Hannah Arendt’s *Denktagebuch* is certainly the richest source for her thoughts on love, richer even than her dissertation about the concept of love in Augustine. Here, all loose ends converge, waiting to be tied up—it turns out in vain. Some of them go back to her earlier, even the earliest works, others appear here for the first time. In June and December 1952, for example, she comments on Rilke’s “abandoned lovers,” a topic she had already discussed in an essay written with her first husband Günter Anders in 1930. In 1952 and in 1969, she quotes Heidegger’s *volo ut sis* and reflects on its ambiguous meaning. Plato’s myth of the spherical creatures makes an appearance; and of course, Augustine, her “old friend and benefactor,” and his concept of charity show up time and again to be criticized. We find her thoughts on passion and *eros*, on friendship and sexuality, on marriage and faithfulness. Many, but not all, of these “thought threads” will find their way into the works to come.

As Barbara Hahn has pointed out, one entry in the *Denktagebuch* suggests especially that love will play a superior role in her philosophy of plurality: “In this realm of plurality, which is the political realm, one has to ask the old questions—what is love, what is friendship, what is solitude,
what is acting, thinking, etc., but not the one question of philosophy: Who
is Man, nor the Was kann ich wissen, was darf ich hoffen, was soll ich tun? The
three Kantian questions, which all come down to the one question
“Who is man?” are not compatible with Arendt’s notion of plurality, which
is so closely linked to her understanding of politics. The “old questions,”
however, have lost nothing of their dignity; they have to be asked again and
answered anew; and yet, there is no such thing as a “vita passiva.” Arendt
does not write a book on love and friendship in addition to her works on
the vita activa and the vita contemplativa. In May 1955, she noted in her
Denktagebuch: “Philosophy, which sees everything from the perspective of
‘contemplatio,’ cared neither about ‘actio’ nor ‘passio.’ In the modern age,
both step into the center of thinking, not for the sake of their own dignity,
but because man is thrown back onto himself, tossed out of the common
world. But then ‘actio’ is precisely misunderstood as work and ‘passio’ in
the sense of desire.”

One can hardly doubt that Arendt’s oeuvre as a whole is oriented at
remedying philosophy’s neglect of actio. When she noted these lines, she
was lecturing at Berkeley about amor mundi and thereby about the dignity
of the active life, for which the highest activity is not labor or work but
action. But what about the category of passio, which philosophy equally
neglected?

In this essay, I claim that Arendt did not neglect the personal and inti-
mate life, as it has often been suggested even if it is true that Arendt’s main
works concern the active life and the life of the mind; and although love
does not fit in with labor, work, or action—or with thinking, willing, and
judging—love plays an important role in Arendt’s thinking.

In her preliminary work for The Human Condition for example, love fea-
tures among the fundamental modes of life for a while, but is left out later. However, remarks like the one that desire is not the authentic form of passio
point to the fact that Arendt was not indifferent toward the “heart.” Against
Marx, for example, she claimed that the “elementary relation between
humans” was not based on coercion but on need (dem Bedürfen), that it was,
hence, essentially “Eros”: “Men get together as persons because they need
each other (love).” The fundamental forms in which humans encounter
each other, are neither labor, an isolated activity, nor production, in which
one man sets himself up as a creator god, but action and love.

The Denktagebuch makes clear that the vita passiva must be understood
as an independent mode of life. In the first half of the 1950s, we find sev-
eral lists about the “elementary human activities,” the “active modes of
being alive” (die tätigen Modi des Lebendigseins), sometimes in relation to
their “political indications,” sometimes as “modifications of plurality.”

Arendt sketches as it were a landscape of the conditio humana, assuming that the fundamental modes of life (normally, she counts labor, work, action, thinking, and suffering among them), are assigned to specific spaces like the public, the social, or the intimate sphere, and specific relational forms like solitude, solidarity, or friendship. She supposes these assignments to be in the nature of the activities themselves.

But what does she mean by the odd activity of “suffering” (leiden)? Its meaning encompasses “being passive,” “enduring” in contrast to “acting” in the wider as well as the perturbationes animi, the passions of the soul, in the narrower sense. Related to suffering, pathein, is love, which Arendt sometimes calls the only true passion, because all other “passions” were really desire. Sometimes she gives the impression that love as desire was the inauthentic form, while passion was the authentic form: “Passion is always connected with love; the man of action—Achilles—knows love only as desire, and it then plays a minor role. Ulysses, the much enduring one, knows love as passion; the gods play on him.” Other entries however show that Arendt did not simply identify love with passion; she mentions forms of love, which are not passion, and forms of passion, which are not love.

Although her lists are still in a state of flux, they already show the basic structure of The Human Condition with its threefold division of the active life; in the book, however, she dedicates just a few paragraphs to thinking and suffering, not whole chapters or parts. What is left from her extensive reflection on love in the Denktagebuch, is the claim that love was “by its very nature . . . unworldly,” “the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces.” I would like to argue that this somewhat undercomplex concept of love in The Human Condition is challenged by some of her entries in the Denktagebuch as well as other texts. There is more to love than just being a worldless passion.

What is love according to Arendt? What are we doing when we love? Where are we if we are neither alone with ourselves nor equally bound to all other people but entirely focused on one person?

Although it is not possible to fully reproduce the richness and originality of the thoughts and themes that appear, reappear, morph, and develop, throughout the Denktagebuch, there are fundamental ideas, which allow a coherent reconstruction of her concept(s) of love. In the following, I will give an overview of these core thoughts. Though her notes on love are comprehensive, the scattered and sometimes fragmentary remarks cannot always be understood without contextualizing them within her published
works and correspondences. I take Arendt’s ambiguous relation between love and the world to be the Ariadne’s thread that will help lead a way through the labyrinth of Arendt’s voluminous notes. Given Arendt’s claim that love was “apolitical,” her notion of *amor mundi* (or love for the world) has been called “surprising,” “mysterious,” and “highly paradoxical.” The *Denktagebuch* helps to illuminate such seemingly contradictory claims. I would like to suggest that Arendt’s ambivalent, partly paradoxical thinking about love emerges from a—never systematic—differentiation between various forms of love. It is possible to distinguish three or even four different concepts of love in the *Denktagebuch*. The characteristics of these different kinds of love may partly intersect, but they cannot be subsumed in a single, consistent concept of love:

1. Probably the best-known concept is love as a worldless passion. This is the same notion of love we find in *The Human Condition*.
2. A less influential concept is love as *eros* in the sense of Aristophanes’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, namely, as a desire of what one is not. The precondition for *eros* or desire is plurality, yet it is completely different from politics.
3. In 1955, Arendt makes notes about her plan to write a book called *Amor Mundi*. With it we find a third notion of love, which at first seems completely unconnected to the form of love that affects humans: the love for the world.
4. The forth notion of love we find in Arendt is love understood as unconditional affirmation, and its main source is the Augustinian (or Heideggerian) quote *volo ut sis*.

I will, however, focus in the following almost exclusively on the first and the last concept. Compared to “passion” and “affirmation,” “desire” is systematically less relevant for Arendt’s philosophy. And although *amor mundi* is a very important notion for Arendt’s political theory, discussing it here in detail would go beyond the scope of this chapter. Given that it has a different “object” than the other forms of love, the decision might be justified.

With regard to the first concept of love, love as passion, I will argue that the separation between love and the world is not as absolute as Arendt sometimes suggests. Arendt sees love as a creative force, one that while it is politically destructive nevertheless is generative of human plurality. Furthermore, I will argue that the forth notion, love as unconditional affirmation, sheds some light on the seemingly paradoxical relation between love and the world.
Love as Divine Power and Worldless Passion

“What I want to tell you now is nothing but, at heart, a very sober portrayal of the situation. I love you as I did on the first day—you know that, and I have always known it, even before this reunion. The path you showed me is longer and more difficult than I thought. . . . The solitude of this path is self-chosen and is the only way of living given me. But the desolation that fate has kept in store not only would have taken from me the strength to live in the world, that is, not in isolation; it also would have blocked my path, which, as it is wide and not a leap, runs through the world.”

Arendt’s claim that love is “worldless” is certainly the best known of her theses about love. Even in this early letter to Heidegger (actually her earliest extant letter to him), Arendt speaks about the conflict between love and living-in-the-world, and closes with the lines: “And, if God exists, I shall but love thee better after death.”

Decades later, she adds an interpretation to these verses by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which Rilke had translated into German: “and not, namely, because I don’t ‘live’ anymore, and am therefore maybe able to be faithful or the like, but on condition that I continue to live after death and have lost in it only the world!”

Since working on her dissertation Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin (1929), Arendt abhorred the idea of founding a community on love, because Augustinian charity would turn the world into a desert, and not into a homeland. The believer does not love his neighbor for his own sake, but instead to lead him toward God. In her later works, too, Arendt claims that whereas the “world” as a space for politics was the “product of amor mundi,” love for another person was a passion, in which we suffer the “power of the universe”—as if under a divine spell. As did Heidegger, Arendt does not understand “passion” in modern, psychological terms, but as an overindividual power:

Although love nests in man’s heart, she writes in the Denktagebuch, the heart is neither its origin nor its “home:” “As a universal power of life, love does not really have a human origin.” No one, she writes, can escape this power, which makes us a part of the “living universe.” To turn the divine event of love, which man can only endure, into a feeling or a friendship means to evade the power of love, to deny it. Insofar as it takes power over the heart but does not originate from it, Arendt distinguishes between love as an event and as a mere feeling or emotion: “Passions degenerate into feelings . . . because we cannot stand to be purely seized by passion (the pathos), and fall back on feelings (under the pretense of internalization).” The difference between “passion” and “feeling” for Arendt is that feelings are always connected to a subject, while
all subjectivity is dissolved through passion: “To differentiate: I have feelings, but love has me.” The widely held assumption that love was a relation between subject and object originates in the dominating experience of productive work. But love is as far from working as thinking or acting. Homo faber is neither capable of “thinking—namely being purely active—nor of loving—namely being purely passive.”

This last quotation from the Denktagebuch undergirds Arendt’s stance toward the vita passiva, insofar it shows that in addition to thought and action, love can be counted among the pure activities, which are assigned the highest dignity. Although she writes “Passion is the exact opposite of action,” Arendt also points out that “enduring’ in the sense of pathein is only the other side of acting, in the sense of prattein. The opposite of pathein is poein.” Action and endurance belong together, and they are both a far cry from production and its categories: subjects and objects, means and ends.

As early as in Rahel Varnhagen, the book in which Arendt discusses the nature of passion for the first time, it becomes clear how closely her notion of love is connected to a certain notion of time. Love is a sudden irruption of an event that transforms one’s existence for good. In the Denktagebuch, too, Arendt claims, that love was “always a ‘coup de foudre,’” in stark contrast to friendship, which needs duration: “a two weeks old friendship does not exist.” As love is already accomplished in the “sublime moment” of its beginning, its duration is not crucial, but the event alone—“out of which can emerge a story or fate” (aus dem eine Geschichte werden kann oder ein Geschick).

For this reason, faith has a different meaning in love than in friendship. “Being faithful” does not necessarily mean to spend a life together, but to let the common story or the common fate evolve freely, “without all guarantees and faithful only in not forgetting what happened and what was sent [by fate].” Because all institutions have the tendency to consume events, passion can only be destroyed by marriage, which, subject to divorce, is no longer a real institution. As the “institution of love,” marriage makes love “completely and utterly homeless and defenseless.”

The passion of love in its extreme intensity belongs certainly to the greatest experiences man can have: “Who has never endured this power, does not live, does not belong to the living.” But this does not mean that love for Arendt is (as for Heidegger or Augustine), a reliable source of knowledge:

Love is not blind and makes not blind; rather the opposite is true; but love dedicates itself to the darkness of the heart, which lights up and
illuminates itself . . . for moments only. . . . The venture of love, its “blindness,” is that it does not reckon with deceit and cannot reckon with it. Therefore it is true: “Wer sich der Liebe ergibt, hält er sein Leben zu Rat?” [Who yields to love, does he spare his life? (Goethe)]

Love and philosophy belong together, insofar they both “flee the world, are apolitical and antipolitical,” but they belong to each other only in this regard. While lovers are close to each other up to the point of symbiosis, thinking shifts its object in a distance to be able to look at it. Moreover, while thinking creates plurality through its inner dialogue, love inversely turns two people into one. By the “absoluteness of a relation, which is not a relation anymore, because one does not relate anymore, but one is,” the common realm between people disappears. This realm between people normally is the medium to relate to and understand others, whereas if we understand each other directly, without relation to anything that lies between us, we love. The thunderbolt of passion disrupts all human relations and opens up an experience of an absolute, which is not communicable. The intensity of a passion seems to make love an embodiment of life itself, and, by the same token, an antagonist of death: “[Love] is the power of life and guaranties therefore its progression against death. This is why love ‘overcomes’ death.”

From this point of view, the loss of the world in love is by no means only a privative state, because it brings man’s specific humaneness, “man as such,” as it were, to the fore. In “consuming” the world, love unveils the human being behind the persona, which always is, at least in part, a mask: “If [love] seizes humans, it becomes the most ‘humane’ [quality] that humans have, namely a humaneness that exists worldless, objectless (the beloved one is never object), spaceless.” Love reveals the specifically human element in the universe, because it shows that humans are more than the world they create: “as lovers,” she writes, “every human being is—in a unimaginably ironic way—also the human being as such [der Mensch].”

But politically speaking, the experience of such an absolute is a form of death within the world, because there must not be any interfering of the “divine” within politics, that is, there must not be an absolute measure. “In politics,” Arendt wrote to James Baldwin in an unpublished letter, “love is a stranger. . . . Hatred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in the private.” Time and again Arendt warned not to mix love with politics, because in the heat of passion “the world between us, the world of plurality and homeliness, goes up in flames.” In *The Human Condition* and in *On Revolution*, she emphasizes
that introducing love into politics will inevitably change even the most authentic feeling into hypocrisy. The verses by William Blake: “Never seek to tell thy love,/love that never told can be” were for her a credo.\(^49\) Love for the *world* (and not of *mankind*) can be the motif for political engagement, but it must neither be functionalized as a political argument nor regarded as the proper relation between people acting *in concert*. With these claims, Arendt does not want to debase private phenomena. She only fights against any mixing of the private with the public: “Whenever we have souls in politics, we are perverted. Whenever we are soulless in private life, we are perverted.”\(^50\)

**Creativity and Tragedy**

For a long time, we had little reason to question that “worldless passion” was Arendt’s main, if not her only concept of love. But with the posthumous publication of her correspondence and, most notably, her *Denktagebuch*, the wall she raised between the private and the public realm has revealed some cracks. When we look closer, we find a more complex model of how love and the world relate to each other. Although she repeatedly refers to love as apolitical, insisting that love has no role to play in politics, there are other passages where the *positive* and creative interaction between love and the world comes to the fore.

Arendt makes it clear that the state of worldlessness described earlier cannot last. As a life in the absolute is impossible, because it creates its own relativity,\(^51\) so too love without the world has no constancy: “the pure sounding of love urges one always back into communication, in which one shares something common with the other. The thou of the I becomes the other—if all goes well, the one closest to oneself.”\(^52\) From this perspective, there are only two possibilities for lovers: Either they try to conserve their passionate yet worldless symbiosis and live in eternal remembrance, or they return into the world. One possible way of returning is for Arendt “symbolized in the child,” who at the same time separates and connects his parents. But the return to the world as the only “happy ending” of love is at the same time the end of love.\(^53\) As the *Denktagebuch* testifies, Arendt did not only discover the kernel of human freedom in the phenomenon of birth, but also reflected on the symbolic meaning of the act of love that precedes it: The union of two people, by which a new person is created, is a double metamorphosis from duality to unity, and from unity to plurality: “It could be possible that mankind arises, because the two, having become one, ebbs away into plurality . . . but in a way that the principle of life
(which is the pure vitality of two becoming one), must necessarily survive even within plurality for the sake of mankind’s continuation.”

But if the loving unification of two people is the dynamic mediation between singularity and plurality, the separation between love and the world cannot be absolute. In 1953, Arendt notes in her *Denktagebuch*: “From the absolute worldlessness of the lovers, a new world has its source, symbolized in the child. To this new in-between, the new space of a beginning world, the lovers belong from now on, and they are responsible for it. . . . Love is living without a world. As such, it proves to be world-creating; it creates, engenders a new world. Every love is the beginning of a new world; that is its greatness and its tragedy. Because in this new world in so far as it is not only new but also world, it perishes.”

I must admit that I am always struck by Arendt’s claim that every love was the beginning of a new world. To my knowledge, the *Denktagebuch* is the only source where Arendt discusses the creative force of love at such length. Love might be “worldless,” even world-destructive—but it is also “world-creating.” And yet, passion does not survive the act of birth, which forces the lovers to act, no matter if the lovers literally have a baby or accept another challenge in the world. For Arendt, love, like pregnancy, seems to be a state of transition only, an ephemeral process, the sense of which seems to be nothing else than to create something new—as if love was “only necessary to make a beginning at all.”

Consequently, the relation between love and the world is not simply that of mutual exclusion or destruction—it is, first of all, a dialectic or a tragic relation. “Tragedy” must be understood here in the Hegelian sense: The conflict between love and the world is tragic, because both are equally justified and yet cannot coexist. One principle has to yield, but in its negation, it is still there; abolished, but also preserved and elevated. Love creates a world as a result of which it perishes, but in sacrificing itself for the creation of a new world, love becomes immortal. As such, love is not simply a destructive force; it is a catalyst of togetherness and plurality in the world.

*A World in Miniature*

If I am right and the tragic relation between love and the world raises questions about the prejudice that Arendt did not assign much value to private love, it remains questionable how convincing her conception of the creative force of love is. Why should love perish with the return into the world; more important, why should it “be transformed into another mode of belonging together”? Until now, it seemed as if love and the world, although intimately
connected, could not coexist. But love is not only the complementary side of the world. There is also another generative idea of love as a world in miniature that Arendt explores in some of her letters and other less “official” texts. After the death of her husband, Heinrich Blücher, Arendt wrote to Heidegger: “Between two people, sometimes, how rarely, a world grows. It is then one’s homeland; in any case it was the only homeland, we were willing to recognize. This tiny microworld where you can always save yourself from the world, disintegrates when the other has gone away." This rare passage gives us a glimpse into how Arendt thought the relation between a long-lasting love and the world. Here, love is not a stranger in or an enemy to the world—it is “a” world, in addition to “the” world. But what is this little world—is it simply the oasis Arendt speaks of in Introduction into Politics, a refuge where one can hide from “the” world? Why does she call it a “world” at all?

In a laudatio for Karl Jaspers, Arendt described love as a space where the integrity of a person can endure in dark times:

It was thanks to good fortune that Jaspers could be isolated in the course of his life, but could not be driven into solitude. That good fortune is based on a marriage, in which a woman who is his peer has stood at his side ever since his youth. If two people do not succumb to the illusion that the ties binding them have made them one, they can create a world anew between them. Certainly for Jaspers this marriage has never been merely a private thing. It has proved that two people of different origins—Jaspers’ wife is Jewish—could create a world of their own. And from that world in miniature he has learned, as from a model, what happens or what could happen in the world.

In this passage, Arendt abandons—as a tribute to Jaspers’s notion of love or out of conviction—her strict distinction between public and private, oikos and polis, love and the world. Here, the space love creates is not ephemeral. Arendt contemplates togetherness as a form of playground providing the possibility of preparing for the world. But she makes it very clear that this kind of love can only occur under certain conditions—one of them being the renouncing of complete symbiosis. If two people are too close, there is no space between them for the world to appear, as it were.

Already in her earliest remark on love, which can be found in an unpublished letter to Erwin Loewenson, Arendt emphasized the importance of equality in love. A loving relationship demands, she writes in 1927, “that the phenomenon of servitude which obliterates the one person and thus makes love impossible, does not appear.” Given a relationship of equals,
love can overcome being only an ephemeral state or a protecting oasis, and transform itself into quite the reverse: At its best, love creates a space where two people can open up in complete frankness and interact with each other in a way that Jaspers beautifully called “a loving struggle.” In this sense, love is neither passion nor a “life-giving source,” but a space where one can exercise political virtue such as dialogue. Thus, the laudatio continues: “Within this small world [Jaspers] unfolded and practiced his incompa-
rable faculty for dialogue . . . the constant readiness to give a candid account of himself . . . and above all the ability to lure what is otherwise passed over in silence into the area of discourse.”

While Arendt normally emphasized that lovers understand each other immediately and therefore talk without relating to objects, the relationship here is plural and thus worldly. Arendt followed Jaspers in considering debates as essential for personal relationships because arguments are the condition for recognizing someone as equal. Thus, the dignity of a friendship or a love does not depend on the unanimity with the alter ego but on a complete mutual trust, which can never occur in public. It may well be this trust that is expressed in the loving word as the absolute affirmation: *amo: volo ut sis.*

**Volo ut sis: Love as Unconditional Affirmation**

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the phrase *amo: volo ut sis*—“I love you, I want you to be”—was Arendt’s lifelong companion. Heidegger had sent her the words in a letter in May 1925, attributing them to Augustine. While he understands the phrase as the will to the other’s being, a will that lets the other be and thus transforms the other’s existence, Arendt rejects the Augustinian idea of love in her dissertation as a form of domination or denial. Later, however, in her *Denktagebuch*, she is more ambiguous about its meaning. In 1952, she notes that *volo ut sis* could be related to one’s essence, the authentic being of someone, and as such would not be “love, but imperiousness, which, under the pretense of affirming, subjects the other’s essence under the own will. But it can also mean: I want you to be—whatever you eventually will have been. That is to say, knowing, that no one is ‘ante mortem’ who he is, and trusting that it will have been just right in the end.” In contrast to her middle period, in which she characterizes love above all as worldless passion, Arendt comes eventually to discuss love in the context of willing and judging; in these texts, she discovers in love the supreme form of affirmation.
In 1969, she notes, “The highest form of recognition is love: volo ut sis.” In *The Life of the Mind*, too, Arendt repeatedly refers to love as the strongest and “unconditional acceptance.” “There is no greater assertion of something or somebody than to love it, that is, to say: I will that you be—Amo: Volo ut sis.” Love in this sense is the free choice of the other person comparable to the act of willing. It is the affirmation of the other who is loved for his own sake and not as an object of desire: “The willing ego, when it says in its highest manifestation, ‘Amo: Volo ut sis,’ ‘I love you; I want you to be’—and not ‘I want to have you’ or ‘I want to rule you’—shows itself capable of the same love with which supposedly God loves men, whom he created only because He willed them to exist and whom He loves without desiring them.” In Arendt’s understanding, “I want you to be” is not the will to the other person’s future possibilities, her potential, but the affirmation of her present reality and givenness.

Although Arendt sometimes labels volo ut sis as a form of “recognition,” the Hegelian overtones of this notion and its association with struggle are not what Arendt implies. In contrast to other forms of affirmation or appreciation, love is the pure gift of the lover to the beloved. Unlike for rights, for example, it would be absurd to fight for this gift. Therefore, love is the complementary side of other, less exclusive forms of recognition like law, respect and solidarity. In this regard, love itself is not political, but it becomes clear that the political or public sphere would be incomplete without the intimate realm. It is love’s specific humaneness to show and value that every person is more than what she creates and accomplishes:

The human being who has lost his place in a community, his political status in the struggle of his time, and the legal personality which makes his actions and part of his destiny a consistent whole, is left with those qualities which usually can become articulate only in the sphere of private life and must remain unqualified, mere existence in all matters of public concern. This mere existence, that is, all that which is mysteriously given us by birth and which includes the shape of our bodies and the talents of our minds, can be adequately dealt with only by the unpredictable hazards of friendship and sympathy, or by the great and incalculable grace of love, which says with Augustine, “Volo ut sis (I want you to be),” without being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation.

What Arendt discusses here, in the chapter about the right to have rights in *Origins of Totalitarianism*, is that aspect of every person that cannot be
recognized by the public, because it is not based on words and deeds, on
achievement and excellence, but ultimately on something unspeakably indi-
vidual and contingent. Love in this sense is not a divine power, it is a “con-
firmation of the sheer arbitrariness of being: We have not made ourselves,
we stand in need of confirmation. We are strangers, we stand in need of
being welcome. I want you to be.”

Fame and honor, the recognition of the public, can never be a substitute
for this pure gift of love. It is this affirmation of the other that forms the
basis for unreserved dialogue. In discourse, the world of politics enters the
small world of the lovers, as the example of Jaspers shows. The world inhab-
ited by the lovers is an object of their common care. Speaking seems to be
that titration point in which the inwardness of thinking and feeling can
become acting in the world. Thus, the world en miniature represents and
relates to “the” world where the totality of mankind is assembled. Arendt
therefore agrees with Lessing in considering personal relationships as the
foundation for humaneness. As discourse gives intimate relationships a
political meaning, it introduces humaneness into politics, a humaneness
that teaches to prefer people to principles. And from this point of view, love
as affirmation would have an indirect influence on the political sphere.

Moreover, I claim that Arendt’s amor mundi can only be adequately
understood by taking into account her understanding of volo ut sis. When
she talks about the love for the world, she is not referring to a passion, but
to love understood as unconditional affirmation. With her conceptualiza-
tion of love as affirmation, Arendt bases love and love for the world on a
common conceptual ground. The concept they have in common is love as
an engaged, but in the Kantian sense disinterested affirmation of the
beloved, of his dignity and autonomy. The amor mundi is a “disinterested
interest in the world,” a lively engagement for the worldly inter homines
esse, which is not based on self-interest. For “a true lover of this world”
politics are “sui generis,” not a means to an end, but an end in itself.

Affirmation can be a stance towards the world as well as toward other
people, and Arendt actually used the quote in both contexts alike. She did
not only summarize the highest affirmation of other people, but also the
fulfilled relation of men toward the world in these very words, as, among
others, the manuscript for her seminar Kant’s Political Philosophy proves, on
the margins of which she wrote in capitals “AMO UT SIS”: The “politi-
cally minded” dilectores mundi do not only love the world, because it is,
but because they want it to be, they love in order to create it.

By this concept of love, which is unrelated to passion, the concept of
amor mundi is not only saved theoretically, but love for men and love for
the world can also be combined practically. He, who experiences in private
that the dignity and autonomy of the other is not only unimpeachable, but
also does not diminish one’s self-love, but on the contrary, nourishes it,
may universalize this experience in forms of friendship, respect, solidarity
or love for the world.

Conclusion

With Lessing, Arendt once said that she was not obliged to resolve the
difficulties she raised. The following conclusion is my attempt to deal with
these difficulties. I am quite sure that the implicit differentiation between
several forms of love did not simply happen to Arendt. Arendt embraced
contradictions and regarded them as characteristic of great thinking. She
thought dialectically, in her very own way, not through a Hegelian dialec-tic but with a certain “vividness” of her concepts. Her notions are never
carved in tablets of stone as it were, because they react to new events and
experiences and they do always implicate a process.

I do not advocate here blurring distinctions Arendt made. We should take
her warning to keep the private and the public sphere separately very seri-
ously. But while we should not blur her distinctions, neither should we
overestimate the importance of each and every one of her notions. Instead,
we should keep the diversity of her concepts and the liveliness of her think-
ing. It is the variety of forms of love, which must not be given up in favor
for a logical system, because it corresponds to the different modes of
human existing. Arendt’s response to the perils of love she diagnosed
throughout her work (the world-fleeing égoïsme à deux or the metaphysical
love for principles) can be found in the diversity of her concepts of love. It
is the plurality of love that guarantees the mutual protection of the public
and the intimate sphere. We need them both to turn a desert into a world.

Notes

1. For Arendt’s use of the epigraph, see D XXIII.12.609.
2. D IX.19.215; D XII.13.279. Unless stated otherwise, all translations
are mine.
3. Arendt in an unpublished letter to Erwin Loewenson from October
4. D XIII.2.295. See Barbara Hahn, Hannah Arendt. Leidenschaften,
Menschen und Bücher (Berlin: Berliner Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), 51ff.
5. D XXI.35.520: “Die Philosophie, die alles aus der Perspektive der ‘contem-
platio’ sieht, hat sich weder um ‘actio’ noch um ‘passio’ gekümmert. Im modernen
Zeitalter treten beide ins Zentrum des Denkens, nicht um ihrer eigenen Würde willen, sondern weil der Mensch auf sich zurückgeworfen, aus der gemeinsamen Welt herausgeschleudert ist. Aber da wird dann eben ‘actio’ als Herstellen und ‘passio’ im Sinne des Begehrens mißverstanden.”


7. D IX.3.203: “Menschen finden zueinander als Personen, weil sie einander bedürfen (Liebe).”


15. In this essay, I will not discuss the much-debated origin of the quotation, cf. Tatjana Noemi Tömmel, Wille und Passion (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2013).


17. Arendt and Heidegger, Briefe, 66. Rainer Maria Rilke’s translation of the 43th Sonnet from the Portuguese by Elizabeth Barrett Browning differs from the original; he writes “Und wenn Gott es gibt” (And if God exists) while Barrett Browning writes “And if God choose.”


22. *D* XVI.3.373.
32. Ibid.
34. *D* II.26.49.
36. Ibid., 49.
38. *D* VI.3.127: “Liebe ist nicht blind und macht nicht blind; das Gegenteil ist eher wahr; aber Liebe verschreibt sich der Dunkelheit des Herzens, das auch ihr sich nur augenblickweise erhellt und erleuchtet. . . . Das Wagnis der Liebe, ihre ‘Blindheit’, ist, daß sie mit dem Betrug nicht rechnet und nicht rechnen kann. Darum stimmt: ‘Wer sich der Liebe ergibt, hält er sein Leben zu Rat?’” The quote within the quote is from Goethe’s Elegy “Amyntas” and could be translated as, “Who yields to love, does he spare his life?”
40. *D* XXVII.79.793.
41. *D* XXVI.33.729.
42. *D* XVIII.12.428.
44. *D* XVI.3.373: “Wenn sie Menschen ergreift, wird die Liebe allerdings zum ‘Menschlichsten’ der Menschen, nämlich zu einer Menschlichkeit, die welt-los, objekt-los (der Geliebte ist nie Objekt), raum-los besteht.”
45. *D* IX.3.204: “Und als Liebende, die als Eine die zwei brauchen, um sich von der Natur die Drei usw. schenken zu lassen, nämlich aus der Einzigkeit sofort in
die Mehrheit, aus dem Singular in den Plural müssen, [sind die Menschen,] ist jeder Mensch—auf eine nicht auszudenkende ironische Weise—auch der Mensch.”


48. D XIX.39.470. See the German edition of The Human Condition: Hannah Arendt, Vita activa oder vom tätigen Leben (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2007), 309, where the image of the destroying powers of love seems more drastic.


51. D XXVI.33.729.


54. D III.8.61: “Es könnte sein, dass das Menschengeschlecht dadurch entsteht, dass die Eins gewordene Zwei in die Pluralität . . . abebbt, aber so, dass das Prinzip des Lebens: das die reine Lebendigkeit des Eins-werdens von Zwei ist, zur Fortdauer des Menschengeschlechts notwendig auch in der Pluralität erhalten bleiben muss.”


56. D XII.13.279: “als sei sie nur notwenig gewesen, damit überhaupt ein Anfang gemacht werde.”


59. Hannah Arendt, “Karl Jaspers: A Laudatio,” Men in Dark Times (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 1983), 78. I changed the translation in the last phrase to be closer to the original.

60. Hannah Arendt to Erwin Loewenson, letter from January 23, 1928, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, Signature: A: Arendt 76.956/2: “Dazu
gehört allerdings gerade, daß das Phänomen der Hörigkeit, die die Person des Einen
auslöst und damit Liebe gerade unmöglich macht, nicht eintritt.”

64. D XII.12.276ff: “Liebe, sondern Herrschaftsbegehren, die unter dem Vorwand zu
bestätigen, selbst noch das Wesen des Anderen zum Objekt des eigenen Willens macht.
Es kann aber auch heißen: Ich will, daß Du seist—wie immer Du auch schließlich
gewesen sein wirst. Nämlich wissend, daß niemand ‘ante mortem’ ist, der er ist, und
vertrauend, daß es gerade am Ende recht gewesen sein wird.”
65. D XXVI.69.748.
67. Ibid., 104.
68. Ibid., 136.
71. Hannah Arendt, “On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about
73. Arendt, History of Political Theory, Signature: 024019.
74. Ibid., Signature: 024025.
75. Arendt, Kant’s Political Philosophy, Signature: 032295.