Hannah Arendt and her Augustinian Inheritance: Love, Temporality, and Judgement

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Abstract

Arendt left an unfinished treatise of judgement and a neglect of her own beginnings in philosophy. I intend to examine her initial study of the thought of Augustine and the concept of right love and match this to her final concern with the thought of Kant and her particular notion of the judging individual-in-the-world. An important emphasis will be placed on Arendt’s ‘idea of community’ and her reading of man as homo temporalis and as an extension to this I wish to propose an outline of her intended treatise on judgement. To do this I will highlight the role of trinitarian thinking in her work throughout her life and how this became the theme of her own world-view. From her analysis of Augustine’s trinity of memory, understanding and love to her temporal divisions of promise-making, forgiveness, and trust together with her final theory of the mind as thinking, willing and judging, Arendt remained close to this methodological triadic imperative.

I argue that her final trinity although never written in her intended third volume on Judging in The Life of the Mind series would have been remembrance, the understanding heart and some form of Gemüt. This trinity defines her unwritten theory of judgement and can be constructed because of Arendt’s temporal dimension of past possibility: a temporal dimension determined in reaction to Augustine’s and Heidegger’s emphasis on the future. This past possibility is her memory of the present that locates a reference point for action. Her theory of judgement would have reflected this possibility; a possibility captured by primitive Christianity and Roman experience of foundation, but lost in an Athenian-Judaean tradition of thought, but still captured within St. Augustine’s words. For Arendt this temporal dimension is achieved through storytelling where the individual history being told unfolds between past and future, and can convey a valid authority of tradition to fellow individuals-in-the-world in the form of a principle of judgement. I propose therefore that storytelling in Arendt’s thought reflects a temporal relationship between a theory of illumination and an ethic of inspiration; a relationship which relates the validity of authority as principle in foundation.
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