Etymologically, the word “conscience” is derived from the Latin *cum* and *scire*, literally meaning “to know with”. Conscience accompanies thinking ; it is a special kind of knowing that indicates the moral implications of our thinking. It is judgement, however, that takes into account particulars and allows us to make specific judgements about things and states of affairs, for example, to declare that this object is evil, this behaviour is bad, and so on.⁴³ Arendt notes :

The faculty of judging particulars (as Kant discovered it), the ability to say, “this is wrong,” “this is beautiful,” etc., is not the same as the faculty of thinking. Thinking deals with invisibles, with representations of things that are absent ; judging always concerns particulars and things close at hand. But the two are interrelated in a way similar to the way consciousness and conscience are interconnected. If thinking the two-in-one of the soundless dialogue actualizes the difference within our identity as given in consciousness and thereby results in conscience as its by-product, then judging, the by-product of the liberating effect of thinking, realizes thinking, makes it manifest in the world of appearances, where I am never alone and always much too busy to be able to think. The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge ; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this indeed may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down.⁴⁴

When thinking, conscience and judgement come together in the life of the mind, one can “prevent” catastrophes carried out by “banal”, unthinking individuals such as Eichmann. In many ways, Augustine would agree with Arendt, particularly if we translate Arendt’s “thinking” into Augustinian “questioning”. Questioning may be understood as the concrete practice of thinking. The *Confessions*, for example, is presented as a series of questions and answers that shifts between monologue and dialogue, through which Augustine becomes aware of himself, becomes conscious that he is a question to himself. His thought produces an additional side-effect, an accompanying awareness that good and evil, beauty and ugliness, exist. But whereas Augustine, always navigating the inner conflicts of the will, employs the arbitration of the free will in order to “judge” between specific goods and evils, Arendt separates judgement — what Augustine would call arbitration — from the will, rendering it a unique faculty within the life of the mind. For Arendt, and according to a certain reading of Augustine, evil can be avoided either by invoking the power and arbitration implicit in the will by refusing to consent and assent to evil, or by thinking and judging. It should be remarked that Augustinian assent is not only rooted in the will ; reason, which makes intelligible and understandable what is truly good and evil, as illumined by God, has to step in to guide the will. Though Arendt and Augustine share similar, but nevertheless different, views on the exact relation between will and judgement in relation to evil, Arendt never accounts for an Augustinian sense of evil that is *not* connected to thinking or judgement — an evil, linked to desire, that is purely pleasurable, what Augustine describes as *libido* or *concupiscentia*.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

44. *Ibid.*

III. THE DESIRE AND PLEASURE OF EVIL THAT ESCAPES THE LIFE OF THE MIND

Arendt distinguishes banal evil from evil that is rooted in pathology, wickedness or ideological conviction. She does not define these different forms of evil. What she means by pathological and ideological evil, however, is clear ; the former refers to evil that results from some mental or physical illness, and the latter refers to evil that inheres in various ideologies, such as National Socialism and Stalinism. Wickedness, as it is not specifically defined, is the problematic term here ; it might simply refer to deliberately harmful acts aimed at the destruction of an individual or a state of affairs. As Richard J. Bernstein notes, Arendt moves from a concept of “radical evil” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to “the banality of evil” in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. He comments, “The key concept in her earlier analysis of radical evil is *superfluosness*. After she witnessed the Eichmann trial she turned her attention to *thoughtlessness*.”⁴⁵ Radical evil, according to Bernstein, renders human beings superfluous, “eradicating the very conditions required for living a human life”.⁴⁶ Arendt, however, unlike Augustine, never identifies evil with pleasure and desire.

In Book II of his *Confessions*, Augustine reflects back on his growing cupidity and desire during his adolescence. He describes stealing pears, but recognises that the pears themselves do not give him pleasure. It is the desire to do evil itself, especially in company, that is pleasurable.

The theft itself was a nothing, and for that reason I was more miserable [...]. Therefore my love in the act was to be associated with the gang in whose company I did it [...]. If I had liked the pears which I stole and actually desired to enjoy them, I could by myself have committed that wicked act, had it been enough to attain the pleasure which I sought. I would not have needed to inflame the itch of my cupidity through the excitement generated by sharing the guilt with others. But my pleasure was not in pears ; it was in the crime itself, done in association with a sinful group.⁴⁷

In Book III, Augustine speaks of lusts or libidos : *habendi*, *nocendi* and *dominandi*.⁴⁸ The body and the psyche derive pleasure from possessing things and people ; we possess, dominate and even destroy people with our greedy senses and desires. Delighting in evil spectacles, Augustine describes the evil pleasures of the Roman games and theatres. He recognises that it is natural for one to seek enjoyment.⁴⁹ He also acknowledges that pleasure and evil are not mutually exclusive, particularly in the absence of the desire to love properly, that is, the love of God and the acceptance of God’s love.

In all of Augustine’s descriptions of disordered desire — a desire for pleasures that are evil — Augustine notes that he alone cannot change himself or avert such

45. Richard J. BERNSTEIN, “Did Hannah Arendt Change Her Mind ?”, in Larry MAY and Jerome KOHN, ed., *Hannah Arendt : Twenty Years Later*, Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1996, p. 142-143 ; see also, p. 132-135.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

47. AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, II, viii, 16, p. 33.

48. *Ibid.*, III, ix, 16, p. 47-48.

49. *Ibid.*, III, ii, 3, p. 36.

evil. He constantly evokes God's mercy and love. He admits that, insofar as he fails to reason properly about God's word and deeds and to carry out what God desires, his reason and will are weak. He realizes that he cannot make himself whole. Augustine requires a transcendent God of Love to save him from himself and his evil pleasures. "Can it be wrong at any time or place to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and to love your neighbour as yourself?"⁵⁰ It should also be remarked that there is something mysterious and unintelligible about evil in general. In Book III of *De libero arbitrio*, Evodius asks Augustine why God, who is omnipotent and omniscient, allows evil to persist. In other words, why does God, with the power to arrange matters otherwise, allow evil to happen? Augustine admits that he does not know, and he urges Evodius to remain silent about those things that we do not know. Not only can we not save ourselves if we do not cooperate with God's love, but the larger problem of evil, which lies outside the relation between human reason and will, remains, in Augustine, mysterious.

Though Arendt does not directly identify ways to deal with pleasurable evils, that is, evils that escape the limits of the life of the mind and are dependent upon some form of external redemption, one might infer from Arendt's corpus an alternative solution — one that is not dependent upon human cooperation with divine love — to Augustine's problem of pleasurable evils. I maintain that Arendt's notions of publicity, understood as *sensus communis* and *inter homines esse*, can be employed, in part, to temper the affects to be found in pleasurable evils. Arendt's discussion of Eichmann may create the impression that Eichmann alone failed to think, but the failure was not his alone. As Arendt makes clear in both *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the rise of anti-Semitism and the murder and displacement of millions of Jews did not occur simply because of isolated individuals; vast numbers of people worked in tandem to carry out the heinous events that resulted in the bloodshed and millions of displaced people of World War II. Though pleasurable evils are experienced and enjoyed by individuals, such individuals never exist in a vacuum; they always live and dwell among others.

The notion of pleasure in evil is not unique to Augustine. Aristotle speaks of the delight of the eyes and senses in unnatural things. Indeed, pleasurable evil is a component of tragedy. Nietzsche discusses *Schadenfreude*. Though these thinkers do not conceive of taking pleasure in ugly things and in others' misfortunes as "sinful", they nevertheless recognise that there is something peculiar about finding pleasure in seemingly non-joyous things. Arendt's notions of *inter homines esse* and *sensus communis* can be understood as offering human beings a shared patrimony of cultural and moral tools that can be used to inform judgements and inhibit evil, even pleasurable evils. We know that delighting in another's misfortune militates against the possibility of harmonious human community; any genuine attempt at communal life is undermined by rejoicing in any community member's downfall. Common sense alone would seem to prescribe love, a term Arendt uses when discussing Christ in *The Human Condition*; when wrongs have been committed, the requirements of

50. *Ibid.*, III, viii, 15, p. 45-46.

community include forgiveness and the promise to reform, as well as the comforting of both victims and wrongdoers. The desire to promote community and to preserve a public space that can also serve to correct and inform communal values can assist us in collectively identifying certain pleasurable evils — such as, for example, *Schadenfreude* — that must be kept in check and controlled insofar as they weaken both self-respect and respect for other members of the community.

Arendt invokes two Socratic propositions that ensue from thinking : first, “It is better to be wronged than do wrong” ; second, “It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than I, being one, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict me.”⁵¹ The implications are clear for *inter homines esse*. First, one should never be out of sync with oneself ; one should at all times be able to account for oneself. For Socrates and Augustine, pleasurable evils are, in many cases, irrational, for we should always be directed to the light of the good that illumines all knowledge and all political life. To take pleasure in events that subvert the well-being and flourishing (*eudaimonia*) of the polis, which includes our own well-being, is counter-sensical. Second, the good of the community and, therefore, the well-being of the polis, is a higher good, as it both informs and creates the conditions for making individual judgements and intensely living the life of the mind. Pleasurable evils erode the very foundation of the communal life that is required for our own flourishing. Knowing this, we can build habits that help to restrict and delimit the effects of pleasurable evils. So, although, as Augustine notes, we may be naturally susceptible to impulses toward pleasurable evils, we need not indulge such pleasures as more than passing fancies. When they arise, we are responsible for ensuring that they do not damage or debilitate the *inter homines esse* on which our well-being depends.

Augustine asserts that we can use our wills, independent of our rational assent, to resist pleasurable evils, including the *libido dominandi*, *nocendi* and *habendi* that delight in destroying more comprehensive notions of community and *inter homines esse*. Arendt, instead, privileges judgement. Whereas Arendt seeks recourse in *inter homines esse* and the public sphere, Augustine readily admits that whole communities may be misdirected, even to the extent of cultivating and promoting pleasurable evils. Remember his condemnation of the Manichees and his critique of Roman society, which enthusiastically indulged in the horrific violence and bloodshed of the games. Here lies the crucial difference between Arendt and Augustine. Both thinkers recognise the pleasure to be found in evil and destruction. But where Arendt regards a thinking community as the bulwark against various forms of evil, Augustine understands that communities themselves can be mistaken. For Augustine, the life of the mind is insufficient ; only divine love and God’s mercy can ultimately correct and prevent evil. Arendt, too, has faith in the force of love, forgiveness and promises, but it is a human rather than divine love. Augustine maintains that, eventually, though not here in the earthly city, all evil will be conquered and destroyed. Arendt cannot make

51. ARENDT, “Thinking and Moral Considerations”, p. 181.

such a claim, but she believes we can struggle toward that end with the communal tools of the life of the mind.

For Christians, Augustine's argument is reasonable, but what can Augustine offer non-Christians in understanding the human condition qua evil, particularly pleasurable evil? Augustine identifies a gap in our understanding, to which he responds with the classic Christian discussion of evil as a "mystery". There is something about evil, especially horrendous, large-scale evil such as the Holocaust, that remains fundamentally irrational and incomprehensible, even pleasurable for some. This irrationality and unintelligibility pertains not only to our understanding of evil but also to our understanding of God as omnipotent, as possessing the power to eradicate all evil. I want to claim that Augustine demonstrates that, though we can work to correct, prevent and eliminate evil, both through the will and reason (illuminated by grace and love, of course), something unintelligible, irrational and unaccountable about certain types of evil remains. That something is the pleasure or, to borrow an expression from Augustine, "sweetness" that comes from evil desire. Perhaps this is so with the Eichmann case. However banal he may have been, the scale, brutality, violence and horror of his deeds — indeed, the evil of his acts and his failures to act — were so grotesque that an account of Eichmann as merely failing to think seems too feeble a diagnosis. Does the evil perpetrated by Eichmann resist human comprehension precisely because it is so profoundly evil and inhuman? Perhaps Eichmann loved to destroy. If this is the case, perhaps he was not simply banal; insofar as he took pleasure in mass destruction and violence, he may also have been monstrous.

The Augustinian implication here is straightforward: there is something inherently evil about human nature as evidenced by the desire or drive to dominate, destroy or possess. It is true that Hannah Arendt does not devote much space in her oeuvre to this aspect of human being. Nonetheless, she does maintain that such evil desire and inclinations can be corrected, if thinking, judgement and the will intervene. But when desire overpowers all of the other faculties, then we find ourselves in a mysterious predicament. Publicity and the *sensus communis*, as Arendt understands it, must now face an interesting challenge: how do we together make sense or think about this aspect of human nature, a nature that, in part, is by its very definition out of sync with itself? Perhaps it is here that the Arendtian notion of beginnings and promises can assist us. Just as there is something off about our nature, so too we also have the innate, profound capacity to begin again, even from nothing, to forgive the noxious effects of our partly distorted human nature as well promise to continue to make our human lives together flourish in community. The desire for and pleasure of evil can never be taken away, but we can also fight it and overcome its deleterious effects through promises and new beginnings. Promises and new beginnings are not necessarily constitutive of willing, thinking and judging, but they are conditioned by them. The naturally-occurring desire for and pleasure for evil, then, must be dealt with not strictly through thinking and judging, but through human action that can leap forward in promises and starting anew.