Chapter 4: Tradition

I. All Roads Lead to Rome

a. Tradition, Tradition, Tradition

“Tradition, tradition, tradition” is the title of the opening song of the celebrated Broadway show (later made into a movie) called *Fiddler on the Roof*, which tells the agonizing story of a struggling Jewish family in Eastern Europe. Tradition (in Hebrew “Massoreth”), says Tevye, the main protagonist, is the reason “we keep our balance for many, many years,” for it plays an essential role in the organization of family, community, and Jewish life. “Because of our traditions,” he adds, we show “our constant devotion to God.” Though having no clue as to “how this tradition started,” Tevye explains that it forms both the pillar of his identity and the foundation of everyday life in his community, which lives “in simple peace and harmony.” And if tradition is where the story begins, its slow evaporation marks a central element of the personal drama which ends with deportation. A crisis of modernity, at least from an Eastern European Jewish perspective, is cleverly intertwined with the loss of tradition.

Hannah Arendt is certainly no Tevye, and the notions of devotion to God, or simple peace and harmony, are hardly part of her vocabulary. But some of the main aspects of Arendt’s postwar writings on tradition (especially her works from the 1960s) seem to dovetail with the milkman’s outlook rather well. The grounds for community and identity; the relationship between past and present; the reference to mythic unknown origins; and the modern calamity resulting from the disappearance of tradition – all are essential parts of Arendt’s argumentation. Not without a grain of irony, perhaps, one could say that Arendt’s analysis of the crisis of modernity in the wake of two world wars, and the rise of totalitarianism and extermination, starts where Scholem Aleichem’s drama left off, that is with the loss of tradition, although without the same stagy pathos or moral intentions in mind.

It is in this postwar context of renewed interest in tradition that Arendt adopts a subtle, certainly distinctive approach to the relation of critique to theology. This chapter is dedicated to this relation and to the manner in which it discloses Arendt’s unique critique of theology. In what follows, then, I would first like to show what tradition means for Arendt and the ways in which it represents a theological category. This will invite an examination of how tradition informs her conceptualization of critique and in particular her critique of modernity, and how her concept of secularization is subsequently dependent on theology.

In her political writings from the 1960s in particular – texts that demonstrate, according to Dana Villa, Arendt’s shift of focus “from totalitarianism to tradition” – Arendt presents two main arguments concerning the meaning of tradition.[[1]](#footnote-1) First, tradition means the intergenerational transference of a sacred testament. Second, tradition is a Roman concept. In one of the more evocative passages of a chapter entitled “What is Authority?” she writes:

Tradition preserved the past by handing down from one generation to the next the testimony of the ancestors, who first had witnessed and created the sacred founding and then augmented it by their authority throughout the centuries.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This somewhat dense statement (encompassing a range of notions such as foundation, augmentation, and authority) encapsulates Arendt’s overall understanding of political tradition.[[3]](#footnote-3) Stemming from the Latin (and for Arendt, this means Roman) *traditio,* the concept refers to both the act of “handing down” from one generation to the next, as well as the particular “sacred” content that is being handed down.[[4]](#footnote-4) The first aspect of tradition (as an act of passing on a certain message, which corresponds to the German term *Überlieferung*)denotes the linkage between each generation and the one that preceded it.[[5]](#footnote-5) The second aspect of tradition (as a certain form of content) refers to a unique and “sacred” set of core principles, originating in a mythic past. Here, tradition has a theological connotation because of the particular sacred parcel – the divine “testimony”– being handed down from one generation to another. In this way, tradition relates to religion, and religion is understood in terms of its ties to a sacred, mythic moment of revelation, in the past.

The theological dimension of tradition is important. For Arendt the intergenerational transference of a sacred testament suggests an element of revelation which is augmented by each passing generation. Augmentation (deriving, again, from a Roman word, *augere*) enables a sacred testament to continue to serve as the foundation of what binds people together. Furthermore, in the act of passing on the “testimony” of a “sacred” past to a new generation, history is preserved. In this way, the notion of temporality (the past that we share) is combined with a reference to theology (eternal and divine origins). Put otherwise, the sacred origin of tradition appears, to cite Mircea Eliade, as *“*a sort of eternal mythical present.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

It is this capacity that makes tradition an adhesive religious substance that underpins the shared existence of human beings, binding them to their common ground. Arguably, a mythical and “sacred” past – involving divine presence – is here evoked as an object of reference to which all generations relate because they see themselves – or must see themselves – reflected in it, as if they too were present in the formative mythic experience. This experience serves as a religious condition of communality which is accessible by means of the transmission of the sacred testimonial moment that tradition stands for.

While tradition may be defined as the intergenerational transference of a sacred testament, its origins are to be found in the Roman “spirit.” This is the second point that Arendt makes: tradition is a Roman religious concept. Arendt particularly builds on the Roman experience and in such a way takes part in what Dirk Moses called “Das römische Gespräch” (the Roman debate or discussion) which he defined as the “long-term recuperation of the distant European past for present purposes” that “had been underway in the West since the eighteenth century.”[[7]](#footnote-7) “A rich tradition,” Moses further suggests, “Roman republicanism offered her a variety of positions on questions of war, conquest, and reason of state (raison d’état), and she drew on them both explicitly and implicitly.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Notwithstanding the undisputed importance of Greek philosophy for Arendt, it is – as Dean Hammer convincingly argued – the Roman experience that mainly provides Arendt with her arsenal of concepts, themes, and models for thinking about “how we might discover the past for ourselves” including reflection on the earlier Greek example. [[9]](#footnote-9)

Yet, a similar religious image of tradition is central to the Jewish tradition: the sacred core principles that were revealed in a mythic moment on Mount Sinai were taken to represent divine law and handed down from generation to generation until the present day. In Chapter 1 we saw how Freud was rather sedulous in suggesting that Michelangelo’s Moses attests to the “tamed wrath” of the prophet in the aftermath of the revelation of God’s testament. Freud associated this theological imagery with the artist’s reproach of a “catholic Rome,” which he himself shared. But Arendt may have presented overlapping (rather than antagonistic) theological similes. Samuel Moyn’s suggestion that Arendt “connects between the Jewish and Roman sources of her thought” is particularly pertinent here because Arendt presents a definition of Roman tradition that was considered central to the Jewish experience as well.[[10]](#footnote-10) The idea that it was a Jewish polity that was established at Sinai, an idea that has been debated by Jewish intellectuals since Spinoza, seems to bring the two sources of Arendt’s thought together.[[11]](#footnote-11) Indeed, in the Roman tradition there is, according to Arendt, a testimonial, sacred substance that was revealed in a mythic moment of the past and from that moment on conveyed from one generation to the other, providing all generations with a shared political foundation.

I will return to the combination of Roman and Jewish elements in Arendt’s thought below. Here, I wish to highlight the centrality of St. Augustine to her discussion of tradition. The significance of Augustine to Arendt’s examination of the concept seems to have remained rather underdeveloped in previous research. But starting with her 1929 dissertation, and throughout her meticulous editing of its various English translations in the 1960s (a project she never completed), Arendt takes Augustine to represent not only the most notable Christian thinker but also the most representative Roman one.[[12]](#footnote-12) An understanding of the “Christian Augustine” can be fully grasped, Arendt argues, only “if we take into account the ambiguity of his existence as both a Roman and a Christian.”[[13]](#footnote-13) As the “greatest theorist of Christian politics,” Augustine was “still firmly rooted in the Roman tradition.”[[14]](#footnote-14) When Arendt points out that none of the influences that Augustine absorbed throughout his life were ever “radically excised from his thinking” she is referring less to his Manichean past, and much more to the Roman origins of his thought.[[15]](#footnote-15) Moreover, because of Augustine, Christianity became for Arendt a “religion” only by the merits of its consolidation with the Roman religious imagination. Thus:

Thanks to the fact that the foundation of the city of Rome was repeated in the foundation of the Catholic Church, though, of course, with a radically different content, the Roman trinity of religion, authority, and tradition, could be taken over by the Christian era.[[16]](#footnote-16)

A Roman trinity was absorbed into a Christian one. The church consequently “adapted itself so thoroughly to Roman thinking” because it saw the Apostles as “the founding fathers” and claimed for itself the old authority of the Senate, which embodied divinely sanctioned authority, leaving worldly power to the secular rulers – illustrating the separation of the two earthly and divine “bodies” central to Ernst Kantorovicz’s thesis.[[17]](#footnote-17) In this sense, it was Augustine, rather than Paul (or Adolf von Harnack’s *Marcion* for that matter), who could be seen as the inventor of a new religion.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Augustine’s concept of love particularly exemplifies for Arendt the intersection of Roman and Christian theologies.[[19]](#footnote-19) The main point to note is that Augustine speaks of love – perhaps the most significant of all concepts of Christian theology – as a Roman. As a Roman thinker Augustine displays in his notion of Christian love an “uncritical use not only of Stoic but also of Neoplatonic categories.”[[20]](#footnote-20) It is the intertwining of these categories with Pauline theology that “could not help but lead him into inconsistencies, if not into outright contradictions.”[[21]](#footnote-21) “So strong is Augustine’s dependence upon these non-Christian currents of thought” Arendt adds, “that he even uses them occasionally for a description of God.”[[22]](#footnote-22) In such a way, “the strong influence of Stoic and Neoplatonic terminology of Augustine’s early thought takes its revenge here.”[[23]](#footnote-23) The “revenge” relates to the failure of Augustine to exorcise from his theological imagination a Roman religious take on earlier Greek origins. The “hidden” Roman religious sources of Augustine’s thought “remain active in each set of Christian problems, peculiar transforming them (even concealing them) from a purely Christian point of view.”[[24]](#footnote-24) The Roman religious tradition thus continues to haunt Augustine’s thought, even if “against his own wishes.”[[25]](#footnote-25)

Yet, what was the Roman religious tradition that Augustine absorbed so unwillingly into his conceptualization of love? In her dissertation, Arendt’s answer to this question seems to point to Augustine’s “tripartite hierarchy”.[[26]](#footnote-26) This “hierarchy” of love simply reiterates the Roman translation of the Greek concepts of love – storge, eros, and agape. These concepts correspond to the Roman amor, dilectio, and caritas, which Augustine uses, according to Arendt, rather “loosely.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Augustine then takes:

*amor* to designate desire and craving (that is, for love in its largest, least specific sense); *dilectio* to designate the love of self and neighbor; and *caritas* to designate the love of God and the “highest good.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In line with his Roman sources, Augustine presents here an order of love. This order, or “hierarchy,” relates to “what is above us (*supra nos),* what is beside us (*inxta nos),* and finally what is beneath us (*infra nos).”*[[29]](#footnote-29) The first indicates God, the second points to our neighbor, and the third relates to the (physical) body.

Augustine’s adoption of a Roman “hierarchy of love” leads to inconsistencies that Arendt attributes to the result of a fusion between two elements. The first element relates to a separation between two forms of love: worldly and divine, with divine love representing the “highest good.” Here, Augustine still holds to a dichotomy between the divine (the “highest good”) and the worldly, in a way that demonstrates the sway of Platonic dualism over his thought, also explaining why he saw Plato as being “closest to the Christian faith.”[[30]](#footnote-30) I will return to Arendt’s engagement with dualism later in this chapter, as I consider it representative of her use of the trope of gnosis. Here it is important to note that on the basis of such dualism, Augustine makes a case for two forms of love that are separate: desire, which Augustine terms “cupiditas,” and “caritas,” which stands for “right love.” The first (desire) represents “the root of all evil” in its being an appetite that clings to temporal and transitional objects. The second (“caritas”) “seeks eternity and the absolute future” and represents the human relation with the eternal, transcendent, and divine.[[31]](#footnote-31) The dichotomy between these two forms of love also includes the difference between the “love of God and love of neighbor” (“caritas”) and “love of the world and love of this age (speculum)” (“cupiditas”).[[32]](#footnote-32)

The second, contradicting element, however, relates to the classification of three spheres of love – physical, social, and divine – all three indicating forms of presence of divine love in the world. Here divine love is described not in terms of dualism (divine versus worldly) but rather as constantly present within all physical and social experiences in and of the world, too. A form of theology can be observed here that relates to the belief that there is divine presence in the world in three different modalities (physical, social, and mythic).

Arendt (who dissociates in such a way Augustine from a stern Manichean dualism) concludes that the tripartite scale of love (physical, social, and mythic), relating to three types of divine presence in the world, overrides the Platonic dichotomy between God and the world for two main reasons. First, because a tripartite order of love means that, for Augustine, love of God informs all modes of love in this world, desire included. Thus, “every particular act of love receives its meaning, its reason d’être, in this act of referring back to the original beginning” which means “a return to God.”[[33]](#footnote-33) There are, arguably, no traces of dualism here because desire, in its “return to God,” also includes, rather than excludes, divine love. For Arendt, this means that a return to the heart of a divine love – a main feature of Christianity – is not only already present in the entire spectrum of craving, but also endows it with a positive connotation: “strictly speaking,” writes Arendt, “he who does not love and desire at all is a nobody.”[[34]](#footnote-34)

Second, and perhaps more importantly, the dichotomy between the two terms of love (worldly and divine) does not fully apply to Augustine’s theological speculations because he articulates love of God itself as a type of “desire.” One desires the “highest good” and in this particular sense loves divine love. As Anders Nygren rightly pointed out, this amalgamation of love of God (agape) and desire (eros) is hardly justified from the point of view of a strict Pauline dichotomy.[[35]](#footnote-35) It diverges, therefore, from an original Christian message. Arendt, it seems, offers a corresponding argument in relation to Augustine: “insofar as Augustine defines love as a kind of desire, he hardly speaks as a Christian.”[[36]](#footnote-36) The dichotomous relations between God and the world, love and desire, agape and eros, go through some transformation, according to Arendt, making Augustine’s concept of love different to that of Paul.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Such a view of “the Roman” Augustine reflects mainly on the type of love for one’s “neighbor” which interests Arendt the most. This love also relates to God and in such a way “depends on something outside the human condition as we know and experience it.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Here, it is important to note that “The love of my neighbor, or generally love between human beings, derives from a source altogether different from appetites and desires” and that it stems from the same divine source that also informs these two dispositions (appetite and desire).[[39]](#footnote-39) For Augustine, this implies the human capacity to share the world with others because such a faculty harks back to the mythical moment of the past, which is the main principle of tradition.

Roman tradition, one may argue, conditions love. Human communality consequently becomes “a social organism” that is based on love because it originates in a mythical, divine moment, and it is characterized from that moment on by the “passing away and succeeding” of generations, as the Romans understood it.[[40]](#footnote-40) So unequivocal is Arendt’s argument concerning the relationships between love, tradition, and community that she accentuates the Roman origins of Augustine’s formulation (later to become a leitmotiv in her writings): “that there be a beginning, man was created.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Though trying to reconcile this Roman conception with the biblical story of Adam, Augustine nonetheless merely points to a “source of being itself” that is “altogether different” from the Christian one:

When Augustine asks about the origin of the human race, the answer, as distinct from the self-sameness of God, is that the origin lies in the common ancestor of us all […] In this second sense, man is seen as belonging to mankind and to this world by generation.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Conditioned by tradition, the origin of humanity points to the sacred testament of the mythic past that brings people together generation after generation.

It is interesting to note how Augustine’s neighborly love is deeply informed by such a notion of tradition. Such a love still represents for Augustine “an occasion to love God” and not a love of our fellow human beings for their own sake.[[43]](#footnote-43) In Chapter 3 we saw that in his reading of Kierkegaard’s *Works of love* Adorno concluded that this love of God leads to “pure inwardness,” eventually leaving the world to the “devil.” Arendt, however, concludes the opposite. Since we are dealing here with a divine dwelling in the human world in the Roman traditional sense, love of God is always entwined with its presence in the human political and social sphere. The world is consequently not left to the “devil” because it is redolent of divinity. In the development of Arendt’s idea, love of God is not presented only as diametrically opposed to the world – as “wordless” – but also as entangled with the world – as “worldly.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Gerschom Scholem, not without a controversial amount of hostility, pointed to Arendt’s lack of “love of Israel” (“Ahabat Israel” (sic.)) and this may resonate rather well with this last point.[[45]](#footnote-45) While Scholem’s accusation is usually considered to be a reproach against Arendt’s alleged lack of loyalty to the Jewish people, it could also be construed as a rather crafty comment on the Roman-Augustinian sources of her concept of love.

Arendt wishes, then, to present an area of thought that goes beyond Augustine’s explicit arguments in order to explore what “Augustine himself has merely implied.”[[46]](#footnote-46) What is implied are the Roman origins of his conceptualization of Christian love. Given the central importance of such a concept for Christian faith, Arendt’s argument may be seen as rather radical in this implication: Christianity was never exclusively Christian. Arendt may seem to echo a long, somewhat controversial, modern German scholarly penchant for separating Christian theology from its Jewish origins (F.C. Baur in the nineteenth century and Adolf von Harnack in the twentieth century are distinct examples). Nonetheless, one may also argue that in Arendt’s case such a separation calls into question Christian theology, rather than the Jewish religion, because its pagan sources are underlined. These origins are, to emphasize again, anchored in the Roman concept of tradition, fleshing out in particular the theological substance of this tradition. This theological matter relates to the three main loci of divine presence in the world (physical, social, and mythic) that Augustine absorbed from the Roman religious heritage. In tradition, therefore, Arendt is not arguing for a type of theology that starts with a transcendent, out of this world Godhead, but rather, perhaps conversely, a religious imagination that involves an immanent, in this world, divine presence; a divine attendance that conditions reality is also imagined as dwelling within the political, natural, and mythical human experiences of this world.

(b) Theologia Tripartita

The three loci of divine assurance bring us to the crucial point. Can we not say that Arendt more than “merely implies” that tradition is made of a “tripartite theology” (*theologia tripartita) –* a division between physical, social, and mythical modes of divine presence in the world? Though a “Christian Augustine” may have unequivocally rejected this tripartite view of theology, the Roman Augustine, to follow Arendt, could not avoid incorporating it into his own “hierarchy” of love.

Augustine’s explicit engagement with this particular Roman heritage may support such a claim. For Augustine, the “tripartite theology” was articulated mainly by Varro and it represented a central characteristic of Roman civil life, which he precluded. This is made clear specifically, though not exclusively, in Books 6 and 7 of *The City of God*. Varro’s distinction between mythical, social (or political), and physical theologies represents the main object of scrutiny for Augustine. Granting Varro the extraordinary position of “a man universally informed,” Augustine nevertheless castigates him for being “most hostile to the truth of religion.”[[47]](#footnote-47) Thus, he adds:

What ought we to think but that a most acute and learned man – not, however made free by the Holy Spirit – was overpowered by the custom and laws of his state, and, not being able to be silent about those things by which he was influenced, spoke of them under pretence [sic.] of commending religion?[[48]](#footnote-48)

“The custom and laws of his state” are made of the “three kinds of theology” in which “one is called mythical, the other physical, and the third civil.”[[49]](#footnote-49) The first, mythical or “fabulous” (derived from the Greek μῦθος which Augustine translates as “a fable”), is acted out by poets and “stage-players” who sing or act “such things as are derogatory to the dignity and the nature of the immortals.” [[50]](#footnote-50) The second (physical) which Augustine also calls “natural,” relates to a philosophical examination of the nature of being. It is theological to the extent that it discusses gods in natural (i.e. philosophical) terms. The third kind is a political theology “which citizens in cities, and especially the priests, ought to know and to administer.”[[51]](#footnote-51) It is here, as far as we know, that the term “political theology” first emerges.[[52]](#footnote-52) Augustine thus concludes that according to Varro “The first theology […] is especially adapted to the theater, the second to the world, the third to the city.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

Augustine unequivocally rejects all three theologies as “fables.”[[54]](#footnote-54) His rejection, however, remains for Arendt incomplete. Augustine’s reference to Varro’s idiom “God is the soul of the world” is a key point.[[55]](#footnote-55) For Varro “the soul of the world and its parts are the true gods,” interoperating in such a way with Plato’s “three grades of the soul in universal nature.”[[56]](#footnote-56) The first is defined as the most general in that it “pervades all the living parts of the body, and has not sensation, but only the power of life.” The second is articulated as being positioned somewhat higher in the hierarchy and relates to a certain level of understanding of the world that is provided by the senses.[[57]](#footnote-57) The third in the hierarchy:

is the highest, and is called mind, where intelligence has its throne. This grade of soul no mortal creatures except man are possessed of. Now this part of the soul of the world, Varro says, is called God, and in us is called Genius.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Augustine explicitly rejected Varro. But clearly, in her analysis of Augustine, Arendt portrays his hierarchy of love as corresponding to this “tripartite” order of souls.

In particular, Augustine’s theological distinction between what is above us (*supra nos),* what is beside us (*inxta nos),* and finally what is beneath us (*infra nos),* much like his association of these modalities with nature, society, and myth, dovetails with Varro’s God as “the soul” of the world.[[59]](#footnote-59) Corresponding to God, our perception of ourselves and of physical existence in the most general, natural sense, Varro’s souls seem to be rearranged in Augustine’s thought as elements of a theological speculation about the three types of divine presence in love. Souls, one could argue, are simply transformed into loves.

Arendt, then, strongly points to an area of thought in which Augustine’s explicit rejection of Varro may be seen as accompanied, tacitly, by an adaptation of his structural differentiation between three modes of divine presence. Even though one may argue that the Roman mythical form of worship, which Varro ascribes to the poets, withdraws from Augustine’s tripartite division, it is nonetheless reformulated as a type of knowledge of divine truth. There appears to be a reconceptualization of a mythical theology that stands higher up, rather than lower down, in the hierarchy, exemplifying what Arendt means when she argues that Augustine thinks rather “loosely” as a Roman.

Augustine, however, did not integrate the Roman tripartite theology willingly, openly, or even knowingly. He does not wish to endorse the Roman religious legacy. On the contrary, he argues against it. There is, for Arendt, an unresolved tension between the tacit Roman tripartite theology that Augustine unwillingly absorbed and the explicit Christian language and terminology that he overtly promotes. Moreover, in her view, Augustine remains mostly unaware of the Roman inheritance that informs his theology. Roman theology remains a hidden, to some extent suppressed, perhaps unconscious, element throughout the history of Christianity.

The notion of a “hidden tradition” may therefore apply to Arendt’s examination of Roman theology. This issue seems to deserve attention as it reflects back on what was considered above as the interweaving of Roman and Jewish sources in Arendt’s thought. On the one hand, Arendt coined the notion of “hidden tradition” in her early writings before and during the Second World War, when referring specifically to Jewish history. The “hidden” tradition of which she spoke related to the endurance of a Jewish political “spirit” within an overall apolitical (and, for Arendt, “worldless”) existence imposed on, and self-imposed by, the Jewish people following the fall of their sovereign state in the first century AD. Thus, for example, the messianic political mission of 17th-century Sabbatianism represented for Arendt a last, failed attempt to restore the political “hidden” capacity of Jews that had become buried hundreds of years earlier.[[60]](#footnote-60) In modernity, in particular, the hidden political tradition was maintained, according to Arendt, but also transformed into a plea for worldliness rather than a messianic fight for sovereignty (an argument that seems to be consistent with her growing distance from Zionism in those years). It became the main characteristic of the “conscious pariah” – a term that plays on Weber’s “social outcast” – which Arendt ascribed, in a variety of writings, to a somewhat lively assembly of figures including Heinrich Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, Franz Kafka, Charlie Chaplin, and Walter Benjamin.[[61]](#footnote-61)As Richard Bernstein suggested, Arendt endowed these figures with the status of rebel and pariah, a position which she, one may argue, not only acclaimed but also reclaimed for herself.[[62]](#footnote-62) Against the Jewish imposed, and self-imposed, worldlessness – representing for Arendt “a form of barbarism” and “apolitical” way of being – the conscious pariah acts as a “rebel” who continues to fight for a modern Jewish place in the polity, working against (external and inner) forces that prevent Jews from entering the modern political sphere.[[63]](#footnote-63) Thus: “As soon as the pariah enters the arena of politics, and translates his status into political terms, he becomes perforce a rebel.”[[64]](#footnote-64)

On the other hand, Arendt also applies a similar argument to the Roman religious tradition. As a “hidden” source of Christianity, the Roman religious “spirit” endured from antiquity and throughout the development of Christianity and on into modernity. Arguably, it is the translation of the Roman religious heritage into modern political terms – especially in order to “rebel” against these – that Arendt wishes to evoke in her discussion of tradition. The “hidden” Roman tradition thus serves as a constant element of history, applied wherever the “Roman-western” (for Arendt this also means “Western-Christian”) civilization is to be found. And it penetrated “wherever the *pax Romana* created Western civilization on Roman foundations.”[[65]](#footnote-65)

With this approach in mind, the plot that related to Jewish history is endowed with a universal meaning, shifting the discussion from the specific Jewish context to the general political theater, relevant to the understanding of western history and western modernity as a whole. Ron Feldman’s remark that Arendt’s “view of the modern Jewish condition serves as an introduction to her political theory” may be correct in relation to Arendt’s notion of “hidden” tradition.[[66]](#footnote-66) But, at the same time, the opposite could also be said, namely that her early engagement with the “Roman” Augustine in the 1920s served as an introduction to the evolution of her thought on Jewish modern politics. In both the Jewish and Roman cases, the concept of a “hidden” tradition represents a core, albeit concealed, religious element that endures throughout history and speaks to modernity. In particular, by applying such a notion to the Roman tradition, Arendt shows the extent to which she is interested mainly in the “crisis” of modernity, rather than the history of antiquity.

Hidden tradition, then, implies that Arendt is not shy of suggesting a Roman-Augustinian relevance to the thinking of modernity. Especially as a Roman thinker, Augustine resonates as a “fundamental cord which sounds in its endless modulations through the whole history of Western thought.”[[67]](#footnote-67) He is also the one who “speaks across centuries to Luther, and also to the emerging movement of German phenomenology in the void created by the crises of modernity.”[[68]](#footnote-68) The connection that Arendt would repeatedly make over the years is rather plain. Augustine is:

The great thinker who lived in a period which in some respects resembled our own more than any other in recorded history and who in any case wrote under the full impact of a catastrophic end, which perhaps resembles the end to which we have come.[[69]](#footnote-69)

In the wake of the Second World War, not only two different eons, but more particularly two “catastrophic” ends – the fall of ancient Rome, and the recent destruction, unprecedented death, and, obviously, extermination – are put together.[[70]](#footnote-70) Within this array of somewhat loose, arguably questionable, connotations between a modern crisis and the fall of Rome, Augustine’s relevance to an analysis of modernity is brought to the fore. In witnessing the demolition of Rome, Augustine composes his theology. In reflecting on the expiration of an Augustinian-Roman tradition, Arendt produces, not without some pathos, her own critique of modernity. Perhaps like the Roman Augustine, Arendt articulates for herself the imagined position of a witness, from the troubled shores of distance, to a calamity to which she feels compelled to react. As in the case of Augustine – her “old friend and benefactor” as she calls him – Arendt presents a critique of a world in crisis which includes, as the following section shows, a tacit reliance on a Roman tripartite theology.

II. A Tripartite Critique of Modernity

a. A Critique of Theology

In Arendt’s political writings from the 1960s, the relation between critique and tradition is made explicit. To be critical means:

to discover the real origins of traditional concepts in order to distill from them anew their original spirit which has so sadly evaporated from the very key words of political language – such as freedom, and justice, authority and reason, responsibility and virtue, power and glory – leaving behind empty shells with which to settle almost all accounts, regardless of their underlying phenomenal reality.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Defined as an analysis of “traditional concepts” which have “evaporated” in modernity, critique aims at uncovering “the real origins” of mainly political concepts, liberating in such a way their “original spirit” from all later, “empty” manifestations.[[72]](#footnote-72) As in Freud, Benjamin, and Adorno, we find a concept of critique which refers not only to an analysis of concepts (including their scope, content, and limits), but also to a “release” of their underlining truth or original meaning. Arguably, we are dealing here, once again, with the same notion of critique: the act of rediscovering a certain surreptitious truth, which has got lost, buried, or suppressed, or has faded away in the existing social and political conditions. Arendt uses a rich range of metaphors to express such an endeavor – from “pearl diving” (which she ascribes to Benjamin) and “treasure” seeking, to the excavating of a deeply submerged reality that lies beyond all of its mere historical appearances. In all these cases, the mission of critique seems to be about recovering, or else saving a tradition that has disappeared with the arrival of modernity.

The lost tradition is the Roman religious one. Arendt’s critique is focused, therefore, on one particular theological legacy, and this is not only because the concept of tradition is Roman. There is also the idea that the lost treasures evoked (e.g. freedom, authority, virtue, power, or glory) are those which relate to the bringing together of truth and revelation in philosophy, politics, and myth, originating in a Roman religious experience. In Arendt’s political writings, ideas that have come to lose their constitutive meaning originally endowed by the Roman tripartite theological tradition to which they belong, are emancipated, making it possible to rescue them by re-engaging these original meanings critically.

Critique and theology are thus intimately interwoven, to the extent that another, rather unique, critique of theology emerges – one that takes the Roman religion into consideration and captures the theological sources of Arendt’s concept of critique. There are two points to note. First, theology is clearly a type of content that forms the object of critique because the latter focuses on the disappearance of the Roman theological heritage from the modern theater. What Arendt’s critique puts across is a rather simple argument: modernity represents the loss of the Roman tripartite tradition that tacitly informed Augustine’s theology and reverberated, albeit as a hidden constituent, throughout the history of Christian civilization. Especially in regard to this religious tradition, all that was solid was seen to vanish into thin air. This focus on the “evaporation” of tradition in modernity was no doubt induced by Arendt’s mentors, Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, even if their emphasis was different and to some extent opposing.[[73]](#footnote-73) In Arendt’s variation, however, what becomes lost is a sacred moment of foundation and revelation, which was responsible for producing a divine testament that bound people together in the Roman religious sense.[[74]](#footnote-74) In relating to these “traditional concepts,” critique means a scrutiny of theology.

The adopted maxim “our heritage is left to us by no testament,” with which Arendt opens her book *Between Past and Future,* exemplifies this point since it refers to a type of modern existence that has severed all ties with any mythic testament from the past. Such a void denotes a crisis of modernity not only because “the whole dimension of the past” is endangered, but more profoundly since the sacred testament that binds people together in the Roman religious sense has no relevance anymore.[[75]](#footnote-75) What is lost, therefore, is the particular tradition anchored in the myth of a sacred testament.

Yet, critique not only takes Roman theology as an object of study, but also emerges out of this theological tradition. This is the second, albeit more elusive, point to note. Arendt’s conceptualization of critique can be traced back to theology because she endows this concept with the task of tradition: the harking back to and thus the revealing of a shared “origin” for society and politics. The critical undertaking itself is articulated in a way that reformulates the definition of tradition as a return to a shared foundation that brings people together. The task of criticism, which is to distill “anew”, and in this sense to save the original “spirit” of a lost Roman theological tradition, also implies that critique adopts the practice of this tradition (i.e. the returning to the “original” formative experience of the past). To wit: while in the Roman tradition divine revelation binds human beings together, in critique, it is the revealing of this “lost”, theological tradition that presents us with the original shared core. Like tradition, and arguably, by replacing it, critique offers the only viable way to preserve the past under the conditions of its final disappearance. Critique, one may argue, applies the logic of tradition to tradition, perhaps showing what it means for Arendt “to live with creative confusion.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

In Chapter 3 we saw how Adorno’s critique of theology operates a reconceptualization of theological concepts, in which critique rescues theology by overriding it. In Arendt’s critique of theology, we encounter a rather analogous argument in which critique replaces tradition in order, however, to liberate, and thus to rescue, its central elements. Critique, to follow this analogy, presents a reconceptualization of traditional concepts in the context of their ultimate disappearance. This is not to say that Arendt was directly influenced by Adorno (or vice versa), but she shows in her postwar writings a parallel susceptibility to the dependency of critique on theology, even if differently articulated, and differently thought out. Here, again, the mechanism of critique has theological origins. What critique then presents through its scrutiny (designed to rediscover a lost truth) is the traditional concept of revelation. It does so, however, by replacing the theological image of a revealed divine presence in the world, with a focus on revealing a tradition in which such a presence is central. The next section will show how such a reconceptualization of theology illuminates Arendt’s particular understanding of secularization. Here I simply wish to highlight the manner in which a theological tradition is not only an object of critique but also provides the basis for its argumentation. By redeploying traditional concepts, Arendt’s critique of theology exposes the ways in which critique is immanently dependent on the Roman religious tradition it discusses, disclosing it, to paraphrase Arendt, as “the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us.”[[77]](#footnote-77)

Such an interpretation of critique is relevant, for example, to an understanding of Arendt’s celebrated concept of “gap.” Central to her book *Between Past and Future,* the “gap between past and future” serves as a leitmotiv of the crisis of modernity. The temporal fissure denotes a crisis because human beings find themselves in a certain “here” (*Da*) in which time is “broken in the middle.”[[78]](#footnote-78) As a consequence, modernity is mainly characterized by an inability to offer a valuable connection to our common heritage and, consequently, to solidify a shared desired future. The point to note, however, is that this evocative image of a “break” marks a clear reformulation of a theological concept advocated by Augustine. Arendt makes reference to Augustine most notably in her additional notes to the English translation of her dissertation, composed in the 1960s.[[79]](#footnote-79) Arendt argues that Augustine (who follows Plotinus) articulates a gap as a “now,” representing “what measures time backwards and forwards, because the Now, strictly speaking, is not time but outside time.”[[80]](#footnote-80) In being “outside time” the Augustinian gap stands for a rupture in time; a certain space, as it were, in between the two temporalities (past and future). What stands “outside time” is the transcendent, divine, eternal-present temporality. Thus, in Augustine’s terms, a gap signifies not only a rupture in time but also, concurrently, the “present” divine revealed truth that complements and thus guarantees the temporal flow.[[81]](#footnote-81) Arendt concludes that, for Augustine, “There are three times; a present time about things past, a present time about things present, a present time about things future.”[[82]](#footnote-82) Standing “outside” time is the divine presence underlining the fabric of temporality.

In symbolizing the crisis of modernity, the theological concept of a “gap” still represents a rupture in time for Arendt. There is also a certain “now” that denotes a space of temporal arrest of happening (in the words of Walter Benjamin). Arendt leans, then, on the image of a gap as standing “outside” time, and she is concerned with tracing the religious heritage that originally provided this image with meaning and yet disappeared. Since this gap demonstrates, in her view, the crisis that characterizes modernity, her critique of modernity is openly dependent here on previous theological argumentation. But such a dependency also means that Arendt rearticulates rather than merely restates Augustine’s theology. For Augustine, a gap means both a rupture in time and, coevally, the divine guarantee of its resolution. For Arendt, however, a gap means a breach, with no divine guarantee to rely on. Especially because of the evaporation of the Roman-Augustinian tradition, the Augustinian trust in the eternal present that guarantees temporal coherency is lost. Confined to these modern circumstances, critique depends on human action alone in which “his [the human] standpoint is not the present as we usually understand it but rather a gap in time which “his” constant fighting, “his” making stand against past and future, keeps in existence.”[[83]](#footnote-83)

There is, no doubt, a new basis in human action, rather than in divine assurance, but Arendt’s turn away from God toward the human being does not mean the exorcising of a theological imagination, but rather its rearticulating. It is evident that Arendt’s critique of theology distances itself from Augustine’s trust in a divine presence, guaranteeing the temporal continuum. Such a distancing from theology, however, rearticulates and in this sense maintains, the theological vocabulary in which a divine guarantee is central and on which critique is based. The shift from the divine domain to the human condition marks a reconceptualization of traditional concepts and those are the theological mechanisms that empower critique’s distancing from theology. In such a convoluted way, the critique of a modern world in crisis plays the part of theology by replacing, and offering, arguably, a newfangled articulation of a religious heritage in the aftermath of its disappearance.

Arendt’s examination of Walter Benjamin’s philosophy brings to mind another consideration. Like Theodor Adorno and Gerschom Scholem, Arendt presents, particularly in her *Men in Dark Times,* a version of Benjamin’s early enthusiasm for theology which she distinctively associates with his “traditionalism.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Here especially Arendt wishes to uncover the “theological background” of Benjamin’s early critique of modernity and in particular the manner in which his social criticism saves a theological tradition by replacing it.[[85]](#footnote-85) In this context, “traditionalism” means that for Benjamin, critique aims at analyzing “the break in tradition which took place at the beginning of this century” with the aim, however, to rescue the theological tradition under the conditions of its final withdrawal.[[86]](#footnote-86)

This was especially evident in Benjamin’s work with quotation, representing for Arendt his main method of critical investigation. Signifying “a new way of dealing with the past,” quotations bring traditional theological concepts to the fore in two main ways. First, they reiterate theological vocabulary by citing it. Second, and more importantly, they reveal the deep theological significance of texts that was rendered unavailable to us once the tradition that carried this significance had dissolved.[[87]](#footnote-87) Thus, in quotations we encounter not “an unveiling which destroys the secret, but the revelation which does it justice.”[[88]](#footnote-88) The “secret” revealed is an eternal primal-phenomenon (*Urphänomene*)which Benjamin articulates theologically and associates with the eternal and transcendent God.[[89]](#footnote-89) For this reason, Arendt concludes that, for Benjamin, “to quote is to name.” Therefore:

“Naming through quoting became for him the only possible and appropriate way of dealing with the past without the aid of tradition.” [[90]](#footnote-90)

Since, for Benjamin, “to name” means to take part in the “word of God” (as he articulated it in his early theory of language), quotations recover a “sign of origin,” the “name,” or God.[[91]](#footnote-91) “As to their weight in Benjamin’s writing,” Arendt then argues, “quotations are comparable only to the very dissimilar biblical citations which so often replace the immanent consistency of argumentation in medieval treatises.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

As the traditional transmission of the sacred substance is not available anymore, quotations remain for Benjamin the only possible way to reach out to the original divine content. Critique, to stay with Arendt’s argument, replaces tradition because the “modern function of quotation” simply replaces “the transmissibility of the past” (and this mainly includes the communication of the divine “secret”) by “its citability.”[[93]](#footnote-93) In “citability” we therefore find a critique that adopts the role of theology (and thus saves it) by replacing it.

Arguably, the type of critique of theology that Arendt ascribes to Benjamin seems to resonate rather well with the intimate connection of critique to theology in Arendt’s political writings. In both cases, we are dealing with a critique that replaces tradition. In substituting tradition, nonetheless, critique does not aim at refuting it. On the contrary, its objective is to reveal the lost original (mythic) truth that tradition can no longer transmit, because of its disappearance. Critique, then, evokes the religious tradition that it dismisses, a point that is as relevant to Arendt’s theory as much as it is relevant to her discussion of Benjamin.

The same could be applied to the similarity between Arendt and Adorno, which was evoked briefly above. As in Adorno’s postwar writings, and in parallel to them, Arendt’s political writings put across a critique of theology that relates to a theological tradition against the impossibility of doing so. In both cases, the mechanism that powers critique’s distantiation from theology is of theological origin. If anything, the postwar context left both scholars with an acute need to re-engage, even if differently, with the so-called “critical theological predicament,” relating to the analysis as much as the reconstruction of the relation of critique to theology – even if they present a “fidelity” to different, and to some extent contesting, theological traditions.

b. Philosophy, Myth and Politics

I would like, at this point, to look more closely, however briefly, at how Arendt’s critique of theology presents three main loci of modern “crisis” – philosophy, myth, and politics. This is of particular importance to a further understanding of her reconceptualization of traditional concepts. Roman tripartite theology was based on these three concepts of divine presence in the world, and Arendt seems to bring this type of thinking to bear on what could be seen as her own tripartite critique of modernity.

Especially for the Romans, philosophy stood for a natural theology. The quest to understand the essence of nature, or else the truth of being, was the objective of philosophical inquiry, which assumed “that truth is what reveals itself, that truth *is* revelation.”[[94]](#footnote-94) Revelation implies a phenomenological trust “that things appear as they really are.”[[95]](#footnote-95) For the Romans, philosophy associates this fundament of nature with an idea of God, and the revelation of truth with the disclosure of the divine. However, for Arendt “the meanings of this revelation” are not the same in philosophy and in Christian theology. There is, for example, a difference between the Greek concept of truth, “Aletheia” (ἀλήθεια) which the Romans adopted, and the eschatological expectations that characterize divine revelation in Christianity. The former (philosophy, or natural theology) relates to a discovery of the essence of the world as the essence of the gods, and the latter (Christianity) to a disclosure of the divine ruler of the world. Nonetheless, both types of truths concern a divine (immanent or transcendent) domain and are in this sense theological. As such, they converge in the Roman-Augustinian tradition and continued to underline all philosophical endeavors for centuries.[[96]](#footnote-96)

In modernity, however, this type of theology came to lose its sway. According to Arendt, Marx in particular “buried” the “revealed truth” that was central to the philosophical tradition.[[97]](#footnote-97) His dictum that “labor and not God created man” implied that Plato’s ideas had “lost their autonomous power to illuminate the world and the universe.”[[98]](#footnote-98) When Marx declared that human existence, which he called “society,” conditions truth through the emergence of “socialized men” he broke ties with this philosophical legacy, which led to the evaporation of natural theology.[[99]](#footnote-99) Arendt’s critique, then, aims at revealing the philosophical tradition that was lost in the modern age. One may speak here of an attempt to redeploy theological concepts because to re-engage with tradition is not to restore the same trust in a revealed truth that forms the content of that tradition. Rather, the intention is to renew the philosophical tradition in which this theological concept of revelation is central.

Arendt makes a rather similar argument in relation to a mythical theology, which represents a second theological aspect of the lost Roman tradition. Framed by Augustine as a theology of things divine, a Roman mythical theology stood higher up (i.e. “what is above us”), rather than lower down, in his hierarchy of love, informing the idea of transcendent love. We have seen above how divine love, perhaps the most central aspect of the Christian faith, stems from mythic Roman origins. This is also true for Arendt of the Christian “fear of hell,” relating to an avenging (not loving) God. Here, Christianity can be seen to have adopted a Roman theological take on Plato’s myth of the immortality of the soul, albeit by introducing an element of violence that “diluted” the original Roman mythological theology.[[100]](#footnote-100) Thus, while the Romans understood immortality as “the standard according to which cities may be founded and rules of behavior laid down for the multitude,” Christianity used it to convey the image of eternal punishment, inflicted on the unbeliever by an avenging, transcendent God, and this became a new standard “for rules of behavior” in society.[[101]](#footnote-101)

Modernity broke all ties with such a myth, including a retreat from its Roman sources.[[102]](#footnote-102) This constitutes, therefore, the second aspect of the crisis of modernity. In particular, the myth of “future states,” central to the Christian take on Roman theological myths, disintegrates as a central adhesive force of society. With no heritage concerning “rules of behavior,” social “standards,” and God-given sanctions to lean on, a theology of things divine disappeared from the modern theater altogether. What seems to me to be important here is the manner in which Arendt’s critique of modernity (i.e. the modern loss of traditional concepts) does not express any hope to return to such myths. Rather, it aims at rediscovering the type of theology in which these myths were central, as a source for bringing people together. As in the case of her examination of natural theology, Arendt offers a new basis for society not by returning to the theological content of tradition, but rather by redeploying its logic.

Notwithstanding the importance of these two aspects of modern “crisis,” the withdrawal of Roman political theology (the third locus of a lost tradition) represents a key point of discussion. The centrality of politics in Arendt’s writings from the 1960s is well documented. She strongly identifies the world in which human beings live with the “political world,” while conversely linking “wordlessness” with the state of being “apolitical.”[[103]](#footnote-103) The concept of the “political” indicates somewhat loosely a “togetherness of men in speech and in action” as she repeatedly put it.[[104]](#footnote-104) In this particular sense, the political world that we share is equivalent to the world in which we live. All our thoughts, behaviors, actions, and interactions are conditioned by political “togetherness” and for Arendt this also includes human thinking – perhaps the most personal, intimate, and individualistic feature of the western tradition (“inherent in the philosophical experience” from Athens to modernity) – which she compartmentalizes within the arena of human politics.[[105]](#footnote-105)

However, the importance of theology to this conception of politics is fundamental. Here again we may speak of a reconceptualization of theological concepts because Arendt’s definition of the political sphere of action simply harks back to Roman political theology in which the “immediate revealed presence of the gods” is central.[[106]](#footnote-106) These are the Romans who Arendt already defines in *The Human Condition* as the “most political” people, for whom living signified being among human beings (*inter homines* *esse*).[[107]](#footnote-107) Furthermore, it was the Roman religious (and for Arendt republican) experience of divine revelation that made the “the world” in which we live and the “political world” that joins people together interchangeable.

In such a way, the concept of the political is redolent of theology, an argument that may also be extended to include Arendt’s reflection on Heidegger’s notion of *Miteinandersein.* As Immanuel Levinas noted, the preposition “*mit*” (with) describes the social relation of being “side by side, around something, around a common term and more precisely, for Heidegger, around truth.”[[108]](#footnote-108) When she points out that the notion of “with” reverberates with its original Roman-Augustinian sources, however, Arendt seems to suggest that this terminology has Roman origins. Particularly in the case of Augustine’s theology, the Roman association between truth and revelation entails the capacity to secure human communality with the gods’ willing approval.

We saw at the beginning of this chapter how the political concepts of foundation and authority are integrated into Arendt’s definition of tradition, relating explicitly to a “sacred founding” moment in the past, and to its augmentation by virtue of the “authority” of the ancestors who have witnessed it. These two concepts, therefore, represent key elements of tradition. But they also stand for vital features of Arendt’s modern political theory. Thus, as a Roman political theological concept, foundation denotes “the initial getting together” of humans and implies “an authentic and undisputable experience common to all” in the Roman religious sense.[[109]](#footnote-109) Arendt somewhat echoes Jaspers’ concept of an “origin” as a unique beginning of things when she points to a “unique event” that cannot be repeated in history; one that goes back to a mythical past (i.e. the foundation of the city), as the source of “its own” legitimacy, conditioning all later historical events.[[110]](#footnote-110) The “absolute new beginning” of foundation thus has divine origins.[[111]](#footnote-111) “The binding power of the foundation itself” argues Arendt, “was religious, for the city also offered the gods of the people a permanent home.”[[112]](#footnote-112) These were the gods who “gave Romulus the authority to found the city,” and so:

all authority derives from this foundation, binding every act back to the sacred beginning of Roman history, adding, as it were, to every single moment the whole weight of the past.[[113]](#footnote-113)

Stemming from foundation, authority denotes a divine approval “of decisions made by human beings” and represents in such a way “the source of its nature” (*die Herkunft seines Wesens*), as Heidegger put it. For Arendt, this source refers to “a god who, as long as he dwells among men, as long as he inspires their deeds, saves everything.”[[114]](#footnote-114) Like foundation, then, authority is a Roman political concept since “neither the Greek language nor the varied political experiences of Greek history shows any knowledge of authority and the kind of rule it implies.”[[115]](#footnote-115) This political concept (denoting an hierarchical “pyramid” of power, running “top to bottom” and making it “the least egalitarian of all forms”) is dependent on theology because of the particular Roman take on the earlier Greek experience, and thus:

That the source of their authority, which legitimates the exercise of power, must be beyond the sphere of power and, like the law of nature or the commands of God, must not be man-made goes back to this applicability of the ideas in Plato’s political philosophy.[[116]](#footnote-116)

When Arendt speaks of “the source of authority” that is “always a force external and superior to its own power” she means an “external force which transcends the political realm” and from which “the authorities derive their ‘authority’.”[[117]](#footnote-117) Transcendence, however, implies the godly sphere in the Roman sense; a type of transcendence that dwells in the world, among people, rather than one that is external to it.[[118]](#footnote-118) Authority therefore represents divine approval as interpreted through the Romans’ immanent theology:

The binding force of this authority is closely connected with the religiously binding force of the *auspices,* which, unlike the Greek oracle, does not hint at the objective course of future events but reveals merely divine approval or disapproval of decisions made by men.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Foundation and authority do not fall back on the notion of an unknown god. They are based, nonetheless, on divine revelation as a sign of patronage and guidance from a familiar divinity, making truth, revelation, and authority interchangeable.[[120]](#footnote-120)

Reworking these theological categories for modern needs, in Arendt’s view, means both highlighting their disappearance from the modern theater and pointing to their possible areas of recovery. The disappearance of authority, in particular, underlines the modern condition in which “practically as well as theoretically, we are no longer in a position to know what authority really *is*.”[[121]](#footnote-121) Here Arendt arguably takes her thesis of modern crisis to its extreme: Roman political theological concepts cannot be substituted, or replaced, by later political categories, nor can they be reduced to earlier Greek ones. Representing the theological origins of politics, these concepts have “vanished” completely from the modern world.[[122]](#footnote-122)

At the same time, however, Arendt’s critique (i.e. the distilling of traditional concepts) does not merely underline the political sphere lost to modernity. It also indicates its possible recovery. Consider, for example, her reliance on the Roman concept of foundation. Concluding her *Burden of our Time* (later to become *The Origins* *of Totalitarianism*) with the somewhat dramatic call to create “a new foundation for human community” Arendt seems to make the association between the concept of foundation and a modern recovery of “the political” rather clear.[[123]](#footnote-123) In particular, she discusses freedom – “the most important principle of all political life” – in terms of the capacity to “embark” on something altogether new in the Roman sense.[[124]](#footnote-124) Being free does not relate to freedom of choice, or to the absence of external restrictions. For Arendt, it means an “absolute new beginning” in the sense of a new foundation, and this is especially relevant for her when reflecting on the postwar political context.[[125]](#footnote-125)

Arguably, this is also true of “natality” (or birth), one of the more celebrated concepts that Arendt introduced to political thought.[[126]](#footnote-126) In “natality” Arendt, no doubt, turns against the Heideggerian idea that it is “death” that “works with us in the world” and “humanizes” us.[[127]](#footnote-127) She does so, however, by appealing to the Roman idea of foundation, since for Arendt “natality,” like freedom, signifies the political capability to start something altogether new. In such a way, Arendt links Roman theology to the religious maxim “a child is born,” underlining that the human capacity to deliver to the world something completely new “always appears in the guise of a miracle.”[[128]](#footnote-128) In all these cases (foundation, freedom, and natality) there is a reworking of political theological vocabulary since Arendt bases her modern political theory on traditional Roman concepts, demonstrating the extent to which she reformulates traditional concepts, declared lost, with regard to contemporary needs.

Furthermore, while the association of foundation, freedom, and natality demonstrates the dependency of Arendt’s political theory on Roman theology, her critique of violence points to one of its vital implications. Arendt presents violence (mainly, though not exclusively, in her book *On Violence*) as an instrumental coercion, the use of an external force as a means to an end, distinguishable from the use of power; violence, she says, should be excluded from the modern political sphere.[[129]](#footnote-129) Unlike Benjamin’s critique of violence, Arendt builds her analysis on Roman political categories in order to present an area of power and authority that is dissociated from the deployment of violent force. Indeed, violence and authority are at odds and authority “precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed.”[[130]](#footnote-130) The power of authority, originally embodied by the Senate in the Roman experience, also differs from an open process of argumentation and persuasion.[[131]](#footnote-131) More importantly, however, it renders violence unnecessary. In the modern context it resembles, one may argue, a constitutional principle that is bound by the law and that needs “neither the form of command nor external coercion to make itself heard.”[[132]](#footnote-132) In addition, it is grounded in divine, loving approval that is translated into advice or recommendations that simply cannot be ignored. Arendt, then, incorporates this critique of violence into her modern understanding of politics. To exclude violence from the modern political sphere is, therefore, to respect Roman theological argumentation. As in the case of foundation, however, this does not mean that critique aims to reinstate a dependency on divine approval, which is no longer available. Rather, in the modern context, criticism reveals a Roman religious tradition, in which divine approval is central, thus reconceptualizing the concept of revelation within the framework of its final disappearance.

c. Critical and Political Theology

There seems to be wide agreement among scholars that Arendt formulates her political theory in opposition to Carl Schmitt’s political theology.[[133]](#footnote-133) Anna Jurkevics’ recent study, for example, shows how Arendt’s braiding of the political sphere with the “intimate connection or relationship” between human beings (the so-called “togetherness of men”) starkly contrasted not only with Schmitt’s early grounding of politics in the friend-foe dichotomy but also with his later notion of an earth-bound nomos (central to his “Theory of the Partisan.”).[[134]](#footnote-134) This opposition seems to be made clear through Arendt’s portrayal of a political arena that is not defined by the “decision” of the sovereign but rather by the agreement – “in speech and in action” – of the people. Nonetheless, this departure from Schmitt does not mean that the political arena as a shared (republican) public interest is not informed by theology. This point seems to be significant in the light of contemporary scholarly efforts to dismiss the importance of the “political theological predicament” for Arendt’s political theory.[[135]](#footnote-135) For Arendt, whose political theory, as we have seen, can be traced back to its Roman sources, political categories are based on previous theological ones. Nonetheless, it is true that Arendt suggests a different type of theological underpinning for politics than Schmitt. For Schmitt, the divine source of authority is external to the political arena and endows the unwavering “decision” of the sovereign with its legitimacy. For Arendt, it dwells within such an arena, and is revealed only by the “togetherness” of human beings in discussion.[[136]](#footnote-136) In tradition, divine approval is revealed as advice rather than as a dictate from above. Even the concept of authority, which requires a “transcendent source” for its legitimation, points to divine revelation in a Roman sense. If Schmitt’s concept of the political is dependent on a transcendent, commanding God, Arendt’s comparable concept is built on an alternative theological imaginary centered on the intimacy of divine visitation in the world.

One may argue, then, that Arendt’s retort to Schmitt does not dismiss but rather revises political theology. One of the points that were made in the previous chapter in relation to Adorno was that his clear response to Schmitt’s theory did not lose sight of the theological origins of our political categories. Arendt, it appears, makes a similar effort. In Arendt’s critique of politics there is still a promise relating to a moment of creation and salvation. This, however, harks back to the Roman religious imagination. This is not to deny that Arendt displays opposition to the theology of “absolute truth” and divine “transcendence” (at least in its Schmittian variation), as Peter Gordon, for example, argues.[[137]](#footnote-137) Such opposition, nonetheless, does not imply that she distances herself from the “theological political predicament.” On the contrary, it demonstrates her unique contribution to it.

To exemplify this point, we may consider how modern revolutions are intertwined with the state of emergency in Arendt’s thinking. Central to Schmitt’s theory, the ability to declare a state of emergency defines the sovereign. The “exception,” which is reserved for emergencies, “is analogous to the miracle in theology” and it is the capacity to perform such a miracle that classifies sovereignty.[[138]](#footnote-138) Arendt then integrates this close association between theology and political emergency into her discussion of modern revolutions. Thus, in focusing mainly on the French and (for her) American revolutions, Arendt argues that revolutions embody: “the only salvation which this Roman-Western tradition has provided for emergencies.”[[139]](#footnote-139)

With their grounding in Roman political theology, revolutions are modern phenomena that epitomize not a “break with tradition” but rather traditionalism in disguise.[[140]](#footnote-140) They are “events in which the actions of men are still inspired by and derive their greatest strength from the origins of this tradition.”[[141]](#footnote-141) The American constitution, for example, stands for “a sacred document” and a “constant remembrance of one sacred act, and that is the act of foundation.”[[142]](#footnote-142) It echoes the search for a God-given authority which means “to be tied back, obligated to the enormous, almost superhuman and hence always legendary effort to lay the foundations, to build the cornerstone, to found for eternity.”[[143]](#footnote-143) This reliance on Roman political theology, where founding a community “for eternity” is central, is also true of Machiavelli, whom Arendt (like Leo Strauss) regards “the spiritual father of revolution,” and “the sworn enemy” of religious considerations in political affairs.[[144]](#footnote-144) In wishing to “repeat the Roman experience through the foundation of a unified Italy,” the nemesis of religion nevertheless made a “passionate effort to revive the spirit and the institutions of Roman antiquity.”[[145]](#footnote-145) On this basis, Machiavelli articulates authority in terms of “a God-given authority.”[[146]](#footnote-146)

This means, however, that unlike the terms of Schmitt’s definition, the “miracle” of revolutions does not relate to the absolute power to proclaim the exception, but rather to the freedom from such absolute power, inherent in the new beginning and reserved for the political sphere that brings people together. It is, then, for this reason that “the greatest event in every revolution is the act of foundation.”[[147]](#footnote-147) Such opposition to Schmitt, one may then conclude, does not dismiss the theological sources of political phenomena; the opposition is to his particular version of such a connection.

Thus, it is true, as Margaret Canovan has argued, that Arendt’s notion of revolution depicted a “classical republican tradition” with which she could identify.[[148]](#footnote-148) Arendt, however, is especially attentive to the theological roots of this tradition and thus to the presence of theology in the recovery of a modern political experience. In the same vein, Samuel Moyn’s suggestion that Arendt saw in the American revolution an experiment aimed at discovering a “secular proxy for religion” may also be correct, to the extent that the Roman theological grounds for such a “secular” experiment are taken into consideration (the next section of this chapter discusses Arendt’s concept of the secular more closely).[[149]](#footnote-149)

To think of Arendt’s political theology, it seems, is also to acknowledge the particular characteristics of her own “traditionalism.” Modern revolutions serve as an example of Arendt’s debt to tradition because she presents them as conservative and restorative, rather than progressive and political phenomena. The word “revolution,” argues Arendt, originally meant “restoration,” and in this sense, the “new spirit” of a revolution is intended to imply the recovery of “old rights and liberties.” From its naissance, then, a revolution aspires to recreate a mythic past and hold onto what Gershom Scholem called “hope that mainly turns backwards,” embodying “freedom by God’s blessing restored.”[[150]](#footnote-150)

Nonetheless, it is also important to point out that the term “radical conservative,” which is associated with Arendt, may be somewhat misleading in this context.[[151]](#footnote-151) Arendt sees all modern revolutions as restorative because they are traditional (republican, egalitarian, or denoting a free “togetherness” of human beings) and not because they support conservative values (in particular those referring to social stability, political order, power, or any belief in an organic society). Arguably, what is illuminated here is a difference between conservativism (including its neo-conservative formulation) and this type of traditionalism. The first stresses a need to ardently hold onto a specific set of values, and social and political institutions, which are considered threatened. The second points, quite separately, to an immanent form of critique that conceptualizes theological concepts. More concretely, the form of traditionalism that may be rightly associated with Arendt is situated within an area of modern criticism, in which the loss of a tripartite theology remains incomplete.

III. “Novus ordo seclorum”

a. The Dialectics of Secularization

Arendt’s critique of theology both reconceptualizes and secularizes theology. Secularization appears in Arendt’s interpretation, it seems, in two main ways. First, it refers to the decline of a Christianity that characterizes modernity. “The decline of Christian civilization” Arendt writes to Eric Voegelin, “is, as it were, the framework within which the whole of modern history is played out, and that means for me, speaking as one who is not a Christian, both good and evil.”[[152]](#footnote-152) The weakness of religion also includes the disappearance of the “hidden” Roman tradition that Christianity absorbed. But secularization also refers, somewhat antithetically, to the critical distilling, and in this particular sense the rescuing, of the “hidden” Roman tradition that disappeared from the modern theater. We have seen above the diverse ways in which such a mechanism is central to Arendt’s conceptualization of critique, particularly her critique of modernity. Alongside the “decline” of theology, secularization also means, conversely, a reconceptualization of traditional theological concepts.

The point that seems to me worth noting is that the combination of these two rather opposing elements – the decline of Christianity and a re-engagement with Roman theology – constitutes for Arendt the characteristics of a “novus ordo seclorum,” which she translates as “a new order of the world” (*Die neu Ordnung der Welt*).[[153]](#footnote-153) This new order is secular because it is confined to the human world. The focus on “this world,” however, is still redolent of theology because it is dependent on a particular theological tradition central to which is the presence of God within the world. Because of such a reliance on theology, one may argue, secularization, to paraphrase Bruno Latour, has never been fully secular.[[154]](#footnote-154) It does not exorcise the shadows of theology but outlines them in a new way.

The concomitant withdrawal and resumption of theology may be termed “dialectic of secularization.”[[155]](#footnote-155) Evoked, for example, by Christoph Schmidt, such a “dialectic” points to the admixture of rejection and avowal of theology, in which the former is conditioned by the latter. The idea seems to be fitting here, to the extent that for Arendt, as well, even though “traditional religious beliefs” cannot be simply accepted anymore, they are, for this very reason, never fully excluded.[[156]](#footnote-156)

Modern revolutions, discussed above, exemplify rather well the centrality of this “dialectic” in Arendt’s critique. We are returning here to the meaning of revolutions as a “secular proxy for religion.” Above I argued that this definition of revolution should take into consideration the Roman theological sources of the “revolutionary energy of the new.” [[157]](#footnote-157) On the one hand, revolutions present a secular turn away from divine salvation toward human action, and on the other hand they anchor this movement in a Roman religious basis. This means that the notion of a “new” and secular beginning that distances itself from theology is at the same time grounded in a theological imagination. A “secular” political phenomenon dismisses one type of theology, while being rooted, nonetheless, in another.

It is in this spirit that Arendt discusses the failure of revolutions to recover a lost theological heritage.[[158]](#footnote-158) She locates the problem not in the revolutionary tendency to connect politics and theology, but rather in the erroneous correlation between a “new” secular beginning (in the Roman religious sense) and the approval of an “immortal legislator” (issued from Christianity) who can validate “man-made law.”[[159]](#footnote-159) Arendt’s argument seems to focus on the intertwining of two different theological orientations rather than on the dismissal of theological impulses for revolution. Machiavelli’s authority, for example:

had to be designed in such a way that it would fit and step into the shoes of the old absolute that derived from a God-given authority, thus superseding an earthly order whose ultimate sanction had been the commands of an omnipotent God and whose final source of legitimacy had been the notion of an incarnation of God on earth.[[160]](#footnote-160)

The father of modern revolutions mistakenly associated the Roman religious grounds of authority with the Christian theological imagination (relating to an “omnipotent God”) he set out to dismiss. The same difficulty is visible in the French and American revolutions which had “to plead for some religious sanction” coming from the divine absolute.[[161]](#footnote-161)

The flaw in Arendt’s account is different. What she accentuates is a rather erroneous association between two theological traditions. Arendt’s approach to secularization does not communicate a critique of its reliance on theological argumentation. She points out instead the ways in which it is incapable of being critical, which means she seeks to emancipate original theological Roman sources from their later Christian distortions.

Parallels with Adorno’s concept of the secular can be observed here because for him, as well, the “secularization” of theology that critique represents entails a translation of former theological concepts. Especially in the postwar context, the problem that Adorno wishes to address is the possibility of recovering metaphysical inquiry under the conditions of its final disappearance. What I termed “holding onto an unholdable object” characterized his secular endeavor. Can we not argue that such a line of argumentation may be applied to Arendt’s engagement with tradition, as well? In Arendt’s case, “secularization” also encompasses the recapturing of a theological tradition that cannot be revived; thus, especially in the postwar context, Arendt’s critique demonstrates the same problem of holding onto the unholdable object of tradition.

This last point, however, may also demonstrate the main contrast between Arendt’s theological considerations and the type of mysticism that dominated Benjamin and Adorno’s thinking. Central to both thinkers is a radical, out of this world, transcendent Being that cannot be grasped. For example, in Benjamin’s secularization of mystical allegories we find a radical transcendent God that could only be represented by a “nihil”. Benjamin’s concept of “awakening” (*erwachen*) redeploys a mystical notion of “birth,” denoting a radical or absolute transcendence (described in terms of a “naked truth” or “heart of God”) that is located beyond any possible image or articulation.[[162]](#footnote-162) A somewhat similar theological rationale could be detected in Adorno’s association between education, critique, and negativity in which the only feasible way to hold onto an “absolute” divine object is to not hold onto it – forbidding that thought “in order not to betray that thought” as Adorno puts it.

In Arendt’s critique of theology, we find the somewhat opposite notion of divine presence in this world. Here, the mystical “birth” is replaced by the concept of “natality” anchored in a “holy” beginning in the Roman sense: “natality” relates to the revealed presence of divine loving approval in the world.[[163]](#footnote-163) This is not to argue that Arendt dismisses the mystical moment of revelation, central to Benjamin and Adorno’s understanding of society and politics. She secures such a moment, however, in the contingent presence of divine assurance in the world and not in its absolute nonappearance.

This secular reworking of Roman theology may explain why Arendt, in a reference to Kafka’s story “He” (Er), accentuates the incapability of human beings to elevate themselves to the degree of an observer or a judge outside of, and beyond, the worldly reality in which they exist.[[164]](#footnote-164) Showing a strong similarity to Freud’s engagement with the law (though not with the same intentions in mind), there is for Arendt no reference to any pure or radical transcendent arena, which means that there is no “outside” of the world that endows the world with a meaning. In the same vein, Arendt portrays philosophical luminaries like Kant and Lessing as committed to the human reality of this world, and to the constant “self-formation” (*Bildung*) of the human being by the human’s own hands.[[165]](#footnote-165) For them, “illuminating” the world meant a “commitment” to a “real relationship to the world.”[[166]](#footnote-166)

But if Arendt’s critique demonstrates such a secular, dialectic reliance on Roman theology, what could be said about her view of the prevailing thesis in the 1950s and 1960s that “the modern historical consciousness has a Christian religious origin and came into being through a secularization of originally theological categories”?[[167]](#footnote-167) Advocated most notably by Karl Loewith, this thesis related to modernity as a “secularization of the Christian eschaton.” This argument dominated Loewith’s book “Meaning in History,” published in 1949.[[168]](#footnote-168) Presenting a genealogical description (starting with modern categories and tracing back their origins to earlier theological ideas), the book mainly accentuates the roots of modernity in the “theory of the three ages” of the 12th-century Italian monk, Joachim of Fiora, and its adaptation of earlier Christian and biblical conceptions of time and deliverance. All our modern categories of history, politics, and progress (presented, for example, in Hegel’s idea of the advent of reason) represent, accordingly, later expansions of Christian notions of God’s kingdom, redemption, and the end of time. We are dealing here, then, with what could be termed ‘acute Christianization’ of modernity – an argument in which a modern secular world corresponds to a secularized Christian civilization. Christianity in this view provides the standard model for understanding modern culture, society, and politics.

Arendt hardly refutes Loewith’s argument regarding secularization as translation of theological categories. Nonetheless, Roman theology, and not Christianity, is central to her understanding of these categories, showing the extent to which she could be labeled a “post-Christian” thinker.[[169]](#footnote-169) As in the case of her revising (rather than dismissing) political theology, she presents a unique, perhaps consciously rebellious, way into a prevalent intellectual approach. Secularization still signifies, for her, a transformation of Christian symbolism, but only, and more importantly, as a vehicle for carrying a Roman religious experience into modernity. Here, Arendt’s critique of modernity points to the dialectic of loss and revival of those aspects of the Roman religion that provided the Christian theological concepts of redemption, divinity, love, and temporality with a basis. Secularized does not mean a reworking of a Christian advent of deliverance, but rather a redeploying of the Roman tripartite theology upon which Christianity – and especially Christian tripartite eschatological divisions –is founded. There seems to be here an enclosed move away from the ‘Christianization’ of the modern world that Loewith suggested.

b. The Problem of Evil

I wish to conclude this discussion of Arendt’s critique of theology with a note on her concept of evil, and specifically its relation to her secularization of theology. Evil is important to the discussion because it is central to Arendt’s postwar thought. In 1945, in being profoundly shaken, no doubt, by the horrors of Nazism, Arendt declared that “the problem of evil will be the fundamental question of postwar intellectual life in Europe.”[[170]](#footnote-170) As such a vital issue, this “problem” underlined much of Arendt’s investigation over the next decades – from her examination of totalitarianism, Nazism, and anti-Semitism in the 1950s, to her political writings in the 1960s. Yet over the course of these two decades, Arendt’s treatment of evil was also dominated by a clear shift from a definition of evil as “radical” or “absolute” (exemplified most notably in her book on totalitarianism) to Arendt’s later claim that evil is “banal” (culminating in her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*). Indeed, “banality of evil” is probably the most well-known expression associated with Arendt, representing for many “a kind of icon in the discourse surrounding Auschwitz and related crimes.”[[171]](#footnote-171) The point that seems to me to deserve attention, however, is that this shift also represented for Arendt a clear answer to the question “how can we approach the problem of evil in an entirely secular setting?”[[172]](#footnote-172) A banalization of evil marks, it seems, not only a response to secularization but also a secular approach to “the problem of evil,” and it is this secular approach that I wish to associate with her reliance on theology.

We may start by noting how Arendt’s early definition of evil involves theological considerations, mainly developed from Kant’s terminology of “radical evil.” Kant presents a type of evil that serves as a grounds, and in this sense a transcendental condition, for any deviation (*Abweichung*) from the moral law.[[173]](#footnote-173) For Kant, “radical” evil denotes such a condition because it cannot be reduced to or explained by the transgressive acts or moral deviations that are dependent on it. In her *Burden of our Times* Arendt rather loosely expands on such an understanding of evil, a point that Sylia Benhabib articulated rather well.[[174]](#footnote-174) She speaks of such a “ground” in terms of an “unpunishable, unforgivable, absolute evil which could no longer be understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice.”[[175]](#footnote-175) Embodying an absolute malevolence that lies beyond punishment, which is unforgiven, and which cannot be grasped by human reason, “absolute evil” is also “radical” in that it transcends not only human “evil motives” but also human explanation, or else the possibility to explain such evil from a human standpoint. Absolute evil “transcends the realm of human affairs and the potentialities of human power,” both of which it destroys whenever it appears.[[176]](#footnote-176) Absolute evil, to follow Arendt, resembles potency – an active power – that transcends this worldliness.

Kant’s transcendental condition is in such a way transformed by Arendt into a transcendent force in action. In so doing, Arendt seems to put across a theodicy. Coined by Leibniz, theodicy refers to any type of analysis of and response to the problem of evil (including not only a response to the query “Why does evil exist?” but also an answer to the question “What is evil?”).[[177]](#footnote-177) It involves for Leibniz theological considerations because it means resolving the embedded tension between the coinciding existence of evil and that of a benevolent God. These considerations constitute an important aspect of religious thought, which needs to reconcile the problem of evil in view of the coexistence of two contradicting elements (evil and good). The question “If God is good, how can evil exist?” is therefore central to any theodicy.

Arendt’s theodicy responds to the problem of evil by pitting against each other a fully out of this world transcendent evil and a concrete worldliness. There is, therefore, a stark dualism at work between an absolute evil force and the world in which humans live, not only because the two are completely separate but also since the former transcends the latter. In this manner, the sway of the evil force becomes in Arendt’s analysis immensurable in a way that resembles the power of a demiurge, the traditional gnostic counterpart of the loving benevolent God.

The reference to gnosis seems to be fitting because of its role in the intellectual historical and political imagination of many of Arendt’s colleagues in the postwar era, briefly presented in the previous chapter. In engaging with unexplainable evil power (beyond anything human) Arendt, it seems, makes a unique contribution to the debates around gnosis and its modern implications. The association between dualism and Gnosticism offers an answer to the question of evil as well as insights into its modern political implications. Modernity is not an era of “overcoming” Gnosticism as Blumenberg, for example, argued. At the same time, unlike Voegelin, Arendt does not argue that all modern political phenomena are gnostic. In fact, in totalitarianism she considers political categories to be based on a radical, “demonic” evil, explaining in such a way their vicious practices.[[178]](#footnote-178)

Understanding evil in “secular” terms, undoubtedly, marks a turn against such a dualistic theodicy. For this purpose, and as noted above, especially in her writings from the 1960s, Arendt underlines what was formerly radical and describes it as “banal.” Culminating in the famed passage from her *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* banality was thus clearly associated with a turn against the “diabolical or demonic” characteristics of Eichmann’s criminality:

He [Eichmann] was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period. And if this is ‘banal’ and even funny, if with the best will in the world one cannot extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from Eichmann, that is still far from calling it commonplace.[[179]](#footnote-179)

Thinking of evil as a type of simple “thoughtlessness” explicitly indicates a retreat from “diabolic or demonic” dimensions. Evil is a human, all too human, deficiency. In being “banal,” evil is secular because it does not involve any “radical” or “absolute” characteristic that could be traced back to gnostic dualism.

This notion of secular banality, however, is not Arendt’s creation. Indeed, if her radical, transcendent, evil power expands on Kant, her thinking of evil as banal can be traced back to Jaspers. In a letter to Arendt, dated August 17, 1946, Jaspers took “a banality of evil” to stand at odds with any “satanic greatness” that could be, for him erroneously, attributed to Nazi perpetrators.[[180]](#footnote-180) “It seems to me,” writes Jaspers, that “we have to see these things in their total banality, in their prosaic triviality, because that’s what truly characterizes them.”[[181]](#footnote-181) Arendt then takes this clearly theologically imbued idea to represent her secular retreat from former references to an absolute “satanic” dimension. Evil is secularized because it relates to human “thoughtlessness” and does not stem from a “radical” transcendent power in action. “The very phrase: ‘banality of evil,’” Arendt writes to Mary McCarthy, “stands in contrast to the phrase I used in the totalitarianism book, ‘radical evil.’”[[182]](#footnote-182) And in her last interview she makes it evidently clear that “There’s nothing deep about it [evil] – nothing demonic!”[[183]](#footnote-183) As always, Jasper’s shrewd articulation makes the theological case rather clear: “Now you have delivered the crucial word against “radical evil,” and the gnosis!”[[184]](#footnote-184)

Jaspers’ theological note refers specifically to Arendt’s controversy with Gerschom Scholem surrounding the publication of her *Eichmann* *in* *Jerusalem*. Arguably, the turn against “the gnosis” that he attributes to Arendt’s secularization of evil relates mainly to the centrality of the gnostic apostasy in Scholem’s study of Jewish messianism. Scholem himself made a similar observation by underlining the difference between Arendt’s analysis and his engagement (lasting “more than forty years”) with the “near demonic” aspects of Jewish history.[[185]](#footnote-185) Jaspers seems to locate the root of the controversy in this particular theological disagreement. If evil is banal, so the argument goes, the concept of the “demonic” that Jaspers holds to be important, in particular to Scholem’s understanding of Judaism, becomes obsolete. Under such a new “secular setting,” a dualism of the gnostic kind is refuted; the interplay between the themes of redemption and fall, hidden divinity and heresy, central not only to Scholem’s analysis of Jewish history, but also to his engagement with modern Jewish politics, disintegrates.

Nonetheless, Arendt’s secularization of evil is still dependent on theology, especially because of her emphasis on this, rather than an “other,” world. This point seems to be crucial to understanding Arendt’s particular secularization of theodicy. On the one hand, the “secular setting” clearly contests the metaphysical dualism that is inherent to Arendt’s retreat from a notion of radical transcendence. On the other hand, it leans on Arendt’s critical re-engagement with a theological tradition in which a focus on this world is central. The point to note, then, is that Arendt’s secular emphasis on a banal evil negates only one particular theological notion (that of a “radical” or “absolute” transcendent force), while building on another. Arendt, it seems, does not seek a departure from theology; instead, she operates a shift from one theological argumentation to another. Given the religious sources of her critique of modernity, Arendt’s articulation of evil delineates theological considerations; it does not exclude them, as usually argued. In its emphasis on this world, a banal evil, one may argue, is a concept that is no less theological than “radical” or “absolute” evil; it simply relates to a different theological imagination.

From such a perspective, one may explain why Eichmann’s crimes are clearly not lessened by Arendt, as Michal Ben-Naftali noted.[[186]](#footnote-186) It would be wrong to claim that the reference to the banality of Eichmann’s crimes is intended to make them more conventional, or acceptable. The actions of “one of the greatest criminals of that period” remain unforgivable in Arendt’s view. Situated especially against the backdrop of her discussion of tradition, however, his unprecedented criminality is perceived as an intolerable injury to the sacred fabric that joins people together, and it is on this theological basis that his crimes are indefensible.

The focus on evil, then, may present a unique example for a new secular order in which theology powers the mechanism of turning against theology. In particular, the denial of a transcendent, “demonic” force is informed by immanent religious considerations, showing how the “new” distilling of lost “traditional concepts” denotes their modern reconceptualization. Arguably, then, in Arendt’s postwar writings we may find another version of “immanentization” whereby “new modes of being” are attributed to transcendence, in a way that was relevant, in various forms and expressed differently, to Freud, Benjamin, and Adorno.[[187]](#footnote-187) Indeed, throughout the twentieth century, a critical attitude – relating to the psychological mechanisms of jokes, the social significance of youth, education, or tradition – was characterized by the concomitant termination and recovery of theology, demonstrating, perhaps, the range of loci in which modern secular thinkers have passionately endorsed the impossible.

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2. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press 1968)*,* 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See also a similar point made by Gerhard Richter, *Thinking with Adorno: The Uncoercive Gaze* (New York: Fordham UP, 2019), 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Arendt, *Between,* 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See e.g. Arendt, *Between,* 13, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion (Orlando: Harcourt, 1987), 68-69. See also David J. Wolken, “Thinking in the Gap: Hannah Arendt and the Prospects for a Postsecular Philosophy of Education,” in Keywords in Radical Philosophy and Education: Common Concepts for Contemporary Movements, ed. Derek R. Ford (Leiden/Boston: Brill/Sense, 2019), 317-327. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Moses A. Dirk, “*Das römische* *Gespräch* in a New Key: Hannah Arendt, Genocide, and the Defense of Republican civilization,” *The Journal of Modern History* 85, no. 4 (2013): 871. The author evokes the term that was coined by Eric Voegelin. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Dean Hammer, “Hannah Arendt and Roman Political Thought: The Practice of Theory,” *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002): 124-149. See also Moses, “*Das römische*,” 874; Jacques Taminiaux, “Athens and Rome” in Villa, *The Cambridge,* 170-71. On the importance of Greek philosophy for Arendt, see e.g. Noel O’Sullivan, “Hannah Arendt: Hellenic Nostalgia and Industrial Society,” in *Contemporary Political Philosophers,* eds.Anthony de Crespigny and Kenneth Minogue (New York: Dodd-Mead, 1975); Margaret Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992); Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (New York: Routledge, 1994); John McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Dana Villa, ed., *Politics, Philosophy, Terror: Essays on the Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999); John McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Patricia Bowen-Moore, *Hannah Arendt’s Philosophy of Natality* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1989). Seyla Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt* (London: Sage Publications, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Samuel Moyn, “Hannah Arendt on the Secular,” *New German Critique* 35 3.105 (2008): 71-96. See also Douglas Klusmeyer, “Hannah Arendt's Case for Federalism,” *The Journal of Federalism* 40, no. 1 (2009): 31-58;Miguel Vatter, “Roman Civil Religion and the Question of Jewish Politics in Arendt,” *Philosophy Today* 62, no. 2 (2018): 573-606. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Paul Franks, “Sinai Since Spinoza: Reflections on Revelation in Modern Jewish Thought,” in *[The Significance of Sinai: Traditions About Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity](https://philpapers.org/rec/BROTSO-3),* eds.George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 333-354. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hannah Arendt, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* (Berlin: J. Springer, 1929). In the late 1950s Arendt received a translated manuscript that she continued to rework and rewrite during the 1960s. See e.g. the editors’ notes in Hannah Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996)*,* 118-119; Roy T. Tsao, “Arendt’s Augustine,” in *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt,* ed.Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010)*,* 41; Stephan Kampowski, *Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning: The Action Theory and Moral Thought of Hannah Arendt in the Light of her Dissertation on St. Augustine* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 13-16, who suggests that Arendt just “gave up.” Jaspers wrote a letter to Arendt dated January 25, 1966, stating that in her reworked versions “…you are now able to say better what you back then already meant.” See Köhler und Saner, *Correspondence,* 661. The final English version of Arendt’s work was published posthumously (by Chicago University Press in 1996, as cited above). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Arendt, *Love,* 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Arendt, *Between*, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Arendt, *Love*,6, 21, 28-31, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Arendt, *Between,* 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Arendt, Between, 127. Ernst Kantorovicz, The King’s two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evagelum vom fremden Gott* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrische Buchhandlung, 1924). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Arendt, *Love,* 8. See also the point made by Patrick Boyle, “Elusive Neighborliness,” in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt,* ed.James W. Bernauer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987)*,* 84-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Arendt, *Love,* 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Arendt, *Love,* 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Arendt, *Love,* 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Arendt, *Love,* 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Arendt, *Love,* 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See also the editors’ note in Arendt, *Love,* xvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Arendt, *Love,* 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Arendt, *Love,* 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Arendt, *Love,* 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Arendt, *Love,* 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Philip Schaff, ed., *Augustine’s The City of God and Christian Doctrine* (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1890)*,* 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Arendt, *Love,* 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Arendt, *Love,* 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Arendt, *Love,* 50-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Arendt, *Love,* 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Anders Nygren, *Eros and Agape* (London: Westminster Press, 1953), 49-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Arendt, *Love,* 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Arendt, *Love,* 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Arendt, Love, 49. See also Stephan Kampowski, Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning, 73; Eric Gregory, “Augustine and Arendt on Love: New Dimensions in the Religion and Liberalism Debate,” The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 21, no. XX (2001): 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Arendt, *Love,* 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Arendt, *Love,* 58-59. According to Arendt, the Latin word *agere* encapsulated this everlasting process*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Roy T. Tsao, “Arendt’s Augustine,” 39-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Arendt, *Love,* 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See also Gregory, “Augustine,” 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. See e.g. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958),52. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Hannah Arendt, The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Arendt, *Love,* 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Augustine, The City, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid.,166. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Augustine, *The City,* 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Augustine, *The City,* 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Augustine, *The City,* 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See Facundo Vega, “On the Tragedy of the Modern Condition: The ‘Theologico-Political Problem’ in Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss and Hannah Arendt,” *The European Legacy* 22, no. 6 (2017): 697-728. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Augustine, *The City,* 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Augustine, *The City,* 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Augustine, *The City,* 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Augustine, *The City,* 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Augustine, *The City,* 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Augustine, *The City,* 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Arendt, *Love,* 39. Arendt’s strong focus on the centrality of this three-part division may explain her repeated references to Virgil’s poetry, Livy’s historiography, and Cicero’s philosophy – demonstrating also, perhaps, some consistency with myth, society, and nature. See also Hammer, “Arendt”, 142-143. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Hannah Arendt, “Jewish History Revised,” *Jewish Frontier* (March 1948), 38. See also Young-Bruhl, *Hannah Arendt,* 161-163; Christopher Irwin, “Reading Hannah Arendt as a Biblical Thinker,” *Sophia* 54 (2015): 548-549. See also the analysis offered in Judith Bulter, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See e.g. Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978)*,* 98;Arendt, “Jewish History Revised,” 30-38; on Benjamin see e.g. Hannah Arendt, ed., *Illuminations* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 255-266. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1966)*,* 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See e.g. Arendt, *The Last Interview and other Conversations* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), 28. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt,* 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Arendt, *Pariah,* 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Arendt, *Between,* 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See Feldman’s introduction in Arendt, *Pariah*, 17. See a similar argument in Natan Sznaider, *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Arendt, *Between,* 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Arendt, *Love,* 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Hannah Arendt, “Understanding and Politics,” *Partisan Review* 20, no. 4 (1953): 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. See also Passerin, *The Political,* 28-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Arendt, *Between*, 15. See also Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago UP 1989), 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. See also Richter, *Thinking*, 42; Boyle, “Elusive,” 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Antonia Grunenberg, “Arendt, Heidegger, Jaspers: Thinking Through the Breach in Tradition,” *Social Research* 74, no. 4 (2007): 1004; Banne, “Existential,” 176. Sigwart, *The Wandering*, 121: Grunenberg Antonia, “Arendt,” *Social Research* 74, no. 4 (2007): 1003-1028; Rebecca Dew, *Hannah Arendt: Between Ideologies* (Cham: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2020), 81-107; Lewis P. and Sandra K. Hinchman, “Existentialism Politicized: Arendt’s Debt to Jaspers” in: ders. (eds.) *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (New York: SUNY, 1994), 143-178; Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt*, 65l-663; Kampowski, *Arendt,* 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. In the first footnote of Chapter 6 of *The Human Condition* Arendt already underlines how, starting with the 17th century, an explicit turn against tradition was fully displayed in western thought. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Arendt, *Between,* 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Susan Neiman, “Theodicy in Jerusalem,” in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, ed. Steven E. Aschheim (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Arendt, *Between,* 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Arendt, *Between,* 11-13. See also Vivian Liska, *Giorgio Agambens Leerer Messianismus: Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Franz Kafka* (Schlebrügge: Editor, 2008)*,* 26-27. On the centrality of Arendt’s “spatial construct” see also Rodrigo Cordero, “It happens ‘in-between’: on the spatial birth of politics in Arendt’s On Revolution,” *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 1, no. 3 (2014): 249–265. Her reference to the gap as “this small non-time-space” in the “very heart of time” may be best served, arguably, if read with an adjustment of the hyphenation, as a non-time space. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Arendt, *Love,* 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Arendt, *Love*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Arendt, *Love*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Arendt, *Love,* 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Arendt, *Between,* 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Arendt, *Men,* 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Arendt, *Men,* 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Arendt, *Men*, 193, 200. See also Richter, *Adorno,* 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Arendt, *Men*, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Arendt, *Men*, 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Arendt, *Men,* 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Arendt, *Men,* 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Arendt, *Men,* 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Arendt, *Men,* 194. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Arendt, *Between,* 31. Emphasis in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Arendt, *Between,* 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Arendt, *Between,* 55. Arendt, *Between,* 27-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Arendt, *Between,* 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Arendt, *Between,* 17. See also Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Arendt, *Between,* 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Arendt, *Between,* 129-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. ### This argument is central in Trevor Tchir, *Hannah Arendt's Theory of Political Action: Daimonic Disclosure of the ‘Who'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); John Kiess, *Hannah Arendt and Theology* (New York:Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

     [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See e.g. Arendt, *The Last Interview*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Hannah Arendt, “What is existenz Philosophy?,” *Partisan Review* 13, no. 1 (1946): 34-56. Cited also in Arendt, *Love*, 117. See also the point made in Steve Buckler, *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011)*,* 9. Arendt suggests a clear distinction between action (*praxis*) which characterizes the public sphere, and fabrication (*poiesis*) which relates to those activities that the Romans, in following the Greeks, thought to be restricted to the private, social sphere of the household, having to do with the satisfaction of our material needs. See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 22-27. This distinction is one of the most discussed, to some extent most contested, aspects of her thought. See e.g. Franco Palazzi, “‘Reflections on Little Rock’ and Reflective Judgment,” *Philosophical Papers* 46, no.3 (2017): 389-441 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Arendt, *Between,* 11, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Arendt, *Between,* 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Arendt, *The Human,* 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Immanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays* (Pittsburg: Duquesne UP*,* 1987), 40-41.See also Liska, *Agamben,* 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Arendt, *On Violence,* 52, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. On Jaspers see Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and goal of History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1953), 2; Kang, “The Problem,” 149-150. See also Jaspers’ own three-part division in his opus magnum Karl Jaspers, *Philosophie 3 Bände* *(I. Philosophische Weltorientierung. II. Existenzerhellung. III. Metaphysik)* (Berlin: Springer, 1932). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Arendt, On Revolution, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Arendt, *Between,* 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Arendt, *Between,* 122-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Arendt, *On Revolution,* 214. For Heidegger’s terminology see Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 17. See also Taran Kang, “The Problem of History in Hannah Arendt,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 1 (2013): 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Arendt, *Between,* 104. See also Dean Hammer, “Authoring within History: The Legacy of Roman Politics in Hannah Arendt,” *Classical Receptions Journal* 7, no. 1 (2015): 129-139. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Arendt, *Between,* 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Arendt, *Between,* 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Arendt, *Between,* 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Arendt, *Between*, 122-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Arendt, *Between,* 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Arendt, *Between,* 91-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Hannah Arendt, *The Burden of Our Time* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. For Arendt freedom is a political category since “We first become aware of freedom or its opposite in our intercourse with others, not in the intercourse with ourselves.” See Arendt, *Between,* 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. See Hannah Arendt, “The Legitimacy of Violence as a Political Act?,” in *Dissent, Power and Confrontation,* ed.Alexander Klein (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 97-133; Ilya Winham, “Rereading Hannah Arendt’s ‘What is Freedom?’: Freedom as a Phenomenon of Political virtuosity,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 59, no. 131 (2012): 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See also Mavis Louise Biss, “Arendt and the Theological Signiﬁcance of Natality,” Philosophy Compass 7, no. 11 (2012): 762–771. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. See Maurice Blanchot, *The Gaze of Orpheus* (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 1995), 55. Cited in Wolfson, *Poetic*, 128. Wolfson rightly points out, however, that “the instant of death” is no more than “the mirror image of the instant of the beginning” and that the opposite of both can be either the eternal or timelessness. See Wolfson, *Poetic,* 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Arendt, *The Human Condition,* 178. See also Biss, “Arendt,” 762. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. See e.g. Chad Kautzer, “Political Violence and Race: A Critique of Hannah Arendt,” *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 21, no. 3 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.3551>. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Arendt, *Between,* 92-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Arendt, *Between,* 123. For further reading on the fact that authority is bound by the law, see Arendt, *Between*, 97-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See e.g. Moyn, “Hannah Arendt,” 71-96; Gordon, “The Concept,” 855-878. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Anna Jurkevics, “Hannah Arendt reads Carl Schmitt’s The Nomos of the Earth: A Dialogue on Law and Geopolitics from the Margins,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 16, no. 3 (2017): 345–366*.* See also Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); Carl Schmitt, *Theorie des Partisanen: Zwischenbemerkung zum Begriff des Politischen* (Berlin:Duncker & Humblot, 1963). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. See Gordon, “The Concept,” 855-878. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. See the point also made by Vatter, “Roman,” 573. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. See Gordon, “The Concept,” 855-878. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Schmitt, Political Theology, 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Arendt, *Between,* 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Arendt, *On Revolution,* 2; Buckler, *Arendt,* 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Arendt, *Between,* 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Arendt, *The Last Interview,* 112. See also Arendt, *On Revolution,* 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Arendt, *Between,* 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Arendt, *On Revolution,* 30-31. See also Hannah Arendt, *Denktagebuch, 1950-1973* (München: Piper, 2002), 71-72; Moses, *“Das römische,”* 886. For Arendt’s reading of Strauss, see Keedus Liisi, *The Crisis of German Historicism: The Early Political Thought of Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. See Arendt, *Between,* 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Arendt, On Revolution, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Arendt, On Revolution, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Canovan, *Hannah Arendt,* 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. # Moyn, “Hannah Arendt,” 71-96.

     [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Arendt, *On Revolution,* 36-37. See also Gershom Scholem, *Dvarim Be’go* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1976), 157. [Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Irving Louis Horowitz, *Hannah Arendt: Radical Conservative* (New Brunswick/London: Transaction Publishers, 2012), 28. See also Martin Jay, “Hannah Arendt: Opposing Views,” *Partisan Review* 45, no. 3 (1978): 353; George Kateb, *Politics, conscience, Evil* (Totowa, NJ.:Rowman and Allenheld, 1984), 28-44; Kimberley F. Curtis, “Aesthetic foundations of Democratic Politics in the Work of Hannah Arendt” in *Hannah Arendt & The Meaning of Politics*, eds.Craig Calhoun and John McGowan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)*,* 29; Liisi, *The Crisis*, 135-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. See Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells, “Debating Totalitarianism: An Exchange of Letters between Hannah Arendt and Eric Voegelin,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 3 (2012): 379. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. See the chapter “The Crisis of Education” in Arendt, *Between,* 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Bruno Latour, *We have never been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Christoph Schmidt, Der häretische Imperativ: Überlegungen zur theologischen Dialektik der Kulturwisssenschaft in Deutschland (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2000), 1-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Hannah Arendt, “Religion and the Intellectuals: A symposium,” *Partisan Review* 17 (1950): 113-116. Also cited in Arendt, *Love,* 141. Arendt refers particularly to the intertwining of philosophy and religion in the works of Spinoza, Descartes, and Heidegger. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Stephane Moses, *The Angel of History: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Scholem* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009)*,* 108-9. See also Wolfson, *Poetic,* 169. Moses adopts the term “revolutionary energy” from Benjamin’s *The Arcades* *Projec*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999), 488. Benjamin, however, merely cites Henri Focillon, *Vie des Forms*( Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1934), 12 (“l’énergie révolutionnaire des inventeurs”). [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Arendt, *On Revolution,* 284. See also Buckler, *Arendt,* 122-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Arendt, *On Revolution,* 184. For Arendt, the idea of an immortal legislator was secularized when in the 17th and 18th century “natural law stepped into the place of divinity.” Arendt, *On Revolution,* 188. See also Buckler, *Arendt,* 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Arendt, On Revolution, 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Arendt, On Revolution, 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. See especially the emphasis in Elliot R. Wolfson, “Patriarchy and the Motherhood of God in Zoharic Kabbalah and Meister Eckhart,” in *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* vol. 2, eds.Ra’anan S. Bourstan, et al (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 1063. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. See Arendt, *Denktagebuch,* 208 in which Arendt writes that “every beginning is holy.” See this point also in Peter Trawny, “Verstehen und Urteilen. Hannah Arendts Interpretation der Kantischen “Urteilskraft” als politisch-ethische Hermeneutik,” *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 60, no. 2 (2006): 273; Berkowitz Roger & Storey Ilan, eds., *Artifacts of Thinking: Reading Hannah Arendt’s Denktagebuch* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 106-123. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Arendt, *Between,* 10-15. See also Liska, *Agamben,* 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. See e.g. Arendt’s chapter on “The Crisis in Education” in Arendt, *Between,* 173-196. The chapter was originally written to record her reflections on the Little Rock affair. See Hannah Arendt, “Reflections on Little Rock,” *Dissent* 6, no. 1(Winter 1959): 45-56. See also Evelyn Temme, *Von der Bildung des Politischen zur politischen Bildung: Politikdidaktische Theorien mit Hannah Arendt Weitergedacht* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014)*,* 253-257. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Arendt, *Men,* 5-6. See also Cordero, “It Happens,” 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Arendt, *Between*, 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Karl Loewith, *Meaning in History* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1949). [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. ### Julia Kristeva, *Female Genius: Life, Madness, Words – Hannah Arendt, Melanie Klein, Gabrielle Colette; A Trilogy,* vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). See also John Kiess, *Hannah Arendt and Theology* (New York:Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016).

     [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding* (New York: Schocken Books, 1945), 134. See also Bernstein*, Hannah Arendt*, 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Diner Dan, “Hannah Arendt Reconsidered: On the Banal and the Evil in her Holocaust Narrative,” *New German Critique* 71 (1997): 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Jerome Kohn, “Evil and Plurality: Hannah Arendt’s Way to *The Life of the Mind,* I,*”* in *Hannah Arendt: Twenty Years Later, eds.* Jerome Kohn and Larry May (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 155. The author cites Arendt’s letter to Kenneth Thompson of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1969. See also Villa, *Hannah Arendt,* 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960). See also Trawny, “Verstehen,” 270. On Arendt’s debt to Kant, see in particular Rebecca Dew, *Hannah Arendt: Between Ideologies* (Cham: Palgrave Mcmillan, 2020), 53-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Benhabib, *The Reluctant*, 186-187; Seyla Benhabib, “Arendt and Adorno: The Elusiveness of the Particular and the Benjaminian Moment,” in *Arendt and Adorno: Political and Philosophical Investigations,* eds.Lars Rensmann & Samir Gandesha(Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012), 40. See also Terence Holden, “Adorno and Arendt: Evil, Modernity and the Underside of Theodicy,” *Sophia* (2017): 3-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Arendt, *Origins,* 433. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Arendt, The Human Condition, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Leibniz’s engagement with the problem of evil was central to his first and last publications, *The Philosopher’s Confessions* from 1672 and *Theodicy* from 1709. See e.g. Mary Morris and George Henry Radcliffe Parkinson, eds., Leibniz-Philosophical Writings (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1973). [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. George Cotkin, “Illuminating Evil: Hannah Arendt and Moral History,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 3 (2007): 463-490. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Arendt, *Eichmann,* 287-288. Except for the title of the book, the term “banality” appears in only one other passage. See Arendt, *Eichmann,* 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Arendt, *Correspondence,* 62. See also Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt,* 148; Elhanan Yekira, “Hannah Arendt, the Holocaust and Zionism: A Story of a Failure,” *Israeli Studies* 11, no. 3 (2006): 31-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Arendt, Correspondence, 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Carol Brightman, ed., *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy 1949-1975* (New York/San Diego/London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995)*,* 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Arendt, *The Last Interview,* 48. Interview with Joachim Fest, November 9, 1964. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. See Jaspers’ letter to Arendt dated 22 October, 1963 in Arendt, *Correspondence,* 525. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. See Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah,* 240-241. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Michal Ben-Naftali, *The Visitation of Hannah Arendt* (Amsterdam: De Gruyter, 2020). [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Agata Bielik Robson, “The God of Myth Is Not Dead”–Modernity and Its Cryptotheologies: A Jewish Perspective,” in *The Making of Modern German Thought*, eds. Willem Styfhals and Stephane Symons (New York: SUNY, 2019): 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)