

## THE ROLE OF FORGETTING IN OUR EXPERIENCE OF TIME: AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO AND HANNAH ARENDT

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Hannah Arendt's work is deeply marked by a rich analysis of temporality. One finds references to it from her earliest works on Augustine of Hippo<sup>1</sup> to her last major work, *The Life of the Mind*. Scholars have rightly explored the significance of temporality and its constitutive centrality for Arendt's thought.<sup>2</sup> Her views of temporality can be divided *grosso modo* along three axes. First, there is time-lived or the times-experienced, which comprise or touch upon such aspects as history, biography, narrative, and a timely engagement with the issues of the day, which include, for example, various moments in American Cold-War culture and civil-rights movements.<sup>3</sup> Second, there is a sense of time understood as spontaneity, as natality, in which a new beginning is made possible today, *hodiernus*. Arising spontaneously, this time marks a new promise, as in the case of forgiveness.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps we can call this the time of the *kairos*, the opportune time, the now-time that *emerges* from a set of circumstances but is not merely a *result* of a series of causal events. Finally, one finds in Arendt's work a philosophical position on the very nature of time itself, understood as the past and the future that make possible the present, that condition the very existence of the human being. Particularly striking is the account of time that Arendt gives in the concluding parts of her work on "Thinking" in *The Life of the Mind*. There are, of course, many aspects of Arendt's treatment of time that could easily form the basis of a whole study, but I would like to focus on the last one mentioned above as there is little scholarship on this specific aspect of time in Arendt's corpus.

Arendt's fragmented, metaphorical analyses of time draw from a wealth of sources, including the philosophies of Augustine, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Benjamin, Bergson, and Heidegger. In *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt claims that thinking reveals a deep temporal structure.<sup>5</sup> The infinity or *nunc stans* of thought, which Augustine believed to be the eternity of the mind of God or the eternal omnipresence of God, arises only when the arrow of infinite future possibility or anticipation meets with the infinite trajectory of the past as uncovered in memory. Infinite, here, does not mean eternal. It simply means that, so long as one lives, there is a non-denumerable infinity of possible future willings or anticipations, as well as of possible interpretations of past memories; there are a non-denumerable, unfixed number of possible past moments and future anticipations while one continues to live, as life is not absolutely predetermined. The present is described as a "diagonal" that intersects or transverses the past and the future. The constitutive moments of time, namely, the past, the present, and the future, are called "forces":

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The two antagonistic forces of the past and future are both indefinite to their origin; seen from the viewpoint of the present in the middle, the one comes from an infinite past and the other from an infinite future. But though they have no known beginning, they have a terminal ending, the point at which they meet and clash, which is the present.<sup>6</sup>

The present arises with and through the clash of the past and the future; it is an antagonistic struggle. Thinking occurs as a particular experience of the present, as a place where one is no longer conscious of time. It is as if one is lifted out of time, at least while one is engaged in thought. One is reminded here of Arendt's poignant descriptions of Socrates as the "electric ray" paralysed in and by thought. One becomes as if time-less, out of time.

Clearly, Arendt reworked Augustine's notion of time and God's understanding of time, placing it firmly with the human realm. One is also reminded here of Aristotle's notion of thought thinking itself, infinitely and in a self-contained fashion. I do not wish to pretend that I can mine all of the sources of Arendt's theory of time in this brief essay. Rather, I want to focus on Augustine of Hippo, largely because Augustine is one of Arendt's constant companions in thought, from the early days of her dissertation to her last work, *The Life of the Mind*. In particular, I would like to focus on a particular Arendtian claim. For Augustine, there is eternal time, and while humans dwell within the mind of God eternally,<sup>7</sup> they experience their own existence temporally; that is, their earthly lives are lived from a specific beginning to a specific end. Yet, when they cross into the afterlife, they will experience eternity as promised by God. But the human experience of eternity in the afterlife is not the same as the full eternity of God. Humans continue to bear the finitude of their being even after death and are, therefore, incapable of experiencing eternity in the way an infinite, omniscient, and omnipotent God does. Memory, as a constituent element in their respective analyses of time, is vital for both Arendt and Augustine. Following Bergson, Arendt says that memory is selective. It moves, recalling images, events, sensations, etc., as it chooses. Augustine would agree, for he describes memory as a "stomach," a rich thesaurus or storehouse of treasures. But, for Augustine, what makes time possible—and what allows the memory to recollect and see one memory as separate and distinct from another—is forgetting. Forgetting is constitutive of memory. Although forgetting can be found in Arendt's philosophy—think, for example, of her reply to Eric Voegelin concerning his review of the *Origins of Totalitarianism* and his criticism of her failure to clarify her historical method<sup>8</sup>—it does not occupy the constitutive role it does in Augustine's thought. I will argue that if forgetting is seen merely as an operation of the mind, and not as foundational, as it is in Augustine, there are consequences for the activating possibilities of the mind, especially *qua* thinking. I maintain that there can be no Bergsonian-inspired selection of images or memories, and no real fragmentation for Arendt, without forgetting. I also argue that, without forgetting, one can never experience the past as being nearer or more remote, intimate or distant. Forgetting may distance us from what is proper between human beings, perhaps resulting, as Arendt's example of Eichmann demonstrates, in the forgetting of what is most meaningful among humans, namely, speech and action, or what Arendt calls politics. Finally, the sense of time that Arendt argues is made possible by the clash of the future and the past may not be as rich as one might hope without the vital sense of forgetting advocated by Augustine.

Before unpacking Arendt's theory of time as experienced or lived time, I would like to address briefly some of the current literature on Augustine and Arendt *qua* time. The most current and sustained analysis of this connection can be found in Stephan Kampowski's excellent work, *Arendt, Augustine and the New Beginning*. Kampowski cites Dal Lago, who remarks that temporality is intimately linked to the human condition.<sup>9</sup> According to Kampowski's very accurate analysis, Arendt acknowledges that there is a profound connection between time, existence, and the need to make sense of our existence by remembering the past. He writes:

Rather, the sense of remembrance that Arendt presents in *Der Liebesbegriff* is that of remembering the contingency of one's existence, the source of one's being in Another. It is a remembrance in the sense of the medieval exhortation "remember death"—or, we might also say, "Remember birth." It means to open one's eyes to the reality of things and humbly acknowledge and gratefully accept the fact that one is a created and contingent being. Such is the meaning of remembrance in her dissertation.<sup>10</sup>

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Other scholars recognise in Arendt a profound need to recall and remember the past: memory serves as one of the fundamental ways that we find and make meaning, both in speech and action, and, ultimately, in politics.<sup>11</sup> What is notable about the analyses of these scholars is their lack of attention to forgetting, which is so significant for Augustine but not for Arendt. One noteworthy exception is the work of Jeffrey Andrew Barash,<sup>12</sup> who rightly notes the importance of forgetting, especially the forgetting of being, for Heidegger but not for Arendt. However, focussing his attention on remembering and the memorialising (*anamnesis*) of the past, Barash does not develop the implications of forgetting for Arendt's thought. It is within and against this framework of scholarship that I would like to explore the relevance of forgetting for Arendt's thinking, which is made possible by Augustine's own reflections on the forceful role forgetting plays in his own philosophy of time.

### ARENDT'S METAPHORICAL THEORY OF TIME: THINKING, WILLING AND JUDGING

The time that Arendt connects with thinking is not chronological time, measurable by seconds and change from one moment to the next; rather, she describes temporality as an infrastructure, but an infrastructure that is not evident in and of itself. It only comes to manifest itself through an examination of the very limits of the human condition, namely, our beginning and our end. Drawing inspiration from Kant, Arendt notes that time appears with the question of space, but this is not the space of Newton. At the end of "Thinking," Arendt poses the question: Where are we when we think?<sup>13</sup> Her answer is that we are nowhere, for thinking puts us in to a *nunc stans* that is experienced as both timeless and spaceless; we are in the *scholé* or the *otium* of the ancients. We become separate from our common-sense, practical, and material existence. We are mindful, however, that that the no-space of thinking has limits, for we are not like the Christian God of eternity or the Greek gods of cyclical eternity. We are bound by the limits of our appearing—birth and death—and our thinking is deeply cognisant of these two pivotal moments of our own existence. Like Kant, Arendt was aware that it is these boundaries that push us to think; without boundaries, there would be no thinking.

And since this nowhere is by no means identical with the twofold nowhere from which we suddenly appear at birth and to which almost as suddenly we disappear in death, it might be conceived only as the Void. Obviously, if there is absolutely nothing, there can be nothing to think about. That we are in possession of these limiting boundary concepts enclosing our thought within insurmountable walls—and the notion of an absolute beginning or an absolute end is among them—does not tell us more than that we are *finite* beings.<sup>14</sup>

Our finitude is lived between a beginning and an end, and it is this span of our lives that gives us time—our human time of existence, but also the very time that makes thinking possible.

Man's finitude, irrevocably given by virtue of his own short time span set in an infinity of time stretching into both past and future, constitutes the infrastructure, as it were, of all mental activities: it manifests itself as the only reality of which thinking *qua* thinking is aware, when the thinking ego has withdrawn from the world of appearances and lost the sense of realness inherent in the *sensus communis* by which we orient ourselves in this world.<sup>15</sup>

It is within the two limits of our finitude, birth and death, that the infinity of the time of thinking emerges—a time where one can endlessly make things visible and manifest through imagination and the questioning dialogue with oneself: *quaestio mihi factus sum*.<sup>16</sup>

If we are nowhere when we think—and Arendt admits that the question of where we are when we think is a bad question<sup>17</sup>—then what is it that time does for us? Thinking makes visible that which is invisible; reflection and imagination allow de-sensed and de-materialised things to appear. But time lets what appears in thought—its thought-things or thought-objects—have movement; time places them into various relations. But this is not the

sequencing relationality that Kant speaks of in the transcendental aesthetic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Perhaps our question—Where are we when we think?—was wrong because by asking for the *topos* of this activity, we were exclusively spatially ordered—as though we had forgotten Kant’s famous insight that “time is nothing but the form of inner sense, that is, of intuition of ourselves and of our inner state.” For Kant, this meant that time had nothing to do with appearances as such—“neither with shape nor position” as given to our senses—but only with appearances as affecting our “inner state,” in which time determines “the relation of representation.” And these representations—by which we make present what is phenomenally absent—are, of course, thought-things, that is, experiences or notions that have gone through the de-materializing operation by which the mind prepares its own objects and by “generalizing” deprives them of their spatial properties as well.<sup>18</sup>

As time organises relations between thought-objects, it does so discursively. This is an important point, for though we may be tempted, we would be mistaken to think that Arendt regarded temporal relations as sequential, flowing one after another in the sense of chronological time—what happens first, then second, then third, then fourth, and so on—a highly mathematised sequencing. When Arendt speaks of discursive relationality, she has in mind the two-in-one conversation or dialogue one has with oneself, the back-and-forth of trains of thought that need not follow a temporal order of prior and posterior, before and after, former and latter, etc. She notes:

Time determines the way these representations are related to each other by forcing them into the order of a sequence, and these sequences are what we usually call thought-trains. All thinking is discursive and, insofar as it follows a train of thought, it could by analogy be presented as a “line progressing to infinity,” corresponding to the way we usually present to ourselves the sequential nature of time. But in order to create such a line of thought we must transform the *juxtaposition* in which experiences are given to us into a *succession* of soundless words—the only medium in which we can think—which means we not only de-sense but de-spatialize the original experience.<sup>19</sup>

Here, sequencing and relationality need not be linear, for the language of thinking, as explained in earlier parts of “Thinking,” is metaphorical.<sup>20</sup> We should also note how Arendt describes the infinity of thought. This is not real infinity, at least not in the sense of a denumerable infinity. It is, rather, the infinity of possible meanings, a progressive line of unfolding that follows the very extension of our life. Another way of expressing Arendtian infinity in relation to thinking is simply to say that as long as we live, we can think; there is thinking as long as there is human life. Infinity marks the extension of a life, and as such, it perdures as we continue to live in thinking, as if there is no time. We are here in the infinity of the *nunc stans*. As long as there is life, thinking can extend and expand, reaching ever further. This possibility of thinking’s limitless extension and expansion is what Arendt calls “everlasting change.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, perhaps this is what gives Arendtian spontaneity its very structure.

Arendt summarises her position with great acuity and limpidity:

In other words, the time continuum, everlasting change, is broken up into the tenses past, present, future, whereby past and future are antagonistic to each other as the no-longer and the not-yet only because of the presence of man, who himself has an “origin,” his birth, and an end, his death, and therefore stands at any given moment between them; this in-between is called the present. It is the insertion of man with his limited life span that transforms the continuously flowing stream of sheer change—which we can conceive of cyclically as well as in the form of rectilinear motion without ever being able to conceive of an absolute beginning or an absolute end—into time as we know it.<sup>22</sup>

Key here is the distinction between four senses of time: time as change; time as cyclical (think, for example, of the seasons or anniversaries); time as moving forward, which implies an inability to repeat what has been; and, finally, time as we experience it. It is this last notion of time, time as we experience it, that is most valuable and

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significant, most meaningful, for Arendt—this lived time is time proper.

The tenses that belong to experienced or lived time are the past, the present, and the future. Arendt notes that there is an experience of time, different from the ordinary experience of time, in which the tenses of time seem to collapse. Here, a conflict between common sense and a more philosophical approach to the life of the mind comes to the fore.

It should not unduly alarm us that this time construct is totally different from the time sequence of ordinary life, where the three tenses smoothly follow each other and time itself can be understood in analogy to numerical sequences, fixed by the calendar, according to which the present is today, the past begins with yesterday, and the future begins tomorrow. Here, too, the present is surrounded by past and future inasmuch as it remains the fixed point from which we take our bearings, looking back or looking forward. That we can shape the everlasting stream of sheer change into a time continuum we owe not to time itself but to the continuity of our business and our activities in the world, in which *we continue* what we started yesterday and hope to finish tomorrow. In other words, the time continuum depends on the continuity of our everyday life, and the business of everyday life, in contrast to the activity of the thinking ego—always independent of the spatial circumstances surrounding it—which is always spatially determined and conditioned.<sup>23</sup>

In *The Human Condition*, it is work that produces objects that help to anchor and create a world. Our relation to such objects creates a sense of time, which, in Arendt's sense, is common-sensical, but not time proper. In our ordinary experience, time is determined by our beginning to work with and on the objects we create by our work.

In order to describe the proper sense of lived time, Arendt drew upon Kafka and the gap he introduced as constitutive of our experience of time:

Returning to Kafka...[, s]een from the viewpoint of a continuously flowing everlasting stream, the insertion of man, fighting in both directions, produces a rupture which, by being defended in both directions, is extended to a gap, the present seen as the fighter's battleground. This battleground for Kafka is the metaphor for man's home on earth. Seen from the viewpoint of man, at each single moment inserted and caught in the middle between *his* past and *his* future, both aimed at the one who is creating his present, the battleground is an in-between, an extended Now on which one spends his life. The present, in ordinary life the most futile and slippery of the tenses—when I say “now” and point to it, it is already gone—is no more than the clash of a past, which is no more, with a future, which is approaching and not yet there. Man lives in this in-between, and what he calls the present is a lifelong fight against the dead weight of the past, driving him forward with hope, and the fear of a future (whose only certainty is death), driving him backward toward the “quiet of the past” with nostalgia for and remembrance of the only reality he can be sure of.<sup>24</sup>

The now for which Kafka longs, according to Arendt, is the “old dream that Western metaphysics has dreamt from Parmenides to Hegel, of a timeless region, an eternal presence in complete quiet, lying beyond human clocks and calendars altogether, the region, precisely, of thought...”<sup>25</sup>

Arendt understands the present as this gap, the *nunc stans*, the timeless nowhere in which thought happens and from which thought-trains issue. But this gap occurs only in and through a fight or battle between the past and the future. The past is a treasure-house or “belly” from which the images that the mind wishes to bring forward and make appear in thinking are selected; it is the future that draws and situates them in a new context or web of relations. One must become conscious of being inserted between past and future.

Each new generation, every new human being, as he becomes conscious of being inserted between an infinite past and an infinite future, must discover and ploddingly pave anew the past of thought. And it is after all

possible, and seems to me likely, that the strange survival of great works, their relative permanence throughout thousands of years, is due to their having been born in the small, inconspicuous track of non-time which their authors' thought has beaten between an infinite past and an infinite future by accepting past and future as directed, aimed as it were, at themselves—as *their* predecessors and successors, *their* future, thus establishing a present for themselves, a kind of timeless time in which men are able to create timeless works with which to transcend their own finiteness.<sup>26</sup>

Arendt powerfully concludes “Thinking” by turning to the time of history as it pertains to thinking. The past upon which thinking draws is no longer coloured by or infused with the legacy of metaphysical thinking. Twentieth-century philosophers worked long and hard to dismantle metaphysical thinking—what Heidegger called “ontic thinking” and Derrida called the “metaphysics of presence.”<sup>27</sup> The past, then, can no longer be seen as continuous; rather, it is fragmented.

I have certainly joined the ranks of those who for some time now have been attempting to dismantle metaphysics, and philosophy with all of its categories, as we have known them from their beginning in Greece until today. Such dismantling is possible only on the assumption that the thread of tradition is broken and that we shall not be able to renew it.... What has been lost is the continuity of the past as it seemed to be handed down from generation to generation, developing in the process its own consistency. The dismantling process has its own technique, and I did not go into that here except peripherally. What you then are left with is still the past, but a *fragmented* past, which has lost its certainty of evaluation. It is with such fragments from the past...that I have dealt here. That they could be used at all we owe to the timeless track that thinking beats into the world of space and time. If some of my listeners or some of my readers should be tempted to try their luck at the technique of dismantling, let them be careful not to destroy the “rich and strange,” the “coral” and the “pearls,” which can probably be saved only as fragments.... Or to put the same in prose: “Some books are undeservedly forgotten, none are undeservedly remembered.”<sup>28</sup>

The past, so vital for Arendt’s concept of time, is *not* to be seen as a complete archive or treasure-house; rather, the very idea of the past as complete, smooth, and continuous is no longer sustainable. What was handed down through the generations was never complete, and we must resist the temptation to think that it was. It was this kind of thinking that produced metaphysical thinking in the first place. This fragmented past has implications for the present: the present is not a continuance of the past. This would be possible only in an Augustinian metaphysics in which God sustains all of the *semes* of creation in His mind. Arendt poignantly remarks,

The small non-time space in the very heart of time [i.e., the present], unlike the world and culture into which we are born, cannot be inherited and handed down by tradition, although every great book of thought points to it somewhat cryptically—as we found Heraclitus saying of the notoriously cryptic and unreliable Delphic oracle: “*oute legei, oute kryptei, alla semenai*” [“it does not say and it does not hide, it intimates”].<sup>29</sup>

Until now, we have focussed on the present as the point of struggle, or gap, of the *nunc stans*, and the past as the “belly” that holds fragmented content and memories that can be drawn forward with the help of the future. But we have not yet considered the precise nature of the future. Arendt describes memory as the organ of the past and designates the will as the organ of the future.<sup>30</sup> How does the future come to be lived in willing? As we have already seen, the future is the not-yet and the maybe of tomorrow. But the future brings with it a tonality, a mood, that colours the life of the mind. It also introduces the possibility of choice. The organic life of the will reveals the future as a project, as opposed to the making apparent of the thought-object of present thinking.<sup>31</sup>

Earlier, I drew attention to the fact that time arises in and through strife and conflict. Thinking and willing, and, therefore, the past, present, and future, clash, insofar as they are mental activities that seem unable to coexist.

When we form a volition, that is, when we focus our attention on some future project, we have no less

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withdrawn from the world of appearances than when we are following a train of thought. Thinking and willing are antagonists only insofar as they affect our psychic states; both, it is true, make present to our mind what is actually absent, but thinking draws into its enduring present what either is or at least has been, whereas willing, stretching out into the future, moves in a region where no such certainties exist.<sup>32</sup>

The future is described as expectation, as a stretching forward, but this expectation is coloured by its two chief modes of feeling: fear and hope.

These two modes of feeling are intimately connected in that each of them is prone to veer to its seeming opposite, and because of the uncertainties of the region these shiftings are almost automatic. Every hope carries within itself a fear, and every fear cures itself by turning to the corresponding hope. It is because of their shifting, unstable, and disquieting nature that classical antiquity counted both among the evils of Pandora's box.<sup>33</sup>

Arendt argues that the will regards thinking with contempt;<sup>34</sup> thinking is seen to be "doing nothing." There is pleasure in thinking, especially when thought thinks itself, and the philosophical tradition affirms this. Willing, however, is rarely seen as producing pleasure, except in the cases of thinkers such as Duns Scotus or Nietzsche.<sup>35</sup> The present almost seamlessly draws upon memory for content. But the futurity of the will implies no remembrance; it is sheer anticipation and extension forward. It cannot rest upon what has come before, and this openness, like an abyss, causes us to experience strong feelings such as hope and fear. Furthermore, because it deals with things that are within our power but cannot guarantee that these things will be carried out, despite its desire for them, the will is seen to be in conflict with itself.<sup>36</sup> Citing Augustine, Arendt tells us that *velle* and *posse* are not the same thing.<sup>37</sup>

On the contrary, the willing ego, looking forward and not backward, deals with things which are in our power but whose accomplishment is by no means certain. The resulting tension, unlike the rather stimulating excitement that may accompany problem-solving activities, causes a kind of disquiet in the soul easily bordering on turmoil, a mixture of fear and hope that becomes unbearable...<sup>38</sup>

Thinking produces serenity, a *tranquillitas animi*, whereas willing produces tension, fear and hope, all of which bespeak a tonality or mood proper to willing.

In *The Human Condition*, action and speech are seen as the highest activities, the *vita activa*. Arendt never claims that action is identical with willing. Action can be motivated by all kinds of things, including speech. The classic view of the will as the power or capacity to bring about or enact a specific wish or desire is not Arendt's. For her, the will allows us to see future possibilities, but it does not possess the power to enact that which it foresees. Willing is a mental activity that can be described as Promethean: it sees or looks forward, but is not guaranteed that its seeing will produce a desired or envisioned outcome. In short, the will is not willpower or an agency for enactment.

In addition to a kind of visionary anticipation, the will is also mindful of its ultimate end, namely, death.

That there exists such a thing as the *Life* of the mind is due to the mind's [being an] organ for the future and its resulting "restlessness"; that there exists such a thing as the life of the *Mind* is due to death, which, foreseen as an absolute end, halts the will and transforms the future into an anticipated past, the will's projects into objects of thought, and the soul's expectations into an anticipated remembrance.<sup>39</sup>

The will knows that it will experience its ultimate end in death and it is this very limit of death that allows the future, understood as anticipation, from reaching its own limit. We do not have infinite anticipation in Arendt

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Because death transforms the anticipated future into an anticipated past. What does this mean? How does an anticipated future become remembrance?

The will can project or anticipate certain hopes and fears about one's own or another's being or being in the world. But one also knows that death limits the extension of that anticipation so that the future anticipation is no longer lived as a future anticipation as such. Once the future anticipation of willing ceases through its encounter with the eventuality of death, it becomes nothing. Willing can only live through being remembered as once having been. I believe that Arendt is arguing against a notion of futurity as absolute, infinite progress. Such a notion ignores the uncertainty that is part and parcel of the structure of the will. It also ignores the very fact of human finitude that is marked by death. For human beings, there is no pure and infinite extension into the future. Such a notion makes no sense for Arendt; it is unfaithful to the finitude of the human condition and to the way in which we experience future anticipations, which may endure, even for a long while, but will eventually end. They become past, the remembrance of an anticipated future that once was. Arendt criticises the modern concept of progress because it claims to guarantee a better future: things will only get better. For Arendt, the future cannot guarantee anything—it shows only possibilities, good and bad, but it can never guarantee their actualisation.

So far, my analysis has largely focussed on time as Arendt developed it in *The Life of the Mind*. Arendt was working on judging when she died. Not only an activity that helps us distinguish between various thoughts, judging is also deeply informed by a common sensibility or shared understanding between humans that fosters communicability as well as publicity. Judging has the power to bring us back from the *nunc stans* of thinking, the moods of the future, and the belly of the past, straight into the world. Judging, along with the conscience of two-in-one thinking, assists us in making moral decisions, especially when we must distinguish between such things as good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly. Following the spirit of Kant, Arendt recognises that judging may provide a bridge between willing and thinking.<sup>40</sup> But does judging reveal anything about time?

I maintain that it does, though this may not be absolutely justifiable, as Arendt's final work on judging remains incomplete. However, if we turn to her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, we see a heavy emphasis on imagination and reflection (both functions of thinking), as well as communicability, publicity, and the *sensus communis*.<sup>41</sup> Arendt claims that the time of judging is momentous, that is, it is the time that gives us a visible and defined moment that is delineated against the backdrop of the durational *nunc stans* (literally, the standing-now) of the present. The German "*Moment*" is helpful here in elucidating my meaning. The connotation of the German word for moment is that of a distinct stage of development wherein one can speak of a proper sense of time. For example, for Hegel, the French Revolution is a *Moment* because it is not only a particular historical event with a definitive beginning and end, but also an important stage for the development of freedom and consciousness. The time of judging always operates within historically given, temporal events (the first sense of time I presented in my opening paragraph). This sense of time brings to mind the question of meaning and validity for human beings living in the world. In Arendt's Kant lectures, common sense allows the individual to test his or her claims about a specific state of affairs, whether pleasing, repulsive, good or bad, by comparing these claims with the public sensibilities of others. One asks oneself, always in relation to others (*inter esse*), whether what one finds good, bad, beautiful, and ugly is actually the case. The moment that constitutes judgement is a specific experience of the world and others; the time of judgement can be seen to bring one into relation with the world and others, but in a very specific sense: when what is brought forward to the mind requires an ethical or aesthetic judgement concerning the validity and meaning of what is brought forward in that specific moment. In short, the time of judgement gives us, or makes appear pressing, urgent, or pivotal, moments in which moral and aesthetic judgements that will ensure a life-affirming, as opposed to life-annihilating, plurality and common interest are required. Here, one is reminded of Kant's account of the origin of morality in the *Groundwork*, in which he claimed that morality begins when one is confronted with the forceful question of the ought.<sup>42</sup> In judgement, we find the pressing urgency of the two-in-one of conscience. It was this moment, this sense of time, and the lack of reflection on what this moment meant for him and for humanity as a whole, that rendered Eichmann so banal. This is, of course, only suggested by my own particular reading of the time of

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judging. Sadly, in the end no one can definitively know what a time of judging might look like for Arendt, as her work remains unfinished.

### AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO'S CHALLENGE OF TIME

In Arendt's doctoral dissertation, which she revised for publication later in life, the treatment of time figures meaningfully in her discussion of love and Saint Augustine. Her notions of the present, past, and future draw deeply on Augustine's views. Arendt remarks:

If the present is altogether filled with desire for the future, man can anticipate a timeless present.... This is properly called divine "time," that is, the time of him whose "today is eternity." This anticipation, namely that man can live in the future as though it were present and can "hold" (*tenere*) and "enjoy" (*frui*) future eternity, is possible on the ground of Augustine's interpretation of temporality. In contrast to our own understanding, time for Augustine does not begin in the past in order to progress through the present into the future, but comes out of the future and runs, as it were, backward through the present and ends in the past.<sup>43</sup>

Given Augustine's view of the possibility of a Christian eternity, Arendt argues that it is the future, or the anticipation of the *beata vita*, that allows Augustine to reread the present and the past. This is a viable argument, especially if we consider the structure of the *Confessiones*. Augustine, always mindful of his desire for a final end in which he would be with God, reads his present as not absolutely satisfactory and his past as wholly unsatisfactory because of his inability to see God and His love. Think of all of Augustine's wondrously temporally paradoxical formulations, for example, his famous "*sero te amavi, pulchritudo tam antiqua et tam nova, sero te amavi.*"<sup>44</sup> Arendt thus reads Augustine, as did Hegel and many others, as future-oriented, as otherworldly.

Furthermore, Arendt argues that Augustine viewed the past and the future, at least in the way we usually experience them, as modes of the present.<sup>45</sup> He could do so, of course, because of his conviction in the primacy of God's eternal present. In her doctoral dissertation, Arendt goes on to link time with love. When fully loving God, humans lose or forget themselves.<sup>46</sup> This forgetting of self makes love experienceable in its highest form, as one becomes consumed by God's love. "Hence, to live in expectation to the point of oblivion is still a way of living in the present. This is the only way of complete self-obliteration: 'God must be loved in such a way that, if at all possible, we would forget ourselves.'"<sup>47</sup> Here, we have a view of self-emptying or self-negation, always understood as a forgetting, that prepares one to love God fully, and thus to achieve the maximum happiness. One becomes filled with God's love; in forgetting oneself and loving God, one plunges into the time of the eternal present. One achieves salvation and eternal life, forgetting the dimension of the past.<sup>48</sup> The past is absorbed by the present, which is ultimately experienced as our longing for the future of the happy life with God.

But the past is not the only thing that is annihilated. Arendt notes a second form of oblivion or negation in Augustine's thought, namely, the forgetting or annihilation of the self. The self is annihilated by the very structure of desire itself.

However, this forgetfulness is by no means only characteristic of the love of God. Since craving [*appetitus*] is the basic mode of human existence, men always "forget...something," namely, whatever they happen to desire. Desire itself is a state of forgetfulness.... Whatever man loves and desires, he always forgets something. Craving the world, he forgets his self and forgets the world; discovering that he cannot find his self except in the craving for God, he forgets his self. Although desire arises out of the will to be happy...and thus refers back to the self, it forgets this origin, cuts itself loose from this anchor, and becomes entirely absorbed by the object.<sup>49</sup>

Arendt is profoundly aware that, in the Augustinian structure of desiring, always a future-oriented activity,

one loses a sense of present time, and, moving in the time of the eternal present, can become absorbed by the object of one's desire. This object can be God or something else, which, usually, for Augustine, can be sinfully overwhelming.

Arendt's Augustine reserves a special place for forgetting; forgetting is constitutive of the structure of temporality. While it allows us to experience the possibility of God's love, it is also constitutive of the very structure of desire itself, which moves and animates human beings, especially toward their final end, God. I do not contest Arendt's reading of Augustine; I think she reads him astutely and with great plausibility. Rather, what I find fascinating in her treatment is her own forgetting. In two important respects. First, why does she not discuss forgetting at any length, especially *qua* time, in *The Life of the Mind*? I believe this question is relevant because it speaks to something about the fragmented-ness of time itself, and to Arendt's own project vis-à-vis storytelling, speech, and action. Arendt emphasises Bergsonian selection rather than forgetting as such, thereby privileging construction over forgetting; she does not need to call for the restoration of a past that no longer is, and she is not tempted to establish a seamless continuity of the past. Second, and this is Augustine's point, time is not only punctuated by movement within the time-eternal of the eternal present as lived by God, but also by forgetting. Forgetting, understood as a kind of annihilation, allows differences to emerge—differences between self and God, self and others, self and world, self and self. Forgetting is certainly one way to achieve the splitting that characterises the two-in-one of thinking, but it also achieves the splitting of the will, Augustine's willy-nilly (*volo-nolo*) of the will that she deals with in her treatment of Saint Paul.<sup>50</sup> In more Arendtian terms, Augustinian forgetting can be understood as that which makes fragmentation possible in Arendt's theory of time. In short, forgetting can be a rich source for the conflict, splitting, and clash, as well as the fragmentation so constitutive of Arendt's philosophy of time.

In Book X of the *Confessiones*, Augustine of Hippo makes the intimate connection between memory and forgetting. It is important to note that the general context for his discussion of memory is love and self-becoming. Augustine once again becomes a question for himself, and he tries to work out (*laboro in meipso*) what it is that he is. Memory will help him discover who and what he is and who and what God is. Also, his desire to know these things is a loving desire. The soul is impelled by love and, if we read Book X of *On The Trinity*, we see that it is the will pushed by love that seeks to enact both the understanding and memory of Augustine's proper sense of belonging to God and of bearing the traces of his triune source of being. Memory is not only understood in the Platonic sense of remembrance of things that are past; we also have memories as images—of sensations, events, objects, etc. Of course, not all memories need be accompanied by images; Augustine gives the example of dialectical thinking or speaking, in which thought is unaccompanied by images. But what allows memory to distinguish one image or thought from another? What distinguishes memory as memory, as distinct from the eternal present?

Augustine claims that forgetting is constitutive of memory<sup>51</sup>: memory is forgetting. "*Ergo cum memoriam meminim, per seipsam sibi praeo est ipsa memoria: cum vero meminim oblivionem, et memoria praeo est et oblivio; memoria qua meminim, oblivio quam meminim.*"<sup>52</sup> Augustine's argument is that one can never make something present unless it has been absent at some point. Furthermore, one can never bring something forward in memory unless it has been previously forgotten. Forgetting is described as a privation or absence of memory,<sup>53</sup> and within the Neo-Platonic logic of apophasis, is seen to be a constitutive part of remembering. "*Sed quid est oblivio, nisi privatio memoriae? Quomodo ergo adest ut eam meminim, quando cum adest meminim non possum? At si quod meminim memoria retinemus; oblivionem autem nisi meminimsemus, nequaquam possemus audito isto nomine, rem quae illo significatur agnoscere; memoria retinetur oblivio. Adest ergo ne obliviscamur, quae cum adest obliviscimur.*"<sup>54</sup> Augustine claims that we could never understand the concept or meaning of memory without the binary of memory and forgetting. One can never make present the act of forgetting, he says. It is only in remembering that we recall that we have forgotten. For Augustine, unlike Arendt, there is no spontaneity or newness that surges with the conflict between past and future. Augustine believed, like Plato, that all we know was once known but is now forgotten through *Lethe*; much like the slave-boy Meno, we are bound to recollection as a way of knowing.

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How do forgetting and remembering work together? Augustine maintains that the study of images may provide a useful clue, but he is aware that the relation of remembering to forgetting remains mysterious. After dismissing the possibility of speaking as a means of exploring the relationship between memory and forgetting, he asserts that we must turn to images:

*Quid illud tertium? quo pacto dicam imaginem oblivionis teneri memoria mea, non ipsam oblivionem, cum eam memini? Quo pacto et hoc dicam, quandoquidem cum imprimitur rei cuiusque imago in memoria, prius necesse est ut adsit res ipsa unde illa imago possit imprimi? Sic enim Carthaginis memini, sic omnium locorum quibus interfui, sic facies hominum quas vidi, et ceterorum sensuum nuntiata, sic ipsius corporis salutem sive dolorem. Cum praesto essent ista, cepit ab eis imagines memoria quas intuerer praesentes, et retractarem animo cum illa et absentia reminiscerer. Si ergo per imaginem suam non per seipsam in memoria tenetur oblivio, ipsa utique aderat ut ejus imago caperetur. Cum autem adesset, quomodo imaginem suam in memoria conscribebat, quando id etiam quod jam notatum invenit, praesentia sua delet oblivio? Et tamen quocumque modo, licet sit modus iste incomprehensibilis et inexplicabilis, etiam ipsam oblivionem meminisse me certus sum, qua id quod meminimus obruitur.<sup>55</sup>*

Memory makes images of what it encounters, be it sensual, personal, or objective. The act of forgetting itself is never visible, but it can be seen to operate through the images one has stored. Augustine says that he has images of his body, of Carthage, and of people and places he has seen. These are all images made by memory. Unlike God, who retains all images in the eternal present of his own mind, the human being can only hold certain images present to consciousness. Memory also makes images present to consciousness, but it can only do so insofar as forgetting has deleted other images (*praesentia sua delet oblivio*). Forgetting is the mechanism that helps presence come to be, for it deletes or withdraws certain images while memory puts forward others. We should note that although this discussion of forgetting and memory is deeply connected to images, in certain forms of thinking such as dialectics, there are no images. Augustine does not tell us how forgetting works here. Perhaps Arendt takes over this silence in her own version of thinking, in which forgetting does not seem to play a constitutive role.

Memory's selective role, which Arendt sees as vital for making things appear, however, tends to suggest that both appearing and non-appearing need to be considered. Augustine might call this non-appearance forgetting, a *privatio memoriae*. In any case, what is important for us to ponder here is the significance of Arendt's omission of forgetting in her analysis of memory. I would like to suggest that, just like memory, forgetting, too, is selective. We choose to forget certain things while others are indelibly impressed upon the mind. There is also a hierarchy attached to forgetting, as there is to memory: we choose to forget what is least valuable while retaining and bringing forward those things that we value or ought to value (i.e., in the two-in-one of conscience). I see two implications of a selective notion of forgetting that might be compatible with Augustinian memory.

First, Augustinian forgetting might help to account for why we really do have a selective view of the past, what Arendt calls a fragmentary view of the past. As she emphasises at the beginning of "Thinking," bad metaphysics and the reductive view of science can certainly be seen to have contributed to the idea of a continuous, seamless, and linear past, which is not an accurate representation of the past. But one can also understand the very nature of memory and forgetting as selective, and this can help us to work with a more fragmentary view of history and the past. Second (and I cannot help but think of her treatment of Eichmann here), perhaps the banality of evil lies not only in the failure to think, but also in forgetting, and this extends to our own forgetting as well. We forget and cannot remember what is proper to us in the in-between of plurality and politics: speech and action. Thus can evil arise, and things such as art, politics, and education<sup>56</sup>—all dear and central to Arendt's thinking—may decline or never emerge in the first place. Such evil transpires not only because of a failure to live the life of the mind, to live out the human condition in the fullest possible sense and in a meaningful fashion, but also because of forgetting—forgetting the fruitful place of the life of the mind within our lives as individuals and as members of communities. Neglecting the life of the mind is easier when we choose to forget, individually and collectively, who we are as human beings dwelling together on earth. If we forget the centrality of Augustine's insight that questioning oneself is how one becomes a self, then we undermine the very condition

of our humanity. Yet, if Augustine is right, forgetfulness is constitutive of memory. Perhaps, then, Eichmann's forgetting of the personhood of his Jewish captives, or the forgetting of the life of the mind, is inevitable. History certainly testifies to this reality and its bloody implications. Arendt is no utopian thinker: she would never claim that a rich memory as well as a lively engagement with the life of the mind constitute a panacea for evil. Yet, if we remain aware that our forgetting is both perilous and forgiving—forgiving in the sense that it can yield infinite possibilities from retrieved (and newly configured) memories from the past—then perhaps we can become more vigilant, more mindful and careful about this twofold forgetting that at once gives us a fragmented past, sparing us the necessity of inventing a continuous and seamless totalitarian history, as well as the frightful possibility that we may forget too much or forget the things that are vital for human survival and the cultivation of all that Arendt valued about human beings.

Finally, I would like to consider one last implication of forgetting, namely, conflict. The clash that is so crucial for Arendtian time, the clash between past and future, and the diagonally intersecting line of the present that this clash produces, can be further conditioned by forgetting. If we admit forgetting into the Arendtian view of the past, then there is always potential conflict between what is selected to come to presence and what remains hidden or forgotten in the “belly” of memory. This clash would also have implications for the future and the *nunc stans* of the present. What can appear in the future and the present is deeply conditioned by what is forgotten, which thereby structures the meaning and value of what comes to appear in the present and what can potentially come to be in the future. Furthermore, the imagination and the turning around in the interior conversation that is reflection, which are constitutive of thinking, are also conditioned by forgetting, which Arendt omits (forgets?) in her treatment of thinking and willing. In short, forgetting, understood in the Augustinian sense, would allow what comes to appear in the life of the mind to have greater or lesser differentiation, greater or lesser intensity, greater or lesser meaning. All of the colorations offered by forgetting could affect the tonality or moods of willing: fear and hope, the latter understood as the *negatio negationis*, the negation of the negation. Certain selected forms of forgetting, for example, could help us to ease our fears and intensify our hopes. The opposite is true as well. This being said, Arendt can certainly accommodate the hidden or things that do not appear, especially if we recall her citing of the Delphic oracle: “*oute legei, oute kryptei, alla semenai*.”<sup>57</sup> The ultimate question for us, though, is whether forgetting is a form of hiding or darkness, or the very essence of hiding or darkening. This question cannot be taken up here, but it may be, as Augustine believed, that we cannot speak about that which is hidden or non-appearing precisely because it is such. Perhaps, like Evodius and Wittgenstein, we must remain silent. *Tacite!*<sup>58</sup>

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### NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, eds. J. Vecchiarelli Scott and J. Chelsius Stark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 28 and 63.
2. Alessandro Marini, *La temporalità del linguaggio: Il significato secondo Hannah Arendt* (Ancona: L'orecchio di Van Gogh, 2008); Robert Lee-Nichols, "Judgment, History, Memory: Arendt and Benjamin on Connecting Us to Our Past," *Philosophy Today* 50:3 (Fall 2006, 307–323); Dean Hammer, "Freedom and Fatefulness: Augustine, Arendt and the Journey of Memory," *Theory, Culture and Society* 17:2 (2000, 83–104); Patricia Bowen-Moore, *Hannah Arendt's Philosophy of Natality* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989); 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, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 188–194.
3. See, for example, Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (London: Penguin, 1972); Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 1954); Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding* (New York: Schocken, 1994).
4. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 236–248, 294–326.
5. Hannah Arendt, "Thinking," *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 208. Henceforth *T*.
6. *T*, 209.
7. See Augustine of Hippo, *De genesi ad litteram*, 5:23, 45; and Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*, eds. M. Dubois and E. Pusey. Project Gutenberg E-book edition. (January 2011, 12:15). Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33849>.
8. Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 402–405.
9. Kampowski, *Arendt, Augustine and the New Beginning*, 188.
10. *Ibid.*, 194.
11. See the works of Hammer, "Freedom and Fatefulness"; David Grumett, "Arendt, Augustine and Evil," *Heythrop Journal* XLI (2000, 154–169); Alessandro Dal Lago, "La difficile vittoria sul tempo. Pensiero e azione in Hannah Arendt," *Hannah Arendt. La vita della mente*, trans. Giorgio Zanetti (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987), 9–59; Remo Bodei, "Hannah Arendt interprete di Agostino," *La pluralità irrepresentabile. Il pensiero politico di Hannah Arendt*, ed. Roberto Esposito (Urbino: Quattro Venti, 1989); Marini, *La temporalità del linguaggio*.
12. Jeffrey Andrew Barash, "Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Remembrance," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 10:2 (2002, 171–182).
13. *T*, 195.
14. *T*, 201.
15. *T*, 201.
16. I have become a question to myself.
17. *T*, 201.
18. *T*, 201.
19. *T*, 201–202.
20. *T*, 98–128.
21. *T*, 203.
22. *T*, 203.
23. *T*, 205.
24. *T*, 204–205.
25. *T*, 207.
26. *T*, 211.
27. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 27–73.
28. *T*, 212–213.
29. *T*, 210.
30. Hannah Arendt, "Willing," *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt, 1971), 13. Henceforth *W*.
31. *W*, 14.
32. *W*, 35.
33. *W*, 35.
34. *W*, 37.
35. *W*, 37.
36. *W*, 70.
37. *W*, 38.
38. *W*, 37–38.
39. *W*, 44.
40. Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. R. Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13–15.

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41. *Ibid.*, 70–73.
42. Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. T.K. Abbott and L. Denis (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 51.
43. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 27–28.
44. “Too late have I loved You, beauty ever ancient and ever anew. Too late have I loved You.” (Translation mine.) Augustine of Hippo, *Confessiones*. Eds. M. Dubois and E. Pusey. Project Gutenberg E-book edition. (January 2011, X, xxvii, 38). Available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33849>.
45. Arendt, *Love and Saint Augustine*, 28.
46. Arendt, *Love*, 28.
47. Arendt, *Love*, 28.
48. Arendt, *Love*, 29.
49. Arendt, *Love*, 28.
50. *W*, 70ff.
51. Scholars of Augustine have remarked on the value of forgetting for Augustine’s larger philosophy beyond the scope of time. See the works of thinkers such as Robert P. Kennedy, “Book Eleven: The *Confessiones* as Eschatological Narrative,” in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 180–184; Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 96–101. The former focuses on distension and self-creation; the latter discusses Augustine’s view of time and how forgetting is important for personal and collective memory. The question of the self is also broached here.
52. Augustine, *Confessiones*, X, xvi, 24. “So when I remember memory, memory is available to itself through itself. But when I remember forgetfulness, both memory and forgetfulness are present—memory by means of which I could remember, forgetfulness which I did remember.” Saint Augustine, *Confessions: A New Translation by Henry Chadwick* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 193.
53. For further discussion of this point, please see James Wetzel’s masterful article, “Time After Augustine,” *Religious Studies*, 31:3 (September 1995, 341–357).
54. Augustine, *Confessiones*, X, xvi, 24. Chadwick’s *Confessions*, 193: “But what is forgetfulness except loss of memory? How then is it present for me to remember when, if it is present, I have no power of remembering? What we remember, we retain by memory. But unless we could recall forgetfulness, we could never hear the word and recognize the thing which the word signifies. Therefore memory retains forgetfulness. So it is there lest we forget what, when present, makes us forget.”
55. Chadwick’s *Confessions*, 193–194: “What of a third solution? Can I say that my memory holds the image of forgetfulness, not forgetfulness itself, when I am remembering it? How can I say this when, for the image of an object to be impressed upon the memory, it is first necessary for the object itself to be present, so that an impression of the image becomes possible? This is how I remember Carthage, and all the places where I have been, the faces of people I have seen, and the information derives from the other senses. This is also how I know of the healthy or painful condition of my body. When these things were present, memory took images of them, images which I could contemplate when they were present and reconsider in mind when I recollected them even though absent from me. If, then, memory holds forgetfulness not through itself but through its image, forgetfulness must itself have been present for its image to be registered. But when it was present, how did it inscribe its image upon the memory, when by its very presence, forgetfulness deletes whatever it finds already there? Yet in some way, though incomprehensible and inexplicable, I am certain that I remember forgetfulness itself, and yet forgetfulness destroys what we remember.”
56. See Hannah Arendt’s collection of essays in: *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006).
57. “It does not speak, it does not hide. It intimates everything.”
58. I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its support in writing this paper.