How Do We Make A World?
Hannah Arendt, the Khoi-San, and the Problems of Alterity and Humanism

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If you were to ask me what God I believed in in political philosophy, it would be the notion that there is no such thing as individual freedom, that human freedom is finally, always a project of making a world with others.

— Wendy Brown, “Learning to Love Again”

not on this grass cliff but somewhere on the other side of the world, somewhere, with its sunlit islands, where what they called history could not happen. Where?

— Derek Walcott, *Omeros*

What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.

— Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*
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PROLOGUE

What does freedom mean? Perhaps, I offer, freedom is not a quality or right of an individual but rather a project of making a world with others. This understanding of freedom dovetails with the kind of political thinking that often emerges from situations of horrible violence — the shattering of worlds that accompanies colonial domination and destruction. These parallel concerns with how the world should be — a question of freedom — and what the world is — a question of alterity — form the subject of this thesis. I offer resources that can help us make a better world: one that affirms the dignity of politics as a human activity, that similarly recognizes the fundamental power of art, and that bears a responsible attitude towards the intertwined histories of humanism and colonialism.

There are many ways to articulate this problematic and develop resources to think through the figure of “the world.” Drawing from Hannah Arendt and the Khoi-San, each section of this work offers one such way in. The introduction expands outward from one small object to demonstrate the stakes of the project and lay the ground for the other lines of argument. The first chapter draws from intellectual history to demonstrate the diverse, intersecting fields of thinking through which Arendt develops the category of the world (focusing especially on her relationships with Heidegger and Augustine, on the one hand, and Marx and Kant, on the other). The second chapter is more properly philosophical, offering an immanent account of Arendtian world-making as a case study of how a future-oriented ethics develops from analysis of worlds as they always already exist. The third chapter, which bears the greatest affinity to anthropology or history, returns to the matter broached in the introduction (the case of the Khoi-San) to offer reflections on aesthetics, posthumanism, and disciplinary theorizing that affirm the ecumenical ambitions of world-making as the virtuosic practice of freedom.
INTRODUCTION: STARTING FROM A MAP

Let’s begin with a piece of paper (figure 1). What do you see? A tangle of lines; writing; perhaps just scrawls — it’s hard to tell. Some spots of color, turquoise and crimson, pop out. After a moment, you realize that two of the lines are labelled: “15 days,” the upper one says; “15 [or 25] days,” the lower one. Some of the words are still bewildering, but others seem a little more familiar with some knowledge of Dutch. Indeed, if you’ve travelled in the Karoo (the great desert of South Africa) you might even recognize some place names still used today:
“Kenhar[d]t” in the top center, “Klein Mummenkoep [Lemoenkoep]” in the top left, and “Olifant[s]vlei” in the bottom right, for instance.¹ Travel times, place names: a map, perhaps?

Indeed, this is one of the many materials created by Wilhelm Bleek, a German philologist, and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd between 1865 and 1875. This sketch in particular was created by Bleek in conversation with //Kabbo, a prisoner in Cape Town who spoke /Xam, a San language of the Karoo.² During the colonial period, the non-Bantu-speaking indigenous people of the Cape — collectively known as the Khoi-San³ — were systematically exterminated by European settlers. This violence reached its peak at the end of the eighteenth century in the San genocide. Commandos of Dutch settlers indiscriminately massacred indigenous people of the Cape, both independently and with explicit authorization from the Dutch East India Company (VOC). San men were generally murdered on sight, while women and children were captured and forced to labor under harsh conditions. //Kabbo himself was arrested by British authorities and brought to the Cape after one of these raids; Bleek later recorded him as saying that “starvation was that on account of which I was bound.”⁴ Settlers saw the Khoi-San as vermin. Shooting four of these “Bushmen” was discussed by one Boer with (to quote an English traveler writing in 1797) “as much composure and indifference as if he had been speaking of four partridges.”⁵ As one Dutch official in 1805 summarized: “the unfortunate notion prevalent here,

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¹ This map is discussed in detail in Deacon, “‘My Place Is the Bitterpits.’”
² / represents a dental click and // a lateral click. This orthography was in fact created by Bleek and Lloyd.
³ The San (“Bushmen”) were distinguished from the Khoikhoi (“Hottentots”) along occupational lines: the San were hunter-gatherers while the Khoikhoi herded cattle. “Khoi-San” was invented as a single category because of a purported linguistic relationship that is no longer supported by most linguists; see Güldemann, The Languages and Linguistics of Africa, 106–7, who writes that “there is little empirical ground for currently propagating such a family.” I nevertheless use this name as a shorthand for the social formations that have emerged through colonialism, which fundamentally changed pre-colonial modes of subsistence and societies.
⁴ Quoted in Bank, Bushmen in a Victorian World, 153.
⁵ Barrow, Travels, 85.
[is that] a heathen is not actually human.”⁶ Even those sympathetic to the cause of the Khoi-San thought their extermination was a foregone conclusion. One nineteenth-century historian wrote that it was a “mere matter of time in an unequal struggle between the primitive bow and arrow, with which they fought, and the deadly gun in the hands of their invaders.”⁷

In this view, still hegemonic today, what the Bleek-Lloyd collection offers are the “last words of an extinct people.”⁸ Through the stories that Bleek and Lloyd recorded, this story goes, we can hear //Kabbo tell us of an enchanted world — one where rain animals unburdened their loads, traveling amongst the sun and moon and stars; one where trees thirsty for this rain are men fastened to the ground by a maiden; one where water smells the fragrance of the earth in appreciation. The fabric of this world was ripped apart by colonialism; in the words of one much-referenced story recounted to Bleek by Diakwain (another /Xam prisoner), “men broke the string for me / and now / my dwelling is strange to me.”⁹ Yet versions of these stories are still told by people in the Karoo who speak a San language today.¹⁰ Especially since the end of apartheid in South Africa, many groups have emerged to make claims on behalf of the Khoi-San, variously employing tropes of strategic essentialism, cultural continuity, and brutal rupture. At the very least, it is clear that an uncomplicated story of the San as “living fossils” fails to capture the contours of assimilation and extermination that the Khoi-San experienced from the eighteenth century onwards. Yet the Bleek-Lloyd collection is still seen as the reliquary of a lost world, a world shattered by modernity.

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⁶ Landdrost Alberti to Governor Janssens, 12 June 1805 (B. R. 68, pp. 280–1, Cape Archives). Quoted in Du Toit, Afrikaner Political Thought, 84.
⁷ Stow, The Native Races of South Africa, 397.
⁸ This is the subtitle of one 2004 book on the Bleek-Lloyd collection: Bennun, The Broken String: The Last Words of an Extinct People. For a comprehensive and critical introduction see Gordon, The Bushman Myth.
⁹ Diakwain and Farmer, “The Broken String.”
¹⁰ de Prada-Samper, The Man Who Cursed the Wind.
How Do We Make a World?

Starting from the objects in the Bleek-Lloyd collection and the stories they tell, we begin to feel the tension that I want to name as the problem of alterity. This tension develops from a recognition of these objects’ otherworldliness. On the one hand, there is the San genocide caused largely by the refusal to see the Khoi-San as equals, as fellow humans.\(^\text{11}\) In other words, the history of the Khoi-San points us to the problem of seeing others as sharing no common essence with oneself. The sketch Bleek and //Kabbo made is not even legible as a map, because it relates to a completely different space — a different world. The opposite response is to see the Bleek-Lloyd collection as representative of Khoi-San culture, no more quaint than English settlers’ teapots or Xhosa traditional dress. In this reading, //Kabbo’s map refers to precisely the same world experienced by everyone else — thus, place names in /Xam, English, and Dutch can be treated as strictly equivalent labels affixed to the same dot. This idea is at the foundation of the assimilationist project by which the Khoi-San became “coloured” under the apartheid regime.\(^\text{12}\) One narrative recognizes the radical difference of the Khoi-San to condone their extermination; the other recognizes the essential commonality of the Khoi-San to endorse their assimilation. The legacy both these narratives have bequeathed is a world that, to borrow the words of “The Broken String,” is no dwelling for the Khoi-San. The question then arises: how can we assert both common rights and uncommon differences?

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This is a question I address throughout this project, especially through the thought of the twentieth-century political theorist Hannah Arendt. The common problematic articulated by Arendt’s thought and the history of the Khoi-San revolves around the intertwined issues of


\(^{12}\) On the creation of “coloured” as a racial category see below at the end of the first section of the third chapter.
INTRODUCTION: STARTING FROM A MAP

humanism and alterity, especially apparent in their violent legacy of genocide. A particularly useful set of resources to tackle these preoccupations comes from thinking critically about “world-making” — one articulation of politics, which for Arendt is how we should live together in our plurality. To understand just why Arendtian world-making is a helpful intervention, it helps to sketch the contours of recent alternative approaches to the same problematic.

One such alternative is represented by the collective contribution of scholars in anthropology such as Eduardo Kohn, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, and Philippe Descola (all of whom have worked in the Amazon), often termed “the ontological turn.”13 The argument they raise runs roughly as follows. Scientists (in this case, anthropologists) abetted colonialism at first by arguing that subject peoples were essentially different. Because they were of a different race, they could be massacred with impunity; thus the justification Dutch settlers offered that the San were not quite human. By the late nineteenth century, common humanity was presumed. Once human difference was explained by culture, not race, anthropology assumed the task of recording the “last words of an extinct people.” Cultural artifacts like //Kabbo’s stories were written in sand, soon to be washed away by modernity if they were not preserved through ethnography. Bleek and Lloyd deeply valued the difference of their interlocutors — but this cultural difference was seen as epiphenomenal, a kind of adornment on common human essence. The ontological turn is driven by a desire to take difference seriously again. We cannot reduce //Kabbo’s map to merely a different culture, say Viveiros de Castro and Kohn. That would be to deny, a priori, the possibility of a world where indeed men, the moon, and springboks interact as equals. In other words, to make the difference of the Khoi-San a matter of culture is to presuppose a common

13 See especially Kohn, “Anthropology of Ontologies”; Viveiros de Castro, “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism.” Kohn distinguishes this “narrow ontological turn” from broader movements that I discuss below.
ontology. Viveiros de Castro urges us to shift from multiculturalism (anthropology’s watchword since the turn away from race) to multinaturalism — “a representational or phenomenological unity which is purely pronominal or deictic, indifferently applied to a radically objective diversity.”

Where the stories in the Bleek-Lloyd collection were seen as the figments of an extinct people’s imagination, we should now affirm that //Kabbo’s stories may reveal something true about the structure of the world. Studying the Bleek-Lloyd collection helps us answer not just the question of what the Khoi-San think exists, but also what really exists.

Implicated in this ontological turn, then, is the problem of truth as it manifests in the analogous binaries of nature/culture and real/representation. A comparable version of the ontological turn in anthropology comes from science studies, particularly in the work of Bruno Latour. There, the argument is roughly as follows. Objectivity holds that scientific truth is produced by closing the gap between the real and the representation; scientists should get out of nature’s way to produce, ideally, unmediated access to truth.

The climate is indeed warming because — look — the ice cores say so! The complete opposite view would argue that scientific truth is merely epiphenomenal: Darwin’s theory of evolution is just the biological exposition of Malthusian economics. Both a scientific theory and //Kabbo’s map are merely cultural artifacts, against which nature is an unchanging backdrop; even as we recognize the social construction of scientific knowledge, we confine it to the realm of culture and leave unperturbed the domain of nature. The ontological turn is to again implicate nature in the scientific process, but not by returning to objectivity’s assertion of nature’s primacy. Instead, Latour says, truth is created in the interaction of scientists, funders, microbes, cows, and all other actors in a network.

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15 This understanding of objectivity is best articulated in Daston and Galison, Objectivity.
16 I am referring here to the classic study by Latour, The Pasteurization of France.
indeed social, but this realm of the social includes actors who were once labeled as merely “natural.”

Latour’s move is analogous to the course correction urged by the ontological turn in anthropology: first, an over-emphasis on nature (race, objectivity); then, a swing to solely consider culture (cultural explanations of difference, social construction of knowledge); then, the synthesis, a “flat ontology” — in the sense that people, animals, and other parts of the “natural” world differ in their attributes but not in ontological status. The Bleek-Lloyd collection does not represent the relics of a bygone race; nor does it represent mere ornamental differences to a common humanity. Rather, //Kabbo’s map and his stories really do tell us something about what exists in the world. Truth is not located in //Kabbo’s stories, nor is truth created by Bleek in his curation of Khoi-San culture. Instead, Bleek is in conversation with //Kabbo, who interacts with me, with the springboks, and with the dust of the Karoo. In other words, the Bleek-Lloyd collection is just as relevant to the project of finding truth about the world as is science or anthropology — traditionally defined as the disciplines that study nature or culture, respectively.

An important corollary is that science, anthropology, and philosophy come to look much the same: truth and power are, after all, conjoined at the hip. To discern the real structure of the world is no longer the province of those who follow Aristotle in calling this the question of metaphysics. Instead, the voices of people like //Kabbo are taken seriously as interlocutors, not just as informants. To consider philosophical questions with the Bleek-Lloyd collection is not to extract theory from an empirical encounter. Instead, to do this work is to take philosophy seriously and radically expand its interlocutors to include those previously classified as mere anthropological subjects. To follow this line of thought, we should understand the stories told by Aristotle, Latour, and //Kabbo as all influencing each other as part of a common world. To
discover (or create) truth, or the good, is to practice the encounter with the other, what was previously called cultural difference. Truth emerges from the encounter with the other — what Hannah Arendt would call politics. It is this project of philosophy as a politics of truly plural interlocutors that I pursue in this work.

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The ontological turn, as I have sketched it, comes to ground a search for truth in alterity — a turn that sounds remarkably phenomenological. Martin Heidegger, too, found the Other in his lifelong search for an answer to his Seinsfrage (the question of Being). Heidegger told us that before we answer ontic questions (what is a map? what is the structure of the world?) we must address the ontological question (what is it to be?). The question of Being, he says, has been forgotten in the ruckus about the nature of beings. Heidegger approaches this more fundamental question — what is the meaning of Being? — by considering the experience of being-in-the-world: in other words, a phenomenology of Dasein (being-there). This methodology, it turns out, gives pride of place to the other. Heidegger writes that “[b]y reason of this with-like [mithafien] Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world [Mitwelt]. Being-in is Being-with Others [Mitsein mit Anderen].”¹⁷ In other words, at the heart of Heidegger’s phenomenological orientation to ontology — that is, his method of approaching the question of “what is” — we find an encounter with the other. Heidegger is rubbing up against the same problem of alterity that confronted both anthropologists (what do we do with the Bleek-Lloyd collection?) and historians of science (what do we do with microbes?). His answer is squarely philosophical in a way that Viveiros de Castro and Latour hesitate to admit: the question of Being (ontology) is answered by the encounter with the other.

¹⁷ Heidegger, Being and Time, 155; Heidegger, Sein und Zeit, 118. Italics in originals.
Yet Heidegger ultimately shies away from the power of the other in his phenomenology. Indeed, this is precisely the criticism that Hannah Arendt levels at him. When Arendt repeatedly emphasizes that the nature of the world is its plurality, she is reiterating Heidegger’s point that the world is always already a world shared with others. But Heidegger would say that Mitsein, as central as it is, serves the higher purpose of telling us about the nature of the world. What matters ultimately is not being-with-others but the question of Being that Mitsein helps us answer — a question that is finally about the self. Thus Arendt writes that

the essential character of the Self [that is, Dasein] is its absolute Self-ness, its radical separation from all its fellows. … Death alone removes [man] from connection with those who are his fellows and who as “They” constantly prevent his being-a-Self. Though death may be the end of Dasein, it is at the same time the guarantor that all that matters ultimately is myself. 18

Being-with-others, Arendt says, is not fundamental to Heidegger but rather a way into a better understanding of lonely existence. This failure to engage seriously with the other, Arendt argues, is at the root of Heidegger’s never-disavowed endorsement of Nazism. Arendt thinks that Heidegger’s weakness towards mass political movements comes from his conception of radically isolated selfhood — that is, a self that is willing to forgo the other. As Seyla Benhabib puts it, Arendt suggests that Heidegger’s “inability to articulate the condition of plurality made Heidegger susceptible to promises of false solidarity in an authoritarian movement.” 19

Arendt establishes an immanent — not contingent — relation between Heidegger’s ontology and his Nazism.

For Arendt, this relation is indicative of a much broader problem with philosophy.

Philosophers exhibit an “attraction to the tyrannical [that] can be demonstrated theoretically in

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19 Benhabib, The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt, 104–5. Arendt scholars generally agree that this is the implicit criticism she makes of Heidegger, but her complicated relationship with her teacher and erstwhile lover means there is no explicit written record. I deal with this relationship at length in chapter 1.
many of the great thinkers” — a result of philosophy’s fundamental aversion to politics.\textsuperscript{20}

Arendt’s contention relies on her idiosyncratic understanding of politics. As she puts it:

> Politics is based on the fact of human plurality. God created \textit{man}, but \textit{men} are a human, earthly product, the product of human nature. Because philosophy and theology are always concerned with \textit{man}, because all their pronouncements would be correct if there were only one or two men or only identical men, they have found no valid philosophical answer to the question: What is politics?\textsuperscript{21}

As a philosopher, Heidegger is concerned with the question of what really exists. Heidegger’s metaphysical quest leads him to recognize the importance of \textit{Mitsein}. But he ultimately sets this aside for the solitude of philosophical meditation on being-\textit{unto-death}. Arendt pushes us towards a different path, one where we follow Heidegger to \textit{Mitsein} but then realize that we find ourselves in the realm of politics.

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Arendt’s response to Heidegger is what we need in order to come to terms with the politics of the ontological turn.\textsuperscript{22} Anthropology, like philosophy, theology, and psychology, is concerned with \textit{man (anthropos)}. Anthropology, Arendt urges us, should deal rather with \textit{men (anthropoi)}. An ontological anthropology moves beyond seeing the anthropologist as providing any sort of access to an informant’s truth; instead, both anthropologists and their interlocutors are co-conspirators in the creation of truth. Reading Arendt anthropologically lets us more fully realize the theoretical affordances of the ontological turn, beyond its disciplinary trappings. What Viveiros de Castro and Latour reach in their quests for ontological truth — like Heidegger before

\textsuperscript{20} Arendt, “Heidegger at Eighty.”
\textsuperscript{21} Arendt, “Introduction into Politics,” 93.
\textsuperscript{22} The criticism that the ontological turn is concerningly apolitical has become a commonplace, one that associated movements such as new materialism, posthumanism, and other versions of alternative ontologies have undertaken to correct. See, for instance, Ramos, “The Politics of Perspectivism”; Bessire and Bond, “Ontological Anthropology and the Deferral of Critique.” I will deal with this matter in more detail in chapter 3.
them — is the realm of politics. In thinking through the problematic of alterity and humanism, then, we come to an ontological-political articulation of world-making. I argue that an Arendtian form of world-making is what we need to work through this politics.

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This work has as its object to elaborate on the characteristics of this kind of world-making. One way of doing this is to lean into the rich affordances offered by Arendt’s thought. For Arendt, many traditional philosophical projects are immanent to politics: they take place in the in-between, the common world. Where political philosophy sought the good life, epistemology the nature of truth, and ontology the nature of reality, Arendt insists that these are wholly political projects. Ontology and epistemology, nature and culture, acting and thinking are all immanent in politics. Heidegger had told us that the meaning of Being is found in being-with-others; now, Arendt tells us that the meaning of politics is freedom, found in acting with others. By tracing the development of Arendt’s thought, we can think more carefully about the common problematic of alterity and humanism — especially as refracted through the experience of genocide that both Arendt and the Khoi-San suffered.

It is this common problematic that I articulate in this work, by offering three different ways into the shared problems of alterity and humanism. Through this trajectory, I also touch on larger discussions of posthumanism and aesthetics that nonetheless do not form the primary subject of this work. In the first chapter, I pause on some of the key figures Arendt was in dialog with when thinking critically about “the world.” In the second chapter, I follow the trajectory of her thought by closely reading passages from The Origins of Totalitarianism to The Human Condition, along the way learning more about how to theorize — that is, to start with a particular situation and think through the problematic it articulates in order to develop a future-oriented
ethics. It is this practice of theory that is at the core of the third and last chapter, in which we learn more about the Khoi-San and especially the contemporary dynamics of land claims and cultural heritage before returning to “The Broken String,” the often-quoted poetic lament from the Bleek-Lloyd collection. For the first two chapters, then, I set aside the Khoi-San — in order to return in the third chapter, better equipped to deal again with the objects of the Bleek-Lloyd collection. I want to affirm that this is not a subordination of one case or the other, but rather an attempt to practice the kind of philosophy as a politics of radically expanded interlocutors I described above. To do so requires patience and a commitment to thinking deeply about the issues that confront us — “staying with the trouble,” as both Donna Haraway and John Lewis would have it. The following chapters, then, give snapshots of topics that revolve around the thought of Hannah Arendt and the history of the Khoi-San, yet my ambitions are broader: to offer resources that help us make a better world with others.
The central concern of this project, Arendtian world-making, can be approached from many different angles. One approach, outlined in the introduction, is to think with a particular case to draw out broader themes that theorists in anthropology and related fields are preoccupied with, discussions in which Arendt offers useful interventions. A different way to develop the problematic of alterity and violence is to adopt approaches from intellectual history. One facet of this historical project, the subject of this chapter, is to develop an Arendtian form of world-making against the background of Arendt’s intellectual influences. This approach to her thinking leans into Arendt’s biography and in particular her early training as a philosopher in Weimar Germany. In this section, I argue that her world-making critically responds to two distinct understandings of “the world”: first, as a community (Heidegger and Augustine); and second, as a globe (Marx and Kant). Arendt’s intellectual biography shows her grappling with these concerns throughout her life in ways that profoundly enrich her thought. In particular, these four thinkers come to think about the world in distinct yet important ways. I sketch each of their intellectual projects insofar as they pertain to a critical understanding of the category of the world and indicate how these streams influence Arendt’s use of this category.

As will become clear, each of these four approaches gives a distinct inflection to world-making. Heidegger, Augustine, Marx, and Kant are more than just four influential figures for Arendt; they represent four very distinct fields of thought in which world-making is surprisingly important. One of the strongest characteristics of world-making is how it is able to include and critically respond to all these intellectual traditions: the category of the world is just as important for a pre-modern figure like Augustine concerned with creating a community of faithful Christians as it is for key figures of modernity like Kant and Marx who are confronted with the
rapid expansion of the globe. This characteristic of world-making emerges best when told from the lens of intellectual history, and so this chapter will follow Arendt’s thinking about the world as it is shaped by these four figures. For each of the following sections, I give an account of how “the world” figures in their thought and how Arendt relates to them in order to gesture towards the capacity of world-making.

HEIDEGGER’S QUESTION OF BEING

In the introduction, I briefly sketched how Arendt grapples with Heidegger’s thought throughout her life. I argued that she leans into the central place of the Other in Heidegger’s phenomenology to make us realize that Heidegger’s philosophical concerns lead us to a fundamentally political project. In this section, I will elaborate on both the significance of the phenomenological category of the world for Heidegger and Arendt’s relationship to him (both personal and intellectual), to offer an understanding of world-making that draws from, yet usefully revises, phenomenology.

Arendt’s revision of Heidegger’s project was (at least in part) a response to his embrace of the Nazi regime. Arendt was deeply disturbed by Heidegger’s own politics and yet remained convinced of the power and originality of his thought. Furthermore, Arendt had deep abiding feelings for Heidegger. When she was eighteen years old, she fell in love with Heidegger. He was then thirty-five, married (with two young sons), and a professor at the height of his intellectual stature. Arendt cut off her physical relationship with Heidegger just a year after they met, yet he continued to influence her immensely. Other Jewish students of his, such as Herbert

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23 The many dimensions of Arendt and Heidegger’s relationship have already used reams of paper. Among the most illuminating works are Taminiaux, The Thracian Maid and the Professional Thinker; Villa, Arendt and Heidegger. These works focus on ideas and mostly rely for their biographical information on the classic biography by Young-Bruehl, Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World.
Marcuse and Emmanuel Levinas, similarly criticized Heidegger for neglecting the place of the Other and hence giving an opening to Nazi politics through his philosophy. But Arendt, unlike Marcuse and Levinas, left no explicit written record of her criticism. We can only get glimpses — for instance, in her notorious article in the New York Review of Books, “Heidegger at Eighty.” There, Arendt largely exonerates Heidegger, writing:

> We who wish to honor the thinkers, even if our own residence lies in the midst of the world, can hardly help finding it striking and perhaps exasperating that Plato and Heidegger, when they entered into human affairs, turned to tyrants and Führers. … With these few it does not finally matter where the storms of their century may have driven them. For the wind that blows through Heidegger’s thinking — like that which still sweeps toward us after thousands of years from the work of Plato — does not spring from the century he happens to live in. It comes from the primeval, and what it leaves behind is something perfect, something which, like everything perfect, falls back to where it came from.

To understand this glorification of Heidegger — elevating him to the Platonic realm of “the perfect” — we must remember Arendt’s personal entanglements with her teacher. It is not hard to surmise that her lasting personal feelings for Heidegger made her hesitant to record her acute criticism of his philosophy in a public written record. This is all the more relevant because the subject of their disagreement comes very close to the personal relationship they maintained. Heidegger’s disregard for Arendt as a romantic partner and a Jew is paralleled by his neglect of the Other in his phenomenology.

Arendt’s time with Heidegger came at probably his most fruitful intellectual period. During the 1920s, Heidegger was a professor at the University of Marburg. He gave lectures that attracted students from far and wide, attracting attention less for his published work than for the brilliance of his lectures. As Arendt would later recount, for the students at Marburg Heidegger...
was “the hidden king [who] reigned in the realm of thinking.” This period culminated in two events that signaled Heidegger’s philosophical triumph: first, the publication of his magnum opus, *Sein und Zeit (Being and Time)* in 1927; and second, the famous debate between Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer (a prominent neo-Kantian) in 1929 at Davos. Arendt was a witness to Heidegger’s developing thought. Indeed, she so valued his lectures that she later wrote that the success of *Sein und Zeit* was at least in part owed to his fame in teaching:

> For Heidegger’s “fame” predates by about eight years the publication of *Sein und Zeit* in 1927; indeed it is open to question whether the unusual success of this book — not just the immediate impact it had inside and outside the academic world but also its extraordinarily lasting influence, with which few of the century’s publications can compare — would have been possible if it had not been preceded by the teacher’s reputation among the students, in whose opinion the book’s success merely confirmed what they had known for many years.

What was so attractive about this “hidden king”? Arendt wrote that “there was nothing tangible on which his fame could have been based … no doctrine that could have been learned, reproduced, and handed on.” What attracted students to Heidegger was the “rumor” that

> Thinking has come to life again; the cultural treasures of the past, believed to be dead, are being made to speak, in the course of which it turns out that they propose things altogether different from the familiar, worn-out trivialities they had been presumed to say. There exists a teacher; one can perhaps learn to think.

Students came to Heidegger not to learn about thinking (as one might learn about cooking) but to learn to think. Even at forty years’ remove, there is a romance to Arendt’s writing about Heidegger: she makes even the readers of the *New York Review of Books*, appalled by Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis, feel some of the attraction his students felt in Marburg.

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26 Ibid., 422.
27 This latter debate is thoroughly recounted in Gordon, *Continental Divide*.
29 Ibid., 421.
This mode of doing philosophy — teaching students to think — was founded in two components of Heidegger’s inheritance: Husserl’s phenomenology and Nietzsche’s break with tradition. In his seminars at Marburg, Heidegger was concerned not with Plato as a theorist but as someone who spoke to “a set of problems of immediate and urgent relevance.”\textsuperscript{30} Like Husserl, Heidegger found his method of doing philosophy in a turn away from mere erudition to “the things themselves.” This turn came about not just because Heidegger wanted to root philosophy in a scientific method — the technical phenomenology Husserl propounded — but also because he understood the tradition as broken in a sense. Both of these characteristics are equally important contributions to Heidegger’s mode of “thinking as pure activity” that Arendt was so attracted to. To understand world-making, then, means to excavate these characteristics in Heidegger’s own work and show how “the world” emerges as a salient category from them.

Nowhere are Heidegger’s phenomenology and break with tradition more evident than in his 1927 masterpiece, \textit{Being and Time}.\textsuperscript{31} Heidegger’s project there is to ask: what is it to be? We usually ask questions of the sort: what is it to be $x$ (a cat, a table, a rose)? Indeed, this traditional approach to metaphysics (from Plato onwards) has neglected the question of Being (the ontological question) in favor of questions about beings (ontic ones). Thus, Heidegger writes that although the ontological question of Being “provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, … a dogma has been developed which not only declares the question about the meaning of Being to be superfluous, but sanctions its complete neglect” (21).\textsuperscript{32} What would it mean to recover this question?

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} The following exposition is indebted to that in Wheeler, “Martin Heidegger.”
\textsuperscript{32} This and following parenthetical citations in this section are to Heidegger, \textit{Being and Time}. Here, as throughout when quoting \textit{Being and Time}, I reproduce the editorial additions made by Macquarrie and Robinson (in square brackets) and follow their lead in only using the punctuation found in Heidegger’s German original. Thus, German
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First, the question of Being must be formulated in a way that is amenable to a kind of inquiry that does not proceed from nothing, but rather from a “vague average understanding of Being” that “must already be available to us in some way” (25). What is this subject that can conduct the inquiry into the question of Being, then? Well, this entity is in fact not a subject at all; for

The very asking of this question is an entity’s mode of Being; and as such it gets its essential character from what is inquired about — namely, Being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being, we shall denote by the term “Dasein.” (27)

Heidegger’s inquiry into the question of Being is thus profoundly phenomenological, in a sense that hearkens back not just to Husserl but also to Hegel. Like the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Being and Time* follows the phenomena that *Dasein* perceives, drawing circles of interpretation that collectively address the question of Being. Heidegger writes that “What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way. … In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing” (195). In other words, Heidegger affirms that his method of knowing the nature of Being proceeds neither from deductive, analytical reasoning nor from historical description. In this way, Heidegger foreshadows Arendt’s mode of doing politics, and indeed of thinking: rather than philosophizing in the abstract or sticking to historical description, both Heidegger and Arendt engage in what Hans Sluga calls “diagnostic practice.” 33

Heidegger answers the question of Being not in the abstract but through an entity that “gets its essential character from what is inquired about,” much in the way that for Arendt politics is part of the essential character of what it is to be human. In both cases, a methodological question

33 Sluga, *Politics and the Search for the Common Good*. 
(what kind of inquiry?) is seen as an ontological one (what kind of inquirer?). This “diagnostic practice” is an essential lesson that Arendt learned from Heidegger at Marburg, one that both brought to bear so decisively on the question of “the world.”

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Perhaps the most important question prompted by this exposition is, then, just what is Dasein? It is apparently not a biological human being, nor is it a person. Robert Brandom has interpreted Dasein as a mode of being; but this seems to conflict with Heidegger’s own insistence that Dasein is some sort of entity. John Haugeland, taking issue with Brandom, reads Dasein as “neither people nor their being, but rather a way of life shared by the members of some community. It is ways of life, in this sense, that have the basic structure of being-in-the-world.”

This is, I believe, a more accurate rendering of Heidegger’s argument. Indeed, Being and Time follows a phenomenology of Dasein that grounded in community. Heidegger writes that “fundamental ontology, from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein” (34). Thus, to answer a methodological question (how do we approach the question of Being?) we must concern ourselves with ontology:

[i]f to Interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, Dasein is not only the primary entity to be interrogated; it is also that entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question. (35)

Where does the character of Dasein that makes it suitable to answering the question of Being come from? The existential analytic of Dasein, whereby the question of Being can be answered, comes ultimately in its comportment towards other entities than itself. In particular,

Dasein’s understanding of Being pertains with equal primordiality both to an understanding of something like a ‘world’, and to the understanding of the Being of those entities which become accessible within the world. (33)

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34 Haugeland, “Reading Brandom Reading Heidegger,” 423.
So here we arrive at the question of the world, by following Heidegger from his desire to focus on the fundamental question of metaphysics that then provokes a concern for the character of Dasein, which is to be found in its existence with others in the world. This interpretation of Dasein, and hence of Being and Time, comes close to Arendt’s own. Understanding Dasein as fundamentally constituted by community is in many ways the amendment Arendt wants to make to Heidegger’s project. Indeed, her understanding of “world” comes in part from Heidegger’s emphasis on Dasein’s being-in-the-world. At first, Heidegger uses “world” as a rough synonym of “environment.” He writes:

The answer to the question of the “who” of everyday Dasein is to be obtained by analysing that kind of Being in which Dasein maintains itself proximally and for the most part. Our investigation takes its orientation from Being-in-the-world — that basic state of Dasein by which every mode of its Being gets co-determined. … In our ‘description’ of that environment which is closest to us — the work-world of the craftsman, for example, — the outcome was that along with the equipment to be found when one is at work [in Arbeit], those Others for whom the ‘work’ [“Werk”] is destined are ‘encountered too.’ (153)

In other words, my understanding of Being is dependent on the world around me. This should be obvious! The question is to elucidate this relationship, which requires a more careful understanding of “world.” Heidegger notes that the world is comprised by what is at hand (say, a hammer) but also who is around me (say, who I am building the chair for). But the Others who are thus ‘encountered’ in a ready-to-hand, environmental context of equipment, are not somehow added on in thought to some Thing which is proximally just present-at-hand; such ‘Things’ are encountered from out of the world in which they are ready-to-hand for Others — a world which is always mine too in advance. (154)

The world does not just incidentally include Others — they are in an important sense constitutive of Dasein. Thus, Heidegger writes:

This Being-there-too [Auch-Dasein] with them does not have the ontological character of a Being-present-at-hand-along-‘with’ them within a world. This ‘with’ is something of the character of Dasein; the ‘too’ means a sameness of Being as circumspectively concernful Being-in-the-world. (154)
There is a sameness of Being between Dasein and the Others, who are not just there too but are there with Dasein. Here we arrive at perhaps the most crucial passage:

‘With’ and ‘too’ are to be understood existentially, not categorially. By reason of this with-like [mithaften] Being-in-the-world, the world is always the one that I share with Others. The world of Dasein is a with-world [Mitwelt]. Being-in is Being-with Others. Their Being-in-themselves within-the-world is Dasein-with [MitDasein]. (155)

The world matters for Heidegger because it is fundamentally constitutive of Dasein; in this role, it is always already a world with others, a Mitwelt. This is the meaning of “world” that Arendt takes from Heidegger.

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Arendt’s great critique of Heidegger is that he fails to pursue this line of thinking to its natural end. He recognizes the importance of Mitwelt but shies away from making the Other truly central to his philosophy. Instead, Dasein for Heidegger is in a profound sense dependent on the world shared with Others, but is at its most authentic when by itself. And yet the resources for a richer understanding of world-making come from taking seriously Heidegger’s Mitwelt. Thus, in her 1946 essay “What is Existential Philosophy?” Arendt writes:

Apart from Nietzsche, … Heidegger’s is the first absolutely and uncompromisingly this-worldly philosophy. The crucial element of man’s being is its being-in-the-world, and what is at stake for his being-in-the-world is quite simply survival in the world.35

Heidegger’s philosophy is so promising because it gives pride of place to the world (and hence to politics and alterity) in its philosophical attempts to answer the question of Being. Yet Heidegger shies away from Mitwelt because Dasein is only authentically itself when alone:

Dasein could be truly itself only if it could pull back from its being-in-the-world into itself, but that is what its nature can never permit it to do … Only at death, which will take him out of the world, does man have the certainty of being himself. This Self is the Who of Dasein. … The essential character of the Self is its absolute Self-ness, its radical separation from all its fellows. Heidegger introduced the anticipation of death as an existential in order to define this essential

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character, for it is in death as an existential that man realizes the absolute *principium individuationis.*

This is a terrible move, Arendt says: it removes the common ground that the self and the other can stand on, leaving “the individual existing independent of humanity and representative of no one but himself — of nothing but his own nothingness” (181). Heidegger had offered us profound resources for understanding the world as *ontologically* constituted by commonality and plurality. His analytic gives us room to stand on, clearing a space for according politics its dignity. But his move in *Being and Time* is to shift away from politics to the Self. The consequences of this are terrible. Not only does Heidegger foreclose that kind of thinking about politics, but he also lays a different ground, an affinity for fascist politics. For fascism is what isolated Selves can turn to in place of a true realm of politics as world-making:

Later, and after the fact, as it were, Heidegger has drawn on mythologizing and muddled concepts like “folk” and “earth” in an effort to supply his isolated Selves with a shared, common ground to stand on. But it is obvious that concepts of that kind can only lead us out of philosophy and into some kind of nature-oriented superstition. If it does not belong to the concept of man that he inhabits the earth together with others of his kind, then all that remains for him is a mechanical reconciliation by which the atomized Selves are provided with a common ground that is essentially alien to their nature. All that can result from that is the organization of these Selves intent only on themselves into an Over-self in order to somehow effect a transition from resolutely accepted guilt to action.

For Heidegger (Arendt says), it is in fascism — the adoration of a Führer — that Selves can organize themselves into some grotesque parody of politics, the natural home for action. Indeed, this is much the connection Heidegger made in many of his writings in the 1930s — a connection that Heidegger never disavowed. To take just one example, in 1948 Heidegger wrote in response to a critical letter from Herbert Marcuse (his former student) that

> I expected from National Socialism a spiritual renewal of life in its entirety, a reconciliation of social antagonisms and a deliverance of Western *Dasein* from the dangers of communism. … An

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36 Ibid., 179–81.
37 Ibid., 181.
avowal after 1945 was for me impossible: the Nazi supporters announced their change of allegiance in the most loathsome way; I, however, had nothing in common with them.³⁸

I do not want to add to the voluminous literature devoted to Heidegger’s relationship with National Socialism. Suffice it to say that Arendt was well aware of his activities, and furthermore drew a clear link between Heidegger’s thought and his actions during the 1930s. Her 1946 article is as close as she ever came to making this link explicit in public.

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How exactly to use Heidegger’s ideas without their Nazi taint continued to preoccupy Arendt. Why not cast off Heidegger entirely? Because it is in his phenomenology that we can find a conception of the world and of man (in Dasein) that is fundamentally concerned with politics. In other words, Arendt finds in Heidegger’s ontology and anthropology the resources for giving dignity to politics — yet these resources come from a man whose political actions took the form precisely of stripping people of their dignity. In Arendt’s 1954 address to the American Political Science Association, it is hard not to read into her general remarks a specific criticism of her mentor:

Twentieth-century political events have brought out and made public a deep-rooted crisis of Western civilization of which the non-academic philosophers had been aware long before it assumed a political reality. The nihilistic aspects of political movements, particularly conspicuous in totalitarian ideologies …, were indeed so familiar to the philosopher that he could easily detect in them his own predicaments.³⁹

It is no accident that Heidegger is identified with “the philosopher” writ large. After all, his political proclivities are symptomatic of the philosopher’s general disdain towards politics:

Thus we find the old hostility of the philosopher toward the polis in Heidegger’s analyses of average everyday life in terms of das Man … in which the public realm has the function of hiding

³⁸ Wolin, The Heidegger Controversy, 162.
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reality and preventing even the appearance of truth.\textsuperscript{40}

And yet, Arendt finds in Heidegger’s thought resources that work against his own politics:

Still, these phenomenological descriptions offer most penetrating insights into one of the basic aspects of society and, moreover, insist that these structures of human life are inherent in the human condition as such, from which there is no escape into an “authenticity” which would be the philosopher’s prerogative.\textsuperscript{41}

This 1954 speech stands between \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism} and \textit{The Human Condition}, which can be schematically understood as Arendt’s identification of a problem first and then the formulation of a solution second (this is elaborated below). Her turn to Heidegger is thus a turn towards resources for help with this solution. As she writes:

\begin{quote}
the experiences of the philosopher — insofar as he is a philosopher — are with solitude, while for man — insofar as he is political — solitude is an essential but nevertheless marginal experience. It may be — but I shall only hint at this — that Heidegger’s concept of “world,” which in many respects stands at the center of his philosophy, constitutes a step out of this difficulty. At any rate, because Heidegger defines human existence as being-in-the-world, he insists on giving philosophic significance to structures of everyday life that are completely incomprehensible if man is not primarily understood as being together with others.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

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Arendt’s idea of the world is fundamentally phenomenological. She was first attracted to Heidegger because of his ability to get to “the things themselves” — his philosophical method was uniquely able to reveal the phenomena that matter. In \textit{Being and Time}, Heidegger gives a startling path to treating politics with dignity, by considering \textit{Mitwelt}, the being-together-in-the-world that is so central to the characterization of \textit{Dasein}. Yet Heidegger’s own philosophy is ultimately preoccupied with atomized selfhood, the very kind of concern with \textit{man} rather than \textit{men} that philosophy traditionally clings to in disdain of politics. In Heidegger’s case, this disdain

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid., 432–33.}
\footnote{Ibid., 433.}
\footnote{Ibid., 443.}
\end{footnotes}
for politics amounts to an embrace of National Socialism as the only sort of politics that can be founded on the common ground that Heidegger laid out. Arendt consistently pushes Heidegger to revise his understanding of the world — because of her personal relationship with him, because of his turn to Nazi politics, but above all because she sees something of great value in the rich foundation he has given to “world.” What Arendtian world-making will come to look like, then, is very much a phenomenology that takes plurality seriously: a version of Heidegger’s “world” that gives due weight to Mitsein and Mitwelt.43

Yet we must not forget that for world-making to look like this is for us to choose as its foundations a philosophy with inherent fascist proclivities. While I look to Arendt for an elaboration of world-making, I realize that on this fundamental point she was very far from reaching any kind of reconciliation. In reflecting on what it means to take so much from Heidegger in offering the resources for world-making as freedom, I would then rather end by reflecting with the courageous words of Cornel West:

And therefore our existential commitments, even my own existential, even my own preoccupations with the plight and predicament with the weak and vulnerable, in some ways must generate certain kinds of blindness, they just must. And I have to be honest and candid about that. I try not to fall into the pit of a cheap didacticism or a kind of missionary attitude toward making the world better, or a naive sentimentalism about just being in uncritical solidarity with the poor and so forth, but it means that I have to be courageous enough to acknowledge that, for example, I have much to learn from a Nazi like Heidegger. Whereas you would think, well, no given a certain existential commitment, you just completely turn away. No, no. Heidegger taught me too much. … And so you find yourself having to be jazzlike: protean, flexible, fluid, open-minded and, therefore, in close conversation and sometimes in very close intellectual proximity to gangsters.44

43 This phenomenological reading of Arendt is astutely elaborated in Loidolt, *Phenomenology of Plurality.*
44 West and Mendieta, “What It Means to Be Human!,” 155. It is perhaps fitting that this interview was conducted as part of a book intended to introduce West’s prophetic pragmatism to a German-speaking audience. What would Arendt have made of reading Manemann, Mendieta, and West, *Prophetischer Pragmatismus: eine Einführung in das Denken von Cornel West?*
In other words, to work with Heidegger means to commit to a sort of artistic practice, one that refuses to blindly follow any one fashion or person but one that similarly is courageous enough to admit that we have much to learn even from those we might hate.

**AUGUSTINE’S CONCEPT OF LOVE**

Despite her close relationship with Heidegger, Arendt chose to write her PhD thesis not with him but with his colleague at the University of Heidelberg, Karl Jaspers. Arendt wrote on a subject that seems strange at first for a German Jew steeped in phenomenology: *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin*, or “the concept of love in Augustine.” Quotations from Augustine litter Arendt’s later works; more deeply, her understanding of the world as an in-between created by humans in their plurality owes a profound debt to Augustine’s concept of love — a debt that is evident not least from the original title of *The Human Condition: Amor Mundi* or *Love of the World*. Just as Heidegger gave her a crucial understanding of the world as Mitwelt (as constituted by others) Augustine’s concept of love gives her a different way into understanding the ontological constitution of the world. By outlining Augustine’s concern with the world and Arendt’s reading of him, I will show how world-making offers a more-than-secular take on community and collective action.

Arendt’s choice of topic likely reflected Heidegger’s strong Catholicism, which (like many aspects of his thought) had an indelible influence on Arendt. Jaspers and Heidegger, along with many of their pupils, read Augustine for his existentialist leanings. Hans Jonas, a friend and colleague of Arendt’s, also wrote on Augustine. In a later interview, he remembered that many students at German universities of the time saw Augustine’s *Confessions* as a “crucial and pivotal text” that prompted students to “self-exploration and the descent into the abyss of
1. Other Worlds: Arendt’s Influences

While Arendt’s choice of topic may have been de rigeur, what she took from Augustine would have a deep influence on her later thought.

In her dissertation, Arendt develops Augustine’s twofold conception of the world. The starting point for this understanding is the Christian commandment to love your neighbor:

“What teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Arendt’s argument hinges on the crucial final words of the second commandment: “as yourself.” For Arendt, Augustine means by this not just an equivalent magnitude of love for the self and the neighbor, a claim about behavior (the manner of love), but also about the substance of the neighbor as the self; there is something ontological in common between yourself and your neighbor. As Roy Tsao puts it: “Arendt supposes, with some support from Augustine’s writings, that he took this phrase to imply something more than an equivalence in the degree or the magnitude of the love to be given to neighbor and self. A manner of love is prescribed, as would be consistent with recognizing some ontological commonality between self and neighbor.”

What this leads to is a Christian community that is bound by love for one another — because the other is oneself.

Augustine on the one hand claims that a Christian sees the meaning of existence only in God. On the other hand, he reads Matthew 22:39 seriously so as to require a simultaneous, coterminous love of the neighbor. In her analysis, Arendt is answering the question: how, according to Augustine, can one love both God and the neighbor? Arendt’s thesis is that there are three distinct conceptual contexts in which Augustine proposes an answer (these contexts parallel

45 Quoted in Arendt, Love and Saint Augustine, xv.
47 Tsao, “Arendt’s Augustine,” 42. Italics in original.
How do we make a world?

In remarkable ways her trichotomy in *The Human Condition* between labor, work, and action). In the first context, we live in a material world where love “desires a worldly object, be it a thing or a person.” In this material world, things are ephemeral, and love as desire is evanescent — except in love of God. God in this context is the transcendent, eternal *summum bonum* (the Neoplatonic Highest Good). Therefore, to love God is to love that which is eternal and incorruptible. On the one hand, love for the neighbor is figured as about the same as desire for a cup of tea; on the other hand, love of God is love for something divine, unreachable. How could one love this God and *in the same way* love the ultimately transient neighbor? What is the relevance of the neighbor in a material world? The two kinds of love are of a different essence, and so to love both God and the neighbor is to love in *essentially* different ways. The neighbor is forgotten before the love of God as *summum bonum*. Thus, the first context is clearly unsatisfactory for explaining the commandment in Matthew 22:39.

In the second conceptual context Arendt limns not a world of material things but a world of human activity. The fear in this context is not of material loss (of the neighbor as of the cup of tea) but rather of *death* — that is, the cessation of activity. In response to our fear of death we turn again to God — this time not the God of rational order but the God of life, God as Creator. The neighbor is loved in a different way than a cup of tea, because of the importance of *vitality*. But love of God is still of a different essence, because God is transcendent: God is immortal. Just as before, we find no place for love of the neighbor if we attain illumination only by loving a transcendent God. Again, it is impossible to love God and the neighbor *in the same way*.

For Arendt, Augustinian neighborly love finds its only suitable context in the Christian community. Here, we find God as Redeemer. In a Christian community redemption is afforded to

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all human beings by Christ’s salvific act. But although redemption is won for all, this grace of God is revealed only through constant striving in community:

The reason one should love one’s neighbor is that the neighbor is fundamentally one’s equal and both share the same sinful past. … Salvation itself is made to depend on the conduct of the world, or rather, on its conquest. Thus the world is relevant, not because the Christian still lives in it, to a certain extent by mistake, but on the ground of his constant tie to the past and thereby to original kinship, which consists of an equal share in original sin and thus in death.⁴⁹

We see in some of our fellow Christians models of good conduct to emulate, and in others humbling reminders of our former condition. Whether through encouragement or rebuke, our fellow members of the Christian community push us to strive for salvation. Our love of God as Redeemer is thus identical to a turn to our fellow members of the Christian community. In Arendt’s words:

I never love my neighbor for his own sake, only for the sake of divine grace. … This indirectness turns my relation to my neighbor into a mere passage for the direct relation to God himself. … We are commanded to love our neighbor, to practice mutual love, only because in so doing we love Christ.⁵⁰

It is only with God as Redeemer that love of the neighbor is fully consonant with love of oneself and of God. This third context, in other words, is the only suitable one for understanding the commandment to love thy neighbor as thyself.

We thus understand that we must love God not in his transcendent capacity as Highest Good or as Creator, but as Redeemer of all humans — including the neighbor. Only with this understanding of God is it possible to love God and the neighbor in the same way. Is this a distinctly Christian assertion? Arendt thinks not. She argues that the neighbor’s relevance is not tied to Christianity. … Faith in Christ redeems the past and only the common past can make the faith a common faith. This past alone is common to all. … Divine grace gives a new meaning to human togetherness — defense against the world. This defense is the foundation of the new city, the city of God. Estrangement itself gives rise to a new togetherness, that

⁴⁹ Ibid., 106–7.
⁵⁰ Ibid., 111.
is, to a new being with and for each other that exists beside and against the old society. Arendt is attracted to Augustine’s explanation of Matthew 22:39 because it is grounded in community. For Arendt, the God as Redeemer is figurative: that is, he stands in for estrangement. In Arendt’s formulation, estrangement is the ultimate cause of the new togetherness. Augustine’s ontological exegesis thus becomes an existentialist claim: a “new being with and for each other” that is premised not on faith in a Christian god but rather on the human condition of estrangement. This human condition of estrangement is what pushes me to love my neighbor as if they were myself. Whether looking inwards to the human condition, or outwards to our end in God or estrangement, we find ourselves looking at the Other. A different way of putting this is that Arendt’s interpretation of Augustine reads much like Heidegger — who also talks about the world in terms of “human togetherness” and “original kinship,” Mitsein and Mitwelt. Yet Arendt finds in Augustine not an ultimate return to solitude as the necessary environment for the truly authentic self, but a meaning in community as its own activity.

Augustine’s understanding of love thus provides the foundation for Arendt to begin to think beyond Heidegger. Arendt had taken a seminar on Aristotle with Heidegger in 1924, where he developed his understanding of the world as related to Dasein and his central question of Being. She read Being and Time when it was published in 1927, and wrote with this understanding of the world in mind when finishing her dissertation in 1929. It is most obvious that she reads Augustine informed by Heidegger, finding a secular basis (estrangement) for the Christian basis of an Augustinian world. But she is also productively reading Heidegger against Augustine; she is not just secularizing Augustine, but making Heidegger more-than-secular too;

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51 Ibid., 107.
52 This argument about the influence of Augustine on Arendt is found, for instance, in Tsao, “Arendt’s Augustine”; Vecchiarelli Scott, “Caritas, Natality and the Banality of Evil”; Kampowski, Arendt, Augustine, and the New Beginning; Spengeman, “Saint Augustine and Hannah Arendt on Love of the World.”
after all, to be strictly secular is to fall into the individualism that makes Dasein susceptible to fascist politics. Augustine tells her that love of the neighbor is of truly primary importance. Where Heidegger recognizes the place of the Other — but ultimately finds Dasein’s authenticity in hermetic isolation — Augustine sees that you can only truly love God in loving the neighbor. Arendt does not want to return Heidegger to his Catholic roots as a corrective to his secularized individualism, but she does hope to recuperate some of the fundamental emphasis Augustine places on community to integrate it into a more-than-secular Arendtian form of world-making.

Throughout her work on Augustine, Arendt remained committed to an idea of world-making that was founded in Heidegger’s phenomenology. Yet Augustine demonstrated an idea of world-making from a very different context, yet one that paid if possible even more serious attention to the Other. In her study of Augustine, Arendt found the resources (even before her experiences under fascism) for articulating a vision of world-making that gives more fundamental importance to plurality than Heidegger ever would. To read her PhD thesis on Augustine is thus, in important ways, to read not just another iteration of Arendt’s critique of Heidegger but also a proleptic vision of full-fledged Arendtian world-making. When she articulates this properly, in The Human Condition, Arendt will continue to refer to Augustine; as many have observed, one quote of Augustine’s — *initium ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit* (in Arendt’s translation, “that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody”)\(^5\) — is deployed again and again by Arendt as a keystone of natality, and hence of her understanding of politics. In other words, just as much as world-making is rooted in Heidegger’s phenomenology, Arendt always and from the earliest stages inflects world-making with a continued, productive engagement with thinkers of very different contexts, like

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\(^5\) Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 177.
Augustine. Arendtian world-making is never consumed by Heidegger’s influence; it is always already capacious enough to accommodate real difference of thought.

**ARENDT’S PRODUCTIVE FRUSTRATION WITH MARX**

After fleeing Nazi Germany, Arendt lived in France as a refugee before emigrating to New York in 1941. There, she found work writing and teaching, but concerned herself primarily with what is widely considered her *magnum opus*: 1951’s *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, which is in many ways a reckoning with the fascism that forced her to flee and killed many of her friends. (I will elaborate on the analytical dimensions of this work later, in the second section.) The problem she formulated in this work was given a response in 1958 with the publication of *The Human Condition*. Between these two works, Arendt was preoccupied with a manuscript on Marx, first called “Totalitarian Elements in Marxism,” then “Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought,” and finally “Introduction into Politics.”

As she wrote in a proposal to the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation in 1951, this projected work would rectify the “serious gap” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the lack of an adequate historical and conceptual analysis of the only element that has behind it a respectable tradition and whose critical discussion requires a criticism of some of the chief tenets of Western political philosophy: Marxism.

Arendt wrote hundreds of pages, sometimes emphasizing common misunderstandings of Marx, sometimes discussing his own role in politics of the day, sometimes focusing on “apodictic statements” that explain his abandonment of philosophy for economics, history, and politics. But little came together. In 1954, she wrote to Heidegger: “I cannot make it concrete without its all

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54 See Jerome Kohn’s introduction to Arendt, *The Promise of Politics.*
55 Quoted in ibid., xi.
becoming endless.” She abandoned her focus on Marx for a broader concern with the tradition of Western political thought. Instead of focusing on Marx per se, she moved on to write a work that aims to liberate political thought from the tradition as a whole. This was the “Introduction into Politics” — not an introduction to politics but (in a Heideggerian vein) an introduction to politics as an activity itself (intended as a complementary volume to Jaspers’ 1950 Introduction into Philosophy). The work was never published as such, but sections were turned into the essays collected in Between Past and Future, On Revolution, and then The Human Condition. In other words, it seems fair to say that Arendt’s shift from The Origins of Totalitarianism to The Human Condition was precipitated by a critical reading of Marx. In what follows, I will therefore illustrate Marx’s preoccupation with the category of the world — especially in the oft-quoted passage on world literature from The Communist Manifesto and in the discussion of primitive accumulation in Capital. To do so is to demonstrate how world-making is (in its mature form) acutely aware of capital’s monopoly on modern discussions of the “globe” and “cosmopolitanism.”

Marx cared about the world, but in a very different sense than either Heidegger or Augustine. A direct line can be easily traced from Kant through Hegel to Marx: he was, in many ways, another German Protestant thinker of the Enlightenment. His understanding of the world does not come from an Augustinian sense of community before God, but from a Protestant individualism developed through an astute analysis of capitalism. One of the most characteristic passages, often cited in critical discussions of world-making, is his discussion of world literature in The Communist Manifesto:

The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe [Erdkugel]. … The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world...
market [Weltmarkts] given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country [aller Länder kosmopolitisch gestaltet]. … In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations [Nationen]. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. The bourgeoisie … compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization [Zivilisation] into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.57

Marx is giving an account of how the emerging power of capital creates the globe: a flat network or “bounded object in Mercatorian space” (as Pheng Cheah calls it).58 There is no imagined transcendence: Marx has turned Hegel on his head so that instead of a vertical axis of progress (temporality, the source of normative force), capital is responsible for limitless horizontal expansion. Marx’s analysis of globalization is characteristically potent. He recognizes that the expansion of capital is not accompanied by the expansion of the community of mutual obligation to encompass all of deterritorialized humanity. Instead, the expansion of capital robs the world of normative force altogether because it removes time entirely. After all, the alienated world of capital is only extensive spatially. The temporally shallow world that Marx limns can do little to support normative accounts of rights. As Cheah explains:

In spiritualist [Hegelian] accounts, the world is a normative category because it is a rationally projected temporal horizon that preserves the achievements of humanity from the corrosiveness of time. Marx’s reduction of the world to the space of market exchange empties out this normative dimension.59

Where can one find a universal right or a common will to which subjects can appeal in a globe flattened by capitalism? For Marx, such ethical conceits (and other spiritual formations like art and literature) are “merely the epiphenomena of material processes that operate in every aspect

59 Ibid., 62.
of concrete existence, namely, the development of productive forces by world trade and
production.”\(^{60}\) This is the alienated world that capital has left us with.

In drawing this picture of the globe, Marx has one foot firmly in German idealism. His
other foot is planted in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European imperialism, which
provided the grounds for new pictures of the world. Marx uses the conceptual resources of
German idealism to comprehend a world forced open by capital. He recognizes that capitalism is
premised on violent dispossession, which he calls primitive accumulation. Thus, in *Capital* Marx
writes that:

> The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in
> mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder
> of India, the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black-skins, are
> all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic processes
> are the chief moments of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the
> European nations, which has the globe as its theater [*Schauplatz*]. It begins with the revolt of the
> Netherlands from Spain, assumes gigantic dimensions in England’s Anti-Jacobin War, and is still
going on in the Opium Wars against China, etc.\(^{61}\)

The world was, in a word, disenchanted by the forces of capital and imperialism. Where
Augustine had seen the world as a community created by the love of God, a “divinely ordered
terrain,” Marx recognized the scattering about of the world by capital. Indeed, Marx’s
recognition is precisely that the world as such is destroyed and replaced by the *globe*. The rich,
temporally-oriented community is replaced by a flat, spatially extensive “theater”\(^{62}\) for the
“commercial war of the European nations.”

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\(^{60}\) Ibid., 63.


\(^{62}\) *Schauplatz*, lit. “show-place,” such as a town square where political theater — read, executions — take place
In *The Human Condition*, Arendt astutely reads Marx’s analysis of the world alienated by capital. She repeatedly writes something similar to Marx about the effects of capitalism on the world — for instance, that

the process of wealth accumulation, as we know it, stimulated by the life process and in turn stimulating human life, is possible only if the world and the very worldliness of man are sacrificed. The first stage of this alienation [that is, of capitalism] was marked by its cruelty, the misery and material wretchedness it meant for a steadily increasing number of “labouring poor,” whom expropriation deprived of the twofold protection of family and property.63

Indeed, Arendt’s whole work is structured as a response to Marx’s critical analysis of labor. Where Marx conflates labor, work, and action, Arendt sets out to strictly separate these. Labor is “the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body,” whose “human condition is life itself”; labor is driven by necessity. Work “provides an ‘artificial’ world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings,” whose “human condition” is “worldliness”; work is driven by utility. Action is “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter” and “corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world”; work is driven by natality, since “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting.”64

This distinction is made under the rubric of the *vita activa*, which Arendt consistently distinguishes from the *vita contemplatativa*. This distinction, she writes,

is as old as (but not older than) our tradition of political thought. And this tradition, far from comprehending and conceptualizing all the political experiences of Western mankind, grew out of a specific historical constellation: the trial of Socrates and the conflict between the philosopher and the polis. It eliminated many experiences of an earlier past that were irrelevant to its immediate political purposes and proceeded until its end, in the work of Karl Marx, in a highly

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64 Ibid., 7.
I will better delineate how Arendt develops her own original thought below, in the section on *The Human Condition*. For now, it suffices to note how substantively this work is a response to Marx. She takes the tradition of political philosophy to task for its “*déformation professionelle,*” its fundamental aversion to politics. Marx for her is the end of this tradition.

Perhaps the most important lesson Arendt drew from Marx is a clear understanding of the world-as-globe. This is the world of alienated capital: extensive horizontally but not temporally, and hence lacking normative force. Cosmopolitanism, Arendt recognizes, is driven by the logic of capital. Hegel saw the expansion of the Christian community of mutual obligation to eventually encompass the globe as driven by teleological temporality, and hence full of normative force. But, as we have seen, this world-opening force is in fact the imperialism that underwrote the Enlightenment. In other words, the world-as-teleological-temporality *is in fact* the world-as-globe. This flattened world is too shallow a source for Arendt’s vision of the world, one that can ground rights. Hence, ultimately, why Arendt rejects cosmopolitanism: this kind of normative project is in fact only grounded in the globe; Arendt is instead thinking of the force of a world-as-community. Thus, *The Human Condition* is not ultimately about Marx. Instead, Arendt uses Marx as a foil to develop Heidegger’s thinking about the Other to a rich political context.

**Kant’s Unwritten Political Philosophy**

Arendt makes much the same critiques of Kant’s political philosophy as she did of Marx. Both suffer from the *déformation professionelle* of philosophers: their disdain for politics. When

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65 Ibid., 9.
it comes to “the world,” Arendt is also willing to line them both up as Protestant inheritors of the Enlightenment: that is, thinkers of the disenchanted, spatially extensive globe rather than the rich world-as-community that passed from Augustine through to Heidegger. Arendtian world-making is thus doubly averse to the political philosophy of Kant and Marx. Yet Arendt had a profoundly different orientation to Kant than to Marx. Where she held a lifelong distaste for Marx, Arendt remained (or indeed grew ever more) resolutely Kantian in her orientation. I do not want to spend time, then, regurgitating Arendt’s critique of Kant’s actual political philosophy. What I am interested in elaborating is her attempt to recuperate an unwritten political philosophy from Kant’s late works, an attempt that brings us in interesting ways to the problems of aesthetics.

While Arendt’s opinion of Marx’s works changed over her life, it ultimately rested on a noticeable frustration. In 1950, she wrote to Karl Jaspers:

I would like to try to rescue Marx’s honor in your sight. Not that what you say about him isn’t right. But along with that … there is Marx the revolutionary, whom a passion for justice has seized by the scruff of his neck. And this separates him most profoundly from Hegel and unites him, it seems to me, in a not entirely visible but very powerful way with Kant.  

But by 1953, her view of Marx had changed. She wrote to Jaspers:

The more I read Marx, the more I see that you were right. He’s not interested either in freedom or in justice. (And he’s a terrible pain in the neck in addition.) In spite of that, a good springboard for talking about certain general problems.

By contrast, Arendt had a profound respect for Immanuel Kant that only grew towards the end of her life. She saw Kant as susceptible to the same déformation professionelle — that is, as she put it in the same letter to Jaspers, the “partiality philosophers have for rational tyranny, which is, after all, the tyranny of reason” — as Marx and other philosophers of the Western tradition.

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67 Ibid., 216.
68 Ibid., 160.
Furthermore, Arendt agreed with the prevailing opinion that his works of political philosophy (as commonly understood) “cannot compare in quality and depth with Kant’s other writings.” But in “Heidegger at Eighty” she noted that though the usual result of the déformation professionelle was regrettable politics (as with Plato and Heidegger), Kant was “the great exception.” This is why in her late lectures on Kant’s political philosophy Arendt was willing to read Kant generously, recuperating an “unwritten political philosophy” from the unlikeliest of sources: Kant’s great work on aesthetics, the Critique of Judgment. These lectures are all we have from the third section of the Life of the Mind that Arendt intended to write. This work as a whole is the counterpart to The Human Condition (long delayed by the Eichmann controversy), concerned with the vita contemplativa that was pushed aside in The Human Condition. The first section of Life of the Mind was entitled “Thinking”; the second, “Willing”; the third, whose first page was found in Arendt’s typewriter on the day she died, “Judging.” I want to suggest that in this last work of hers, we find the positive development of world-making in the Enlightenment tradition of the world-as-globe, something like her much-elaborated positive amendment of Heidegger and Augustine’s world-as-community. This positive development of world-making rests on an unlikely premise: aesthetics, or the serious consideration of art. By reading Kant’s aesthetics with Arendt we can glimpse a relationship to art that not only gives it dignity irreducible to politics or truth but also sees in art a model for world-making — which is, after all, a virtuosic act, the highest possible form of art, being-with-others. To recuperate this Arendtian reading of Kant, I will spend some time trying to think through the questions of truth and art in a more abstract register than I have pursued above.

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69 Arendt, Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy, 7. I will not feign to discuss Kant’s political philosophy; suffice it to say that the grounds for Arendt’s thoroughgoing critique of Kant are central to many of her mature works.
Arendt’s work in The Human Condition gestures towards the conclusion that everything is immanent to politics: freedom is not an end of politics, but rather its meaning. This is (or should be) a troubling assertion. Indeed, everything might be political; but surely there are at least some things that are not identical to — that is, coterminous with or reducible to — politics.

Take truth, for instance. Objectivity holds that truth resides in the world out there; to have knowledge of the truth is to come as close as possible to unmediated access to that world. Arendt tells us that the world is made by men in their plurality. The world is the in-between created by action. It follows that an Arendtian theory of truth cannot follow objectivity. Or, more precisely, if we want to remain wedded to the idea that truth is in some real relation to the world, we must accept that truth is made in much the way the world is made: through politics. If truth is a representation of the world, yet the world is made by people through politics, then truth is also made by people through politics. This has very unsavory implications. For instance, is it true that the Earth revolves around the sun? The answer, we imagine Arendt saying, depends on the configuration of politics at that time: if the church is dominant, then the Earth is the center of the universe; if Galileo suddenly came to power, the Earth would truly revolve around the sun.

Perhaps we could agree that this is an accurate diagnosis of how the truth is made. The “truth” may indeed ultimately depend on politics; the problem of knowledge is fundamentally one of social order (as Hobbes argued, counter Boyle). Yet this is a rather bleak, hopeless prescription. Surely we can at least hold out hope for some kind of truth that is not the victim of power! To think otherwise seems to concede that might makes right, and thus the only way to make truth is to seize power by any means. Besides these implications, this account of truth is

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70 See Shapin and Schaffer, Leviathan and the Air-Pump.
also terribly imprecise and inconsistent; the truth, it seems, is as changeable as the breeze, dependent on little more than arbitrary political arrangements.

One way to correct this theory of truth is to expand the realm of politics, as Latour does. The truth is again made by the interaction of actors, but these are not mere humans: ice cores, scientists, and the media all interact to produce the “truth” about climate change. This has the virtue of being less preposterous. Scientists don’t make things up out of thin air: they are influenced by cultural and social factors, but also by the other parts of the world around them. An Arendtian theory of truth tempered by the ontological turn is both a more accurate description of how truth is made and a more palatable prescription for what a theory of truth should look like.

Yet I think this is an overly generous — not to mention anachronistically posthumanist — attempt to recuperate a palatable theory of truth from Arendt’s thought. Indeed, I think that Arendt would never entertain a posthumanist amendment to her idea of world-making, in part because she was so deeply rooted in the other side of humanism: the tradition of Goethe and Erasmus, where fidelity to the ancient Greeks and Latins is a cardinal virtue. Arendt is a humanist at heart, invested both in this intellectual tradition and fundamentally committed to leaving a better world *for humans*. Her work from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to *The Human Condition* is a humanist response to the Holocaust; a more hopeful, perhaps more naive response than *Dialectics of Enlightenment* because it retains the same fundamental respect for humans that Kant shared. Here, then, is one way to see how Arendt comes to look for a theory of truth in Kant. She sees his failures, and shrewdly articulates the flaws of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. Yet she retains a humanist faith in freedom and the power of the individual acting in concert with others in their plurality. Where does a humanist go to rescue truth from the jaws of power? To art.
**HOW DO WE MAKE A WORLD?**

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To understand the contours of this theory as Arendt recuperated it from Kant, it helps to narrow down to a basic question of aesthetics: why do we like certain works of art — or, better, what does it mean to say that a work of art is beautiful? One way to go about this question is to parse it in terms of desire; I like a movie poster because it uses so much orange and blue and I like Tchaikovsky because of his satisfying cadences and his memorable melodies. A second way to parse the question is through the intellect; I like Shakespeare because of his formal mastery, and Bach because of his supreme command of counterpoint and mathematical genius. Neither of these accounts of why we like art is satisfying; even if one or the other is a true description of our judgment of particular works of art at some point, at its best art appeals neither to desire nor to intellect but rather to a kind of truth. It is a commonplace that the greatest art contains some kind of deep truth — as Keats would have it, “Beauty is truth, truth beauty, — that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.” Yet at its most charitable, this understanding of art as related to truth at a deep level offers a way out of the problematic status of truth for Arendt. In other words, we can and should look to art for a kind of truth that both recognizes the importance and ubiquity of politics and aspires to something future-oriented, something free. It does violence to assert that we should like art despite its politics, to assume that art (like philosophy) should aspire to separate itself from the world of politics to achieve greatness in the abstract realm of the intellect. But it does violence too to say that art is only of this world, that the political world it is created in is all art can account for. Of course, art is part of politics. But there is some kind of truth there that is not reducible to politics. Truth in this instance is not immanent to politics, but neither is it transcendent. This is what Arendt needs: after leaning so far in the direction of politics, we must find something that is not reducible to it.
This question of art is what Kant takes up in the *Critique of Judgment*. Indeed, his work is precisely intended to balance between the two extremes I articulated above:

The power of judgment provides the mediating concept between the concepts of nature [desire] and the concept of freedom [politics], which makes possible the transition from the purely theoretical to the purely practical, from lawfulness in accordance with the former to the final end in accordance with the latter, in the concept of a *purposiveness* of nature; for thereby is the possibility of the final end, which can become actual only in nature and in accord with its laws, cognized.\(^7^1\)

If we part ways with Kant in his belief that the will, the realm of the noumenal, can be a place of absolute freedom, we recognize with Arendt that freedom is in the world. Politics isn’t something that should be shoved aside to get to the *pure* will, to the rational creature that is actually free. So then neither nature (determinism) nor freedom (rationality) is a place to actually find true judgment.

Kant strictly separates theoretical philosophy, based on the necessities of nature, from practical philosophy, based on the free operation of reason. In which of these categories does art lie?

All technically practical rules (i.e., those of art and skill in general, as well as those of prudence, as a skill in influencing human beings and their will), so far as their principles rest on concepts, must be counted only as corollaries of theoretical philosophy. For they concern only the possibility of things in accordance with concepts of nature, to which belong not only the means thereunto that are to be encountered in nature, but even the will (as a faculty of desire, hence as a natural faculty), insofar as it can be determined through natural incentives in accordance with those rules. Hence practical rules of that kind are not called laws (like, say, physical laws), but only precepts: and precisely because the will does not merely stand under the concept of nature, but also under the concept of freedom, in relation to which its principles are called laws, and alone constitute, together with their consequences, the second part of philosophy, namely the practical.\(^7^2\)

A real political philosophy for Arendt cannot proceed from individual reason; she established this negative assertion clearly throughout her career. So, where does it proceed from? Perhaps

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\(^7^1\) Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 81–82.; Prussian Academy edition, 5: 196.

\(^7^2\) Ibid., 60.; 5: 172.
from judgment. For to judge art properly is neither to judge it according to “technically practical rules” (the “corollaries of theoretical philosophy”) nor to judge it according to the will “as a faculty of desire, hence as a natural faculty.” Similarly, to make proper normative claims we must rely on neither nature nor freedom: for

Legislation through concepts of nature takes place through the understanding, and is theoretical. Legislation through the concept of freedom takes place through reason, and is merely practical. …

Now although there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible, just as if there were so many different worlds, the first of which can have no influence on the second: yet the latter should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.73

To recognize freedom and nature as totally separate is to behave as if there were two separate worlds. But there is only one world! This is precisely what Arendt is saying. So how does one access this one world? In other words, how does one actually make normative statements that proceed from one world and not from a specious division of nature and reason? Through “the critique of the power of judgment, as a means for combining the two parts of philosophy into one whole.”74 I will return to this matter at the end of the second chapter, where I will suggest how Arendt recuperates the resources of Kant’s aesthetics to outline a different kind of politics that involves the judgment of beauty and a different relation of subjectivity and objectivity.

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What I have sketched above is an Arendtian reading of Kant that I believe outlines what she sought in Kant as a response to lingering doubts about her vision of politics. Unfortunately, she did not lay out this reading of Kant systematically anywhere; as I mentioned above, the

74 Ibid., 64.
Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy are but sketches towards what would have been the last part of Life of the Mind. What concerns her primarily is to read back into Kant the condition of human plurality. According to Arendt, Kant outlines “three very different concepts of, or perspectives under which we can consider, the affairs of men.”

First is “the human species and its progress” — “part of nature,” to be found in the “second part of [the] Critique of Judgement.” Second, we have man as a “reasonable being, subject to the laws of practical reason which he gives himself, autonomous, an end in himself, belonging to a Geisterreich, real of intelligible beings” — i.e. the man of reason, to be found in the “Critique of Practical Reason and Critique of Pure Reason.” Finally, in an Arendtian vein, we speak of “men as actual inhabitants of the earth, … living in communities, endowed with common sense, sensus communis, a community sense; not autonomous, needing each other’s company even for thinking,” found in the first part of the Critique of Judgment. Philosophy traditionally thought that

pleasures, like displeasures, distract the mind and lead it astray, that the body is a burden if you are after truth, which, being immaterial and beyond sense perception, can be perceived only by the eyes of the soul, which also is immaterial and beyond sense perception.

But Kant’s position differs,

for his theoretical philosophy holds that all cognition depends on the interplay and cooperation of sensibility and intellect.

Furthermore, Arendt sees Kant as ultimately committed to making the philosopher “a man like you and me, living among his fellow men, not among his fellow philosophers.”

To prove this point she quotes an autobiographical passage from his Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime:

I myself am a researcher [Forscher, trans. by Arendt as “inquirer”] by inclination. I feel the entire thirst for cognition [Erkenntnis, trans. by Arendt as “knowledge”] and the eager restlessness to

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75 Arendt, Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy, 27. The following quotations come from the same section.
76 Ibid., 28.
HOW DO WE MAKE A WORLD?

proceed further in it, as well as the satisfaction at every acquisition. There was a time when I believed this alone could constitute the honor of humankind, and I despised the rabble who knows nothing. Rousseau has set me right. This blinding prejudice vanishes, I learn to honor human beings [Menschen, trans. by Arendt as “man”], and I would feel by far less useful than the common laborer if I did not believe that this consideration [which Arendt clarifies as “what I am doing”] could impart a value to all others in order to establish the rights of humanity.77

This is the humanist Kant who thirsts ultimately to provide value to others and who sees himself, too, as a common man. Arendt is telling us that it is not an accident that this remark comes in Kant’s aesthetics: it is there that we find him truly embodying politics, and hence there that we can read from his work an unwritten political philosophy.

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In reaction to Heidegger, Augustine, and Marx, Arendt developed ideas of world-making rooted in their thought yet usefully dealing with their limitations. The relationship of world-making to Kant is rather different. Schematically: Kant’s world-making as articulated in his political philosophy proper (for instance, Towards Perpetual Peace) is dismissed out of hand. It offers little to a productive understanding of world-making, because it is symptomatic of the broader philosophers’ disdain for politics. Thus Arendt understands Kant to be primarily operating out of concern for man rather than men. Yet she remains attracted to him, and convinced (though on scant evidence) that towards the end of his life he too understood the need to treat politics with dignity. The result of this move is, Arendt claims, Kant’s Critique of Judgment. I have tried to sketch a few features of the category of the world as it appears obliquely in this work, and as Arendt reads it in her own unfinished late work, the last section of the Life of the Mind. What we begin to see is an emphasis on art, a turn to aesthetics as a realm where politics, truth, and plurality fruitfully intersect. I believe this is a very promising line of

77 Kant, Observations, 96.; 20: 44.
argument, especially when brought into discussion with my own concerns for truth and the ontological turn. I don’t think we can find the necessary resources to develop this line of argument in Kant or Arendt themselves, though, and so for the moment will turn away from aesthetics — but I will return to this theme in the final section of this thesis.
2. An Immanent Account of Arendtian World-Making

So far I have given two ways into an Arendtian form of world-making: first, by articulating the problematic she shares with contemporary theorists, especially in anthropology, working from a historical case of alterity and violence (//Kabbo’s map); and second, by tracing an intellectual history that prioritizes the influences on her thought of Heidegger and Augustine, on the one hand, and Marx and Kant, on the other. A third way into an Arendtian form of world-making is taking an immanent approach — that is, excluding for a moment other influences and crosscurrents. This is emphatically not an attempt to isolate Arendt’s theory from her surroundings. Indeed, this would do great violence to her work. One of the most profound attractions of Arendt’s thought is how she starts from very real problematics but thinks with them deeply, moving from problems to responses. I am trying here to show that there is an inner logic to this development that is not entirely contingent on Arendt’s influences. Just as it is possible to give an account of her work that is too hermetically sealed, it is too easy to make her thinking appear entirely dependent on the rich sources that she draws from. For instance, Arendt can sometimes become a shadow of Heidegger, a young woman whose thinking is dependent on the towering giant she was so close to. In my discussion of world-making so far, I may have given this impression by sketching Arendt’s thought as primarily a corrective to the phenomenological category of world that Heidegger had articulated. This is a portrait I want to resist by giving an account of the inner logic of Arendt’s developing thought, against the background of the influences drawn in the previous section but with a commitment to developing an independent Arendtian form of world-making.

What such an immanent account of Arendt’s thought most clearly demonstrates is the progression from careful study, diagnosis, and analysis in The Origins of Totalitarianism to
decisively future-oriented ethics in *The Human Condition*. In other words, this account of Arendt’s work functions also as a model for how to best produce normative accounts: neither through the model of social science nor of abstract philosophy, but rather in everyday actions that are suffused with ethics and purpose. As I mentioned above, Arendt finds this model of future-oriented history in Kant. It is in practicing this method that Arendt develops her understanding of world-making, and in practicing its analog that I aim to productively critique and revise world-making for the problematic I am articulating.

**THE PROBLEM POSED IN THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM**

*The Origins of Totalitarianism* gives a magisterial exposition of various elements that crystallized into totalitarianism, which for Arendt are exemplified by the regimes of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. Arendt was concerned neither with giving an abstract systematic sense of what the conditions are for totalitarianism, nor in tracing the specific historic causes of these two regimes; thus, she succeeded in annoying both political scientists and philosophers on the one hand and historians on the other. She works between these two levels to articulate the elements that crystallize into totalitarianism.

Arendt expresses this tension most articulately in the analytical mode, in her chapter of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* entitled “Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man.” She begins by explaining that the Rights of Man are constituted alongside the nation-state:

> The whole question of human rights, therefore, was quickly and inextricably blended with the question of national emancipation; only the emancipated sovereignty of the people, of one’s own people, seemed to be able to insure them. As mankind, since the French Revolution, was conceived in the image of a family of nations, it gradually became self-evident that the people, and not the individual, was the image of man. (291)  

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78 For an early but still authoritative account of this development of Arendt’s thought, see Canovan, *Hannah Arendt*.  
79 This and following parenthetical citations in this section are to Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.  

The emergence of the Rights of Man “meant nothing more nor less than that from then on Man, and not God’s command or the customs of history, should be the source of Law” (290). This shift from particular rights guaranteed by history to universal rights endowed by nature parallels the emergence of the Jewish problem. The Jews

were at the head of the so-called minority movement because of their great need for protection (matched only by the need of the Armenians) and their excellent international connections, but above all because they formed a majority in no country and therefore could be regarded as the *minorité par excellence*, i.e., the only minority whose interests could be defended only by internationally guaranteed protection. (289)

It was thus the Jews, through the phenomenon of mass statelessness, who showed the inherent failure of the Rights of Man. Arendt explains

that the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them. … The Rights of Man, supposedly inalienable, proved to be unenforceable — even in countries whose constitutions were based upon them — whenever people appeared who were no longer citizens of any sovereign state. (292–3)

In other words, the Jewish problem demonstrated that the Rights of Man only worked in a system of nation-states. The Jews were thus at the mercy of the “host” governments; as soon as mass statelessness began — that is, when Jews had to fall back on the “international community” as their provider of rights — the system of rights collapsed. Because the Jews did not belong to any government, they were denied the most fundamental of rights: the right to have rights. One tempting response would be to urge that the non-national rights be strengthened sufficiently.

But Arendt denies this possibility of grounding rights in the globe. She elaborates on this through a proleptic link to natality:

The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective. Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course … [People deprived of human rights] are deprived, not of the right to freedom, but of the right to action; not of the right to think whatever they please, but of the right to opinion. (296)
The issue that underlies the problem of statelessness is not that the stateless are denied rights *per se*. Rather, they are denied the ability to exercise *what makes them human*: action. What lies at the center of the world is action, since this is an ability endowed by the birth of every human being (natality). The Rights of Man, because they are co-constituted with the nation-state, necessarily exclude some people from rights. By doing so, the Jews are not just excluded from the exercise of civil rights — the kind of freedoms that can be restored through legislation. Instead, the Jews are excluded from the very act of world-making itself. The Rights of Man bar the world-as-community from those who are not citizens of any nation. This world-making is the essential prerequisite of freedom. Hence why Arendt defends the community:

> Not the loss of specific rights, then, but the loss of a community willing and able to guarantee any rights whatsoever, has been the calamity which has befallen ever-increasing numbers of people. Man, it turns out, can lose all so-called Rights of Man without losing his essential quality as man, his human dignity. Only the loss of a polity itself expels him from humanity. (297)

A polity, Arendt says, is *necessary* to secure man’s humanity. This polity should not be a nation, or another exclusive community: the Jewish problem has shown us that in painfully clear detail. But this polity cannot be cosmopolitan, either. After all, this kind of cosmopolitanism is founded in the idea that humanity is what gives people rights. But this humanity for Arendt can only be exercised *in community*: the very essence of what it is to be human is to take action, and thereby participate in the making of a world-as-community.

Perhaps it would be too much to read this as an endorsement of the nation-state. Indeed, it is unclear whether Arendt has any idea (at this point) what the polity she deems necessary for human dignity looks like. But Arendt certainly rejects a normative project that simply embraces the sum of deterritorialized humanity; not because she wants to deny anyone rights, but because she sees the predicament of the stateless and reminds us that the right to have rights is to be in a community. After all, Arendt says, “we are not born equal; we become equal as members of a
group on the strength of our decision to guarantee ourselves mutually equal rights” (301). To endorse a vision of cosmopolitanism that aligns simply with Kant and Hegel is to accept that a global, universally interrelated civilization may produce barbarians from its own midst by forcing millions of people into conditions which, despite all appearances, are the conditions of savages. (302)

These conditions are quite literally subhuman: the loss of rights through cosmopolitanism would create a group of people excluded from natality, the essence of humanity.

This, in short, is Arendt’s analysis of how “the whole of nearly three thousand years of Western civilization, as we have known it in a comparatively uninterrupted stream of tradition, has broken down” (434). We are put in a double bind:

Whether we like it or not, we have long ceased to live in a world in which [as for Augustine] the faith in the Judaeo-Christian myth of creation is secure enough to constitute a basis and source of authority for actual laws, and we certainly no longer believe, as the great men of the French Revolution did, in a universal cosmos of which man was a part and whose natural laws he had to imitate and conform to. (434)

Our only way out is to recognize that

The only given condition for the establishment of rights is the plurality of men; rights exist because we inhabit the earth together with other men. No divine command, derived from man’s having been created in the image of God, and no natural law, derived from man’s “nature,” are sufficient for the establishment of a new law on earth, for rights spring from human plurality, and divine command or natural law would be true even if there existed only a single human being. (437)

What we must avoid at all costs is to go back to any idea

where right is that which is “good for” — the individual, or the family, or the people. Such a definition, even if the unit to which the “good for” applies is as large as mankind itself, will never prevent murder. For it is quite conceivable that one beautiful day a highly organized, mechanized, and centralized humanity may decide that it would be better for the whole to do without a certain part. (438)

These remarks — present only in the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, from 1951 — are astonishingly proleptic. The previous four hundred pages outlined in great detail the historical groundwork that led her to identify the problem, the double bind we are in that forces her to find
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a different idea of world-making. Then, in these last few pages, Arendt states clearly what her response will look like when it is finally formulated in significant detail seven years later, in *The Human Condition*. Indeed, her final page even pushes beyond what she would say in that later, more careful work:

> Only a consciously planned beginning of history, only a consciously devised new polity, will eventually be able to reintegrate those who in ever-increasing numbers are being expelled from humanity and severed from human condition [sic]. … The concept of human rights can again be meaningful only if they are redefined as a right to the human condition itself, which depends upon belonging to some human community, the right never to be dependent upon some inborn human dignity which de facto, aside from its guarantee by fellow-men, not only does not exist but is the last and possibly most arrogant myth we have invented in all our long history. (439)

Yet this intimation of what a possible response might be to mass statelessness and genocide is only possible at the end of a long, systematic account of the origins of totalitarianism. To begin to formulate a new vision of politics, for Arendt, we must commit to thorough study of how the problems we want to address have come to be.

**THE RESPONSE SKETCHED IN THE HUMAN CONDITION**

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt gives her clearest articulation of world-making as a necessary solution to the problem she articulated in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: the loss not of rights, but of the right to have rights. As I noted above, the characteristics she outlines in *The Human Condition* were foreshadowed in the conclusion to the first edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Yet it is important to note that *The Human Condition* is structured as a response to the tradition of political thought, and especially as a grand riposte to Marx. As a whole, the work is structured around a trichotomy of labor, work, and action, which stands against Marx’s analysis of labor. For Arendt, by contrast, labor is “the activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body,” whose “human condition is life itself”; work “provides an ‘artificial’ world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings,” whose “human
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condition” is “worldliness”; while action is “the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter” and “corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world” (7). Recognizing what the work is set against can help us understand Arendt’s thought, but in this section I am most interested in reconstructing Arendt’s positive vision of world-making. What work did the category of the world do for her? How does this term connect to her fundamental concerns with freedom and politics, and to the broader problematic of alterity and humanism?

The most important aspect of the Arendtian world that comes to light in *The Human Condition* is its construction by political action, which men are endowed with by natality — the very fact of their birth. Where Heidegger wrote that men are “thrown into” the world, Arendt recuperates from Marx the primacy of action, that is of human creation of the world. This allows Arendt to distinguish the “world” from the “earth”:

the term “public” signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature, as the limited space for the movement of men and the general condition of organic life. It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time. (52)

What matters for the world is that we have something objective in common. These common objects are human artifacts, and therefore the world is a human construct based on earth but not tied to it. This makes it possible to destroy the world by doing much less than destroying the earth. Indeed, to destroy the world, all we need do is to destroy the public realm that we have in common — that is, to become solely private, or deprived of seeing and hearing others:

Under the conditions of a common world, reality is not guaranteed primarily by the “common nature” of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same
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object. If the sameness of the object can no longer be discerned, no common nature of men, least of all the unnatural conformism of a mass society, can prevent the destruction of the common world, which is usually preceded by the destruction of the many aspects in which it presents itself to human plurality. This can happen under conditions of radical isolation, where nobody can any longer agree with anybody else, as is usually the case in tyrannies. But it may also happen under conditions of mass society or mass hysteria, where we see all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor. In both instances, men have become entirely private, that is, they have been deprived of seeing and hearing others, of being seen and being heard by them. They are all imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience, which does not cease to be singular if the same experience is multiplied innumerable times. The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective. (57–8)

We hear echoes here of Arendt’s criticism of Heidegger — he had recognized the conditions of a common world, but the radical isolation he turned to made him an entirely private creature (a philosopher in the proper sense) who thus brings about the end of the common world. Yet now, when writing The Human Condition, Arendt does not mention Heidegger’s name even once. Instead, she writes that what immediately precipitated her work was the perspective brought by a recent event “second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom”: Sputnik (or spaceflight in general), which for the first time allowed man to see the world as the earth in its entirety, as a small blue orb — and thus turn away from the earth, the natural dwelling-place of humans. She asks: “Should the emancipation and secularization of the modern age, which began with a turning-away, not necessarily from God, but from a god who was the Father of men in heaven, end with an even more fateful repudiation of an Earth who was the Mother of all living creatures under the sky?“ It is with this strange gesture that Arendt launches her discussion of the world, under guise of its ending.

Just as one of Arendt’s primary concerns in The Human Condition is the end of the world, the other is how we create a world. Arendt’s appropriation of Marxist categories is a properly

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80 Arendt, The Human Condition, 1.
81 Ibid., 2.
original amendment of the phenomenological world Heidegger had offered. She is particularly interested in the different relationships of the world with both work (fabrication of things, driven by utility) and action (what goes on between people, driven by natality, since “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting” (7)). Thus, she writes:

The man-made world of things, the human artifice erected by homo faber, becomes a home for mortal men, whose stability will endure and outlast the ever-changing movement of their lives and actions, only insomuch as it transcends both the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption [labor] and the sheer utility of objects produced for use [work]. Life in its non-biological sense, the span of time each man has between birth and death, manifests itself in action and speech, both of which share with life its essential futility.

Arendt’s concern with artifice leans into the irreducibility of art. In other words, Arendt recognizes that art is not merely functional — not utilitarian. The world as a work of art will only endure “insomuch as it transcends” functionalism and “sheer utility.” The permanence of the world depends on both work and action, especially in its highest capacity as art:

The “doing of great deeds and the speaking of great words” will leave no trace, no product that might endure after the moment of action and the spoken word has passed. If the animal laborans needs the help of homo faber to ease his labor and remove his pain, and if mortals need his help to erect a home on earth, acting and speaking men need the help of homo faber in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all. In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced. (174)

There are echoes here of Arendt’s lifelong concern with art as more than just politics, yet something eminently political. This is a theme I discussed above with reference to Kant’s aesthetics, and a subject I will elaborate on below when we turn to the Khoi-San. Arendt clearly states that work and action are mutually dependent in the construction of a world that can survive mortal life. While work creates the world, it is action that brings it together. Thus:
Without being talked about by men and without housing them, the world would not be a human artifice but a heap of unrelated things to which each isolated individual was at liberty to add one more object; without the human artifice to house them, human affairs would be as floating, as futile and vain, as the wanderings of nomad tribes. The melancholy wisdom of Ecclesiastes — “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity. … There is no new thing under the sun, … there is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after” — does not necessarily arise from specifically religious experience; but it is certainly unavoidable wherever and whenever trust in the world as a place fit for human appearance, for action and speech, is gone. Without action to bring into the play of the world the new beginning of which each man is capable by virtue of being born, “there is no new thing under the sun”; without speech to materialize and memorialize, however tentatively, the “new things” that appear and shine forth, “there is no remembrance”; without the enduring permanence of a human artifact, there cannot “be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.” (204)

In the end, Arendt concludes that “the miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted” (247).

**ARENDT’S IDIOSYNCRATIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROMISE OF POLITICS**

A frequently underlooked text for understanding Arendt’s vision of politics is the collection edited by Jerome Kohn and published in 2004 called *The Promise of Politics*. As I discussed above, this text collects various fragments Arendt wrote between *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. *The Promise of Politics* is most helpful in crystallizing the broad, idiosyncratic meaning of “politics” for Arendt. Politics is decidedly not about a state apparatus, or even power as such. Rather, “politics deals with the coexistence and association of different men. … Politics arises in what lies between men and is established as relationships.”

This immanence of politics in human relationships is a first instance of how Arendt is decidedly anti-instrumental. Indeed, her issue with philosophy is precisely that politics is subordinated to an end. Whether philosophy is the search for ontological truth (Heidegger) or

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the good life (Plato), politics is merely a means. This subordination of politics is the greatest threat to political life, not least because it is precisely what Arendt identifies as the prime characteristic of totalitarianism (“which in a profound sense is truly apolitical”).

Instead of instrumentalizing politics as a means to an end, Arendt suggests we ground our world-making in action. In that case, freedom is not an end of politics: it is what is realized in the political realm. Freedom “as a fact of everyday life … is actually the reason that men live together in political organization at all. … The raison d’être of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.” A different way of putting this is that freedom is not a quality of man, but rather is immanent in the in-between that men create through political action. Freedom is world-making. Hence why the subordination of politics to an end is the greatest possible threat. For if it were true that political action pursues ends and must be judged according to its expediency, it would follow that politics is concerned with things that are not political in themselves but superior to politics, just as all ends must be superior to the means by which they are accomplished. It would also follow that political action will cease once its end is achieved, and that politics in general … will at some point disappear entirely from human history.

Thus, for Arendt politics “lies altogether out of the categories of means and ends”: “the means to achieve the end would already be the end; and this ‘end,’ conversely, cannot be considered a means in some other respect, because there is nothing higher to attain than this actuality itself.”

For political philosophers, politics is defined by the ends it seeks (freedom, justice, right). By contrast, for Arendt the greatest threat is the reduction of politics to mere means. This is partly a lesson drawn from her study of totalitarianism: she generalizes that subsuming politics to ends will give space for suppression of freedom and justice in the meantime. Instead, the point of

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83 Ibid., 98.
86 Ibid., 207.
politics is political practice. If political action creates the world, and philosophy makes political action a merely incidental means to an end like freedom or justice, then the instrumentalization of politics is nothing less than the destruction of the world.

Arendt is not making the claim that we create the world through political action; that would be to make world-making an end of politics. Rather, political action is identical to world-making, which is an end in itself:

The goals of politics are never anything more than the guidelines and directives by which we orient ourselves and which, as such, are never cast in stone, but whose concrete realizations are constantly changing because we are dealing with other people who also have goals. … If a political action does not achieve its goals — which it never does in reality — that does not render the political action either pointless or meaningless … because in the back-and-forth of exchanged speech — between individuals and peoples, between states and nations — that space in which everything else that takes place is first created and then sustained. What in political language is called a “breakdown in relations” is the abandonment of that in-between space, which all violent action first destroys before it proceeds to annihilate those who live outside of it.87

So how does Arendt regard common political ideals such as freedom, equality, and justice? Instead of being ends for politics, she says that freedom is freedom to act, equality is the equality created by recognizing other humans’ capacity to act, and truth is politics — “for without a space of appearance and without trusting in action and speech as a mode of being together, neither the reality of one’s self, of one’s own identity, nor the reality of the surrounding world can be established beyond doubt.”88 Arendt argues both that “the raison d’être of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action.”89 Thus for Arendt freedom is neither freedom from nor freedom with but freedom to act politically, freedom as virtuosity. Thus,

Freedom … is not only one among the many problems and phenomena of the political realm properly speaking, such as justice, or power, or equality; freedom, which only seldom — in times of crisis or revolution — becomes the direct aim of political action, is actually the reason that men

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87 Ibid., 193.
88 Arendt, The Human Condition, 208.
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live together in political organization at all.90

Equality, in the form of the world we create together, proceeds from this free political action. Equality (for instance, in the form of justice for the Khoi-San) is realized by “creating and maintaining this space of politics, a realm in which people can be recognized as human, as potential partners in interaction.”91 Politics ultimately serves the ideals of equality, freedom, and justice, but it does so by standing on its own two feet rather than being reduced to means.

The Critique of Cosmopolitanism in the Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy

This is essentially the argument against cosmopolitanism. It is an ideal, like equality, justice, or freedom; but to impose it is to foreclose the rich realm of politics in its own right. The only world that is really free is one where everyone is free to act. This requires the construction of a world, an in-between, where actions can have real consequences — where politics is more than a means to the end of equality. So, paradoxically, the only way to achieve cosmopolitanism is by suspending our judgement that cosmopolitanism is right. As Étienne Tassin argues, globalization for Arendt is nothing other than “a globalization of worldlessness, a systematization of the destruction of the world under the cover of its economic and technoscientific domination.”92 If cosmopolitanism as globalization is, paradoxically, worldless, then cosmopolitanism proper (perhaps better understood as cosmopolitics, to use Isabelle Stengers’ felicitous phrase) is “first of all a resistance to worldlessness, to the triple destruction of the

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90 Ibid.
92 Tassin, Un monde commun, 18. In the original: “mondialisation de l’acosmisme, une systématisation de la destruction du monde sous couvert de sa domination économique et technoscientifique.” Italics in original.
world — political, techno-scientific, and economic.”93 This kind of cosmopolitics differs most of all from cosmopolitanism in that it does not want to suppress difference and contestation, but rather celebrate it as political action, that which makes the world. The crucial difference here comes out better in languages other than English, and most prominently in French, where the gap is signified as the difference between globalisation and mondialisation (monde being a common French word not just for world, but also for “people” or “everybody”).94 Thus, it is against the Kantian “transcendental illusion” of cosmopolitanism-as-globalization that Arendt poses her politics: to create a world not out of the flat world-as-globe (that she so incisively critiqued in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*), but rather for a world to arise from the actions of people in their plurality. As James Ingram puts it: “the problem of cosmopolitanism from an Arendtian point of view is then the difficulty of creating a ‘world’ or ‘worlds’ in which it is possible to act politically out of the vast chains of apolitical interaction constituted by contemporary globalization. This cannot be the work of great powers or international institutions, but must arise from relations among political actors themselves.”95

The critique of cosmopolitanism follows from Arendt’s own refusal to subordinate politics as a means to any end — whether equality, freedom, or global justice. Yet a different way to understand Arendt’s critique of cosmopolitanism is as a properly immanent critique of Kant. When outlining his idea of cosmopolitanism, Kant is under no illusions that he is describing objective reality. He understands that such practical philosophy is subjective: in describing cosmopolitanism we do not describe the way the world is, but rather create a scenario

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93 Ibid. In the original: “La cosmopolitique ainsi entendue est d’abord une résistance à l’acosmisme, à la triple destruction politique, technoscientifique et économique du monde.”
94 One particularly salient analysis of this gap is found in Nancy, *La création du monde ou la mondialisation.*
95 Ingram, *Radical Cosmopolitics*, 195.
in our minds that we believe rational actors would follow. Kant’s political philosophy (for
instance, in *On Perpetual Peace*) is essentially a fictional story: internally consistent, but with no
claim to describing the way the world is. Of course, Kant wants his political philosophy to
become objective, to realize itself. To do so he must presume that others reason like him. If
everyone was a rational actor like Kant, then cosmopolitanism would be the logical arrangement
of politics. This is precisely what Arendt criticizes. She says it is philosophy’s problem in
general, and Kant’s in particular, that it sees political arrangements as coming about from the
mind of a rational actor. Politics, as she so often repeats, cannot come from considering the
Kantian subject, man. It must instead be based on the plurality of men.

This is why Arendt turns to Kantian aesthetics in her late *Lectures on Kant’s Political
Philosophy*. She is especially interested in Kant’s account of judgments of the beautiful. When I
claim that a mountain is beautiful, what happens is that there is a coincidence between my
faculty of understanding and my faculty of imagination. I see the mountain as beautiful if I
understand in such a way that it correlates to what I imagine a mountain to be. Such judgments
of the beautiful are only subjectively valid: this is a *coincidence* of two individual faculties, not
the outcome of some cognitive function. Yet judgments of the beautiful (as I discussed earlier)
differ in substance from judgments of the pleasant or agreeable. Those latter are merely
subjective, but beauty is a subjective judgment that *demands or imposes* (*zumuten*) universal
assent. The subjective judgment of the beautiful becomes an objective judgment not through the
linchpin of rationality (as with political philosophy) but rather through a demand of universal
assent that is constitutive of the judgment of the beautiful. What are the grounds for such

96 This word has also been translated as “require” or “impute.” See the editorial comment by Paul Guyer in Kant,
*Critique of the Power of Judgment*, xlviii.
“expectation of a universal assent”? The answer is a favorite Arendtian theme: common sense (Gemeinsinn, sensus communis). As Kant writes:

Thus only under the presupposition that there is a common sense (by which, however, we do not mean any external sense but rather the effect of the free play of our cognitive powers), only under the presupposition of such a common sense, I say, can the judgment of taste be made. Taste (responsible for judgments of the beautiful) is described by Kant as “sensus communis aestheticus.” Thus, “one could even define taste as the faculty for judging that which makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable without the mediation of a concept.” Subjective judgments of the beautiful become objective by appeal to what is common — the in-between, an Arendtian world. Indeed, it is in these passages about common sense that Kant discusses the human being as other than an individual:

For himself alone a human being abandoned on a desert island would not adorn either his hut or himself, nor seek out or still less plant flowers in order to decorate himself; rather, only in society does it occur to him to be not merely a human being but also, in his own way, a refined human being (the beginning of civilization): for this is how we judge someone who is inclined to communicate his pleasure to others and is skilled at it, and who is not content with an object if he cannot feel his satisfaction in it in community with others.

It is in making art in common that we turn to each other to make a common world out of community.

What if cosmopolitanism, or any political vision, were treated as if it were a judgment of the beautiful? This would mean to recognize the subjectivity of political visions: they are fundamentally plural, because every person judges different things as beautiful. Yet such judgments are not merely subjective, like desire. Our political actions are subjective, but that

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97 Ibid., 124.; 5:240.
98 Ibid., 122.; 5:238.
99 Ibid., 175.; 5:295. Italics in original.
100 For a valuable explanation, see Pollok, Kant’s Theory of Normativity, 100–101.
101 Kant, Critique of the Power of Judgment, 177.; 5:297.
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does not mean we are relativists: we argue for particular policies and candidates based on our subjective judgments, but with the hope that they are objective, too. The method of constituting politics Arendt gives us is world-making. One way of elaborating this world-making is by borrowing resources from Kant: our subjective political judgments are made objective by appeal to the world we make together. The world is to politics what taste (the sensus communis aestheticus) is to the beautiful: “that which makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable without the mediation of a concept.” In other words, by appealing to the common world we can make a politics that does not presume a rational subject.

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Earlier in this section we glimpsed how Arendt articulated the problematic of alterity and humanism in her study of genocide and the Rights of Man, The Origins of Totalitarianism. We saw too her early account of what a vision of politics might look like that takes seriously this study as the basis for theory in its proper sense — a new way of looking. So, what is world-making as it emerges from The Human Condition and other contemporaneous writings of Arendt’s? We have seen how she is careful to distinguish the world from the earth. Yet Arendt does draw something from the world’s connotations of planetarity (to borrow a term from Gayatri Spivak). In particular, Arendt is careful to maintain that a “world” is not a civilization or a culture; there is at the end of the day one world, though it may contain many worlds. It is in returning to The Origins of Totalitarianism that we see Arendt’s care to lean away from both cosmopolitanism and communitarianism — neither of which proved helpful for the Jews in Europe. What Arendtian world-making comes down to in the end is a concern with how this

102 These terms are conflate in much more recent work, for instance by work in the environmental humanities such as Chakrabarty, “The Climate of History.”

103 Thus Arendt likely would have approved of the recent work by Cadena and Blaser, A World of Many Worlds.
delineation is made: in other words, a commitment to the dignity of politics as the fundamental category of human activity. This is a human activity that transcends labor (the biological activities we do because they are necessary) and work (the making of things that we do because they are useful) to reach for action as the constituent of politics. After all, action is conditioned by our very birth as human beings. It is in being born that we are endowed with the capacity for action (of which political speech is a prime example). The world we make through action is what we are thrown into with our birth and what will be permanent after our inevitable death, for the world cannot be destroyed merely by the death of its constituents. Instead, for the world to end is for the possibility of action between men to come to an end. To preserve the world, then, is to preserve this right to have rights, that is the right to act. This preservation is undertaken by man in his highest capacity as an artist.

At least as important as discerning these characteristics of world-making for Arendt is understanding the method by which Arendt developed her world-making. Thus, she began with faithfulness to history and to analysis, to what has happened. She proceeds not to make things abstract but rather think with them to grasp the broader questions about freedom, equality, truth, politics. To repeat a Heideggerian canard, it is in this grasping (greifen) that we can begin to find new concepts (Begriffe). Heidegger gave her the concept of the world (the Weltbegriff), but also the method by which to grasp the world. Augustine may well have inspired Arendt’s tripartite division in The Human Condition, but he also led her to understand the more-than-secular community that is a necessary component of a non-alienated world. Kant gave her a set of negative concepts, insofar as it is against his political philosophy (his “transcendental illusion”) that Arendt pushes to delineate her understanding of politics. But where her concepts stand against Kant, Arendt shares with Kant his fundamental orientation to history as a site of future-
oriented ethics, and thus to philosophy as worthless if not ultimately a help meet to establishing
the common rights of mankind. To turn from Arendt’s Weltbegriff to her greifen is then not to
extract a method from her work, but instead to look for resources at one level of her thought (her
fundamental Kantianism) that fruitfully contest her vision of politics as commonly understood.
3. 

In the previous section, I gave an immanent account of Arendt’s developing thought, focusing particularly on *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*. The development of Arendt’s thought over this period can be told as a story of how Arendt reckoned with her experience of the Third Reich. Many of the elements of her mature thought were present in her works from the 1920s and early 30s — in part, as I outlined in the first section, through her serious engagement with Heidegger and Augustine. Yet it was her exile from Germany and subsequent experience of losing friends and a whole world during the Second World War that catalyzed the evolution of her thought. If the Nazis had not come to power, Arendt likely would have settled in a comfortable chair of philosophy at a German university, continuing Heidegger’s project and probably amending it in some of the ways she would ultimately pursue. But without the experience of the Second World War, Arendt would not have written *The Origins of Totalitarianism*; nor would she have so decisively broken with the tradition and discipline of philosophy; nor would she, I believe, have developed such an idiosyncratic and irreverent conception of politics. What I want to argue, then, is that Arendt’s thought is profoundly marked by her engagement with and experience of genocide. Heidegger and Jaspers had taught her to think deeply, insightfully, and critically; when faced with such a calamitous event, Arendt took up the charge of thinking through the problematic of alterity and humanism.

Arendt’s motivation in pursuing this project rests on a view of history that is at heart future-oriented: for her, the events of the past did not amount to a collection of data but rather to a site of ethics and action. This is a view of history that deals seriously with Hegel and Marx, but ultimately revises their understanding by returning to the thought of Kant. Arendt’s deep affection for Kant comes from their mutual belief that, as Arendt quoted Kant in saying,
HOW DO WE MAKE A WORLD?

I would find myself more useless than the common laborer if I did not believe that [what I am doing] can give worth to all others in establishing the rights of mankind.\textsuperscript{104}

The similarity of Kant and Arendt is less of a theoretical affinity — Arendt denigrates Kant’s political philosophy alongside all other philosophers’ — than a kinship in spirit. Thus, in the first volume of \textit{The Life of the Mind}, her last work, Arendt writes that “since Hegel and Marx,”

all attempts to arrive at a halfway plausible theory of ethics … have been treated in the perspective of History and on the assumption that there is such a thing as Progress of the human race. Finally we shall be left with the only alternative there is in these matters — we either can say with Hegel: \textit{Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht}, leaving the ultimate judgment to Success, or we can maintain with Kant the autonomy of the minds of men and their possible independence of things as they are or as they have come into being.\textsuperscript{105}

To follow the latter path is to reflect on the etymology of the word “history,” which Arendt writes is

derived from \textit{historein}, to inquire in order to tell how it was — \textit{legein ta eonta} in Herodotus. But the origin of this verb is again Homer (\textit{Iliad} XVIII) where the noun \textit{history} (“historian,” as it were) occurs, and that Homeric historian is the \textit{judge}. If judgment is our faculty for dealing with the past, the historian is the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgment over it. If that is so, we may reclaim our human dignity, win it back, as it were, from the pseudo-divinity named History of the modern age, without denying history’s importance but denying its right to being the ultimate judge.\textsuperscript{106}

Human dignity is Arendt’s concern, and one reclaims it in the face of history by insisting on our capacity to judge, and thus on our capacity to take action for the future. To recognize contingency in the past one must affirm the possibility of the difference actions can make that are taken in the present. To deny either the fundamental power of action or the contingency of historical events is to succumb to teleology, “leaving the ultimate judgment to Success.” To do

\textsuperscript{104} Quoted in Arendt, \textit{Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy}, 29. The translation and the editorial addition in square brackets are Arendt’s own. For the original passage from Kant, see above at fn. 77.

\textsuperscript{105} Arendt, \textit{The Life of the Mind}, Vol. 1, \textit{Thinking}, 216.

\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Ibid}. Indeed, Classical ἱστορία (inquiry, narrative) derives from the Homeric ἵστωρ (to judge, to witness), which is in turn a form of the verb ὁἶδα (to know, related ultimately to the English “wit”). See the \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} s.v. “history, n.,” accessed January 31, 2020.
history with Arendt is to remain committed to the future and to a past filled with ethics and action.

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It is in this spirit that I would like to return to the Khoi-San. In the Introduction, //Kabbo’s map helped us articulate the central problematic of this work: the intertwined notions of alterity and humanism, and the horrible violence that is their legacy. We will delve deeper into this site of history, always keeping an eye to the future and to elsewhere. I want to critically read the trajectory of Khoi-San history much as Arendt read the genocide that was closer to her experience. Reading this history with Arendt will also bring us to a point where we will part ways. The immanent contradictions of both Arendt’s project and the work of the Khoi-San will become apparent. Just as we must chart a course between the Scylla of identity politics and the Charybdis of materialistic politics, so too must we navigate between the violent past of liberal humanism on the one hand and the terrible possibilities of an uncautious posthumanism on the other. I believe that this is a dilemma Arendt grasped well and began to address by developing a richer understanding of freedom and politics, the constituents of human dignity. In returning to the Khoi-San, I will try to outline how these concerns emerge from this history, too, before returning to the questions of aesthetics. In their last works, after all, both Arendt and Kant turned to art — music, narrative, poetry — as sites rich in politics and yet not reducible to their circumstances of creation. This is how I see “The Broken String,” a frequently cited poem recounted by Diakwain that was originally recorded by Bleek and Lloyd.

Attending to and paying attention to this poem thus helps us return to aesthetics as a site of freedom, as a positive, unwritten political philosophy. As I have previously recounted, at the end of her life Arendt turned to art to recuperate a realm of freedom and truth that is not
reducible to politics; to put it crudely, she looked to aesthetics to restore some kind of dignity to the *vita contemplativa* that she had so decisively stripped it of in *The Human Condition*. Her method of turning to aesthetics was to go back to her Enlightenment roots. Much like Heidegger (who turned to Duns Scotus and the pre-Socratics at the end of his life), to find her way out of an impasse Arendt looked more deeply into the canon. This move reflects her recurring faith that, as much as “the tradition” may have erred in its prioritization of philosophy over politics, it is in its most important thinkers (Kant and Aristotle) that we will find the resources to move beyond them. In other words, Arendt is profoundly committed to generous reading, to returning to the same canonical texts and squeezing out anything possible that resembles a new idea from them — a quintessential humanism in all its senses. I do not want to criticize this project head-on; rather, I want to recognize that even in its most profound criticism it reproduces a very confined image of the Western canon. This is to recognize with Fred Moten “an antiblackness that infuses and animates Arendt’s work, something perhaps not best understood as belonging to her, but rather as that to which she, along with many others, both black and white, neither black nor white (more than merely), belongs.” In a note, Moten explains that he is “trying to index … Arendt’s belonging to — her having been given to or conscripted by — a modernity, and more specifically, a modern intelligence … for which the antiblack racism to which it is not reducible is, nevertheless, constitutive.” Indeed, a careful re-reading of Arendt’s work makes this antiblackness abundantly clear. This is not only the case because Arendt’s fidelity to humanism, as Moten is trying to say, means that she belongs to an antiblackness; for evidence of more

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108 Ibid., 253. n. 3.
blatant racism, we need only look at the passages in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* in which Arendt discusses the indigenous people of the Cape, that is the Khoi-San:

> What made them different from other human beings was not at all the color of their skin but the fact that they behaved like a part of nature, that they treated nature as their undisputed master, that they had not created a human world, a human reality, and that therefore nature had remained, in all its majesty, the only overwhelming reality — compared to which they appeared to be phantoms, unreal and ghostlike. They were, as it were, “natural” human beings who lacked the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder.\(^\text{109}\)

Arendt’s words uncannily echo those of early British travelers, who similarly condemned the Boers’ massacre of the Khoi-San yet persisted in seeing them as, at best, a “prehistoric” people on the way to extinction. Arendt’s point in this passage is to condemn the racism of the Boers, whom she absolutely despises — but in passing she similarly derides the Khoi-San and Bantu-speaking peoples, rather than expressing any kind of solidarity. It is easy to perceive in this refusal of solidarity the kind of antiblackness Moten, too, recognizes. Arendt refuses, of course, the exterminationist racism of the Boers, but in so doing she aligns herself quite clearly with the liberal humanist assimilationist tradition the British brought to South Africa.

What would it mean to do philosophy otherwise, to escape this antiblackness in Arendt’s thought? I think this need not be a rejection of humanism. A humanism that addresses its foundational antiblackness (a posthumanism in its confrontation but not escape from humanism, by analogy with postcolonialism) is one that does not dismiss Arendt and Kant but does accord the same dignity to other voices. What, then, does it look like to *do theory* — that is, to *think* — with interlocutors who are not Kant? Read generously, I think this is the kind of project contemporary anthropology can offer us. Read critically, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro is engaged in little more than another round of anthropological theory, taking the “culture” concept to task

in yet a different way. But read charitably, the project of the ontological turn is not anthropological but rather the project of philosophy itself. Thus, Viveiros de Castro writes that his own untransferable matter of concern [is] the endeavor seeking performatively to redefine anthropology as consisting essentially of (a) a theory of peoples’ ontological autodetermination and (b) a practice of the permanent decolonization of thought. … We could perhaps, in this case, rename the discipline “field geophilosophy” or (in reference to our armchair moments) “speculative ontography.”

The latter in particular is what happens when one recuses oneself from ethnography and instead uses others’ work to stimulate thinking. This is, indeed, how I engage the Khoi-San: I rely on others’ ethnography and primary sources available to, rather than undertaking traditional anthropological fieldwork. We must take seriously the encounter with the other: not to fetishize it, but rather by

refraining from actualizing the possible expressions of alien thought and deciding to sustain them as possibilities — neither relinquishing them as the fantasies of others, nor fantasizing about them as leading to the true reality. … If there is one thing that it falls to anthropology to accomplish, it is not to explicate the worlds of others but rather to multiply our world, peopling it with “all those expresseds, which do not exist apart from their expressions.”

I want to turn to the Khoi-San and ask what it means to sustain the “possible expressions of alien thought” as possibilities, neither rejecting them as fantasies (cultural artifacts) nor fantasizing about their ability to lead us to true reality (as the encounter with the other does for Heidegger). To do so, I first lay some necessary groundwork.

**THE SAN GENOCIDE AND TROUBLES WITH DISCIPLINE**

What even does this strange term — the “Khoi-San” — refer to? Historically, there

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111 Ibid., 137.
112 Variants of this word include Khoe-San and Khoisan; I insist on the hyphen to highlight the difference between the two groups, but remain ambivalent about using “i” or “e.” On the latter issue see the older (and more
were two communities of indigenous people at the Cape of Good Hope that Europeans distinguished since their arrival in 1497: the Khoikhoi or “Hottentots” and the San or “Bushmen.” Economic or occupational lines traditionally distinguish the two groups in the eyes of colonists and descendants: the Khoikhoi grazed cattle while the San were hunter-gatherers. By contrast, there were probably other indigenous social formations that we are unaware of now. The main similarity these groups share, which seems well-founded on both genetic and linguistic grounds, is that the Khoi-San are distinct from Bantu-speaking people that arrived in Southern Africa later on. Indeed, the name “Khoi-San” itself arose because of a perceived genealogical relationship between the languages spoken by the Khoikhoi and the San, though this link is no longer supported by most linguists.

The San have been subject to much academic study over the past hundred years, but the groups that have been most discussed by anthropologists and linguists are generally from farther north in Botswana and the Kalahari desert. My work has focused squarely on South Africa and especially the Cape of Good Hope. The “Khoi-San” here are particularly uneasy subjects of study, in part because they vacillate between anthropology and history — the former studying rock art and the Bleek-Lloyd collection (rather than ethnographic work as in Botswana) and the

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113 The naming of this group of people is a complicated and well-discussed issue; scholars differ widely on their choice of terminology. For particularly useful discussions of nomenclature see Gordon, The Bushman Myth, 4–8; de Prada-Samper, On the Trail of Qing and Orpen, 3; Newton-King, Masters and Servants, 6–7.

114 For a recent discussion of the linguistic issues, see Güldemann, The Languages and Linguistics of Africa, 106–7. In summary, he notes that “since no new versions of or evidence for a Khoisan hypothesis have grown out of any more recent scholarship, there is little empirical ground left for currently propagating such a family.”

latter archival records that tell the history of the San genocide and the emergence of “coloured” as a category in the late nineteenth century and particularly under apartheid. This purported disciplinary division of labor is itself a tacit acknowledgement that the “Khoi-San” as a category is a scholarly shorthand for people scarred by colonial violence that rent the pre-colonial social fabric. In my study of the Khoi-San, I refuse to align with either history or anthropology; as I have discussed at length above, the goal of my engagement is ultimately to practice philosophy as a politics of radically expanded interlocutors.

To engage in this practice is to reckon with immense colonial violence, which reached its apex in the late eighteenth century. This violence was long ignored; especially under apartheid, even groups seeking racial justice focused squarely on the recent past, and the “coloured” bore an uneasy relationship to both the “White” minority and the “Black” (Bantu-speaking) majority. It is only in the past twenty-five years that scholars have focused on the much earlier history of colonial violence against the Khoi-San. Perhaps the most important recent work has been conducted by Mohamed Adhikari, who in 2011 gathered together the evidence to make the convincing case for a San genocide in the late eighteenth century. Even those scholars hesitant to use the word “genocide” recognize the horrific violence wrought upon the indigenous people of the Cape between around 1770 and 1806 (when the Cape Colony passed from Dutch to British rule). Commandos of Dutch settlers indiscriminately massacred the San, with consequences both terrible and far-reaching. As Adhikari summarizes:

In commando raids San men were, with few exceptions, put to death on the spot, while many women and especially children were taken captive. … Trekboers [Dutch settlers] were not beyond smashing the heads of children against rocks or skinning the breasts of women they had killed to make tobacco pouches. … San children were prized because they were seen as tractable and more

116 An excellent microhistory that illustrates this process is Ross, The Borders of Race.
117 For exemplary work on this subject see Penn, The Forgotten Frontier; Newton-King, Masters and Servants.
easily assimilated into the trekboer economy as menial laborers. … Captured San were subject to a grim regime of unremunerated labour, and physical as well as psychological abuse, with virtually no protection against the arbitrary power of masters.¹¹⁹

This violence was driven in part by economic motives: the arid landscape made it necessary to seize ever more land to adequately meet the Dutch East India Company’s (VOC’s) demand for meat, which it supplied to its ships as they docked in Cape Town on their way to the East Indies. Indeed, older scholarship often begins by noting the trade of cattle between Europeans and the Khoikhoi since even before the settlement of Cape Town in 1652.¹²⁰ While relations were never entirely peaceful, for at least a hundred years there was nothing like a genocide. Eventually, though, Dutch settlers expanded away from Cape Town; relations took a particularly sharp turn for the worse after a Khoi-San rebellion in 1772, especially far away from the center of colonial authority in Cape Town. In the words of Nigel Penn:

Heartless attitudes towards the San were already in place, but the escalating violence of the frontier led to even greater inhumanity before the century’s end. San men were eventually perceived as a type of vermin, fit only for extermination, and even women and children were expendable.¹²¹

Yet this older understanding of colonial violence downplays the role of racism in the violence wreaked on indigenous people. Trekboers were not just looking for any land with any people occupying it. As one Dutch official recounted in 1805:

According to the unfortunate notion prevalent here, a heathen is not actually human, but at the same time he cannot really be classed among the animals. He is, therefore, a sort of creature not known elsewhere. His word can in no wise be believed, and only by violent measures can he be brought to do good and shun evil.¹²²

Primary sources like these attest to the sheer brutality of the San genocide. By the end of the

¹¹⁹ Adhikari, “‘The Bushman Is a Wild Animal to Be Shot at Sight,’” 46–48.
¹²⁰ For detail on these early interactions see part 2 of the classic Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*.
¹²¹ Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 122.
¹²² Landdrost Alberti to Governor Janssens, 12 June 1805 (B. R. 68, pp. 280–1, Cape Archives). Quoted in Du Toit, *Afrikaner Political Thought*, 84.
eighteenth century, even contemporary travelers remarked on the exceptional violence of the Dutch-speaking farmers. John Barrow (inaugurating a long history of British contempt not only for the natives but also for the Boers) described as much in his 1797 travel narrative:

The name of Bosjesman [Bushman] is held in horror and detestation; and a farmer thinks he cannot proclaim a more meritorious action than the murder of one of these people. A boor from Graff Reynet [Graaf-Reinet] being asked in the secretary’s office, a few days before we left the town, if the savages were numerous or troublesome on the road, replied, he had only shot four, with as much composure and indifference as if he had been speaking of four partridges. I myself have heard one of the humane colonists boast of having destroyed with his own hands near three hundred of these unfortunate wretches.\(^{123}\)

I will give just one more of countless accounts of such violence. On 6 July 1786, Adriaan van Zijl — the *veldwachtmeester* (a kind of local official) of the Hantam, a north-western frontier district — set out for the north with the dual purpose of bartering for cattle and apprehending two “San thieves.” After a few months’ travel, they approached a party of Khoikhoi:

Hurriedly, the Nuncquinqua [Khoikhoi] began to drive their cattle onto an island, fearful of the approach of armed and mounted strangers. Without saying a word, the Europeans jumped from their horses and open fire. Their horrified servants … stood by until Adriaan van Zijl turned on them with his musket, beating them with the stock and shouting, “Damned things, why aren’t you shooting?”\(^{124}\)

In the face of such brutal violence, how could the Khoikhoi and San survive? What is clear is that their societies underwent immense, traumatic changes as the colonizers killed indigenous people, impressed them into forced labor, and raped them. Even those who survived lost much of their way of life. Hence, over the course of the nineteenth century Khoi-San stopped speaking their native languages and shifted towards agriculture and participation in a capitalist economy. To give just one example, by the twentieth century four out of five languages in the !Ui family were extinct. Nǀuu, the last extant language, has only three fluent speakers (although

\(^{123}\) Barrow, *Travels*, 85.

\(^{124}\) Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 174. Penn painstakingly pieced together this account from archival court records, preserved because this was one of the few times that charges were pressed by the colonial authorities.
revitalization efforts are now underway in collaboration with the University of Cape Town).  

The question of cultural continuity is fraught, to say the least. One tempting response to the horrific violence inflicted on the Khoi-San would be to say they were destroyed as a people, even if individual members survived and were assimilated. But this line elides the very real continuities between Khoikhoi and San communities of the eighteenth century and present-day people of the Cape. This continuity is attested, for instance, by the stories recently collected by José Manuel de Prada-Samper in the Karoo. As he writes in the introduction:

Such tales were first documented among |xam hunter-gatherers in the 1870s by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd. Unexpectedly they have survived, affirming a strong and continuing tradition of oral storytelling in South Africa.  

Still, the kind of continuity between Khoi-San in the Cape today and the |xam of the 1870s (let alone pre-colonial indigenous people) is difficult to establish. To give just one example, the stories de Prada-Samper collected do indeed parallel those in the Bleek-Lloyd collection, but today are told in Afrikaans, not a San language. Neither a narrative of extinction nor of uninterrupted continuity is helpful.

Yet such is the tension in narrating the history of the Khoi-San after 1850. This story is broadly one of assimilation: the Khoikhoi and San slowly mixed with other colonial populations, including Europeans, Bantu-speakers, Asians, and “Bastaards” from earlier unions (many of them slaves and indentured servants brought to the Cape by incipient global capitalism). By the twentieth century, this group of people was termed “coloured” by the colonial government. As Adhikari usefully summarizes,

it was in the decades after the emancipation of the Khoisan in 1828 and slaves in 1834 that various components of the heterogeneous black labouring class at the Cape started integrating more rapidly and developing an incipient collective identity based on a common socio-economic status

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125 See educational materials like the trilingual reader by Shah and Brenzinger, *Ouma Geelmeid Ke Kx’u lxalxa Nǀuu*.  
126 de Prada-Samper, *The Man Who Cursed the Wind*.  

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and a shared culture derived from their incorporation into the lower ranks of Cape colonial society. This emergent community of assimilated colonial blacks consisted overwhelmingly of a downtrodden labouring class of African and Asian origin variously referred to as half-castes, bastards, Cape Boys, off-whites or coloureds, until the last-mentioned became the standard appellation from the latter half of the 1880s onwards.¹²⁷

The word “coloured” persisted as an imprecise label for an array of heterogeneous identities through until the end of apartheid.

One way of tracking shifts in perceptions is by looking at census categories such as “Native,” “Aboriginal Native,” “Coloured,” and “Black” and how these intersect with the identification of people with Khoi-San ancestry. For instance, these are the instructions in a 1961 circular from the Department of Bantu Administration and Development:

> Some district officers may encounter difficulty due to the fact that certain groups such as Nama-Korana [Khoikhoi] and Bushmen [San] may claim classification as coloureds. It must be emphasised that although the abovementioned groups are lighter of skin than the typical Bantu, they belong to an aboriginal race of Africa and are regarded as Bantu for the Population registration purposes.¹²⁸

Coloured identity emerged partly following and partly in contestation of apartheid-era policies like this one.¹²⁹ As Michael Besten puts it, official categories induced people to identify on their terms, but were also “subject to contestation both within dominant and subordinate communities.”¹³⁰ The Khoi-San were not made Bantu by apartheid diktat. But neither did Khoi-San group identity remain static, unbuffeted by the capricious winds of government policy. The particulars of how the Khoi-San “became” coloured under apartheid still need to be spelled out with reference to both people’s experiences and archival records. Henry Trotter began this work by convincingly arguing that coloured identity coalesced not by investing in a remote past, but instead through shared trauma within living memory. For instance, 150 000 coloured people were

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¹²⁷ From the introduction to Adhikari, *Burdened by Race*, xi.
evicted from their natal homes and communities between 1957 and 1985. Trotter’s interviews with 100 contemporary coloured people identified this as a key event in the formation of coloured identity:

The combination of the commonality imposed by Group Areas, the connectivity that was achieved through sharing stories in the wake of mass social trauma, and the reinforcement of a sense of groupness through positive narrative circulation has promoted a sense of coloured self-understanding that goes beyond mere instrumentality.\textsuperscript{131}

Thus, at least some Khoi-San who suffered the forced assimilation of the apartheid government became invested in these new identities. Yet the emergent coloured identity coalesced not around a claim of indigeneity or Khoi-San continuity but instead around recent, shared trauma. This complex interweaving of inherited, forced, and self-proclaimed identities undergirds today’s discussions of Khoi-San representation and redress.

**KHOI-SAN CLAIMS TODAY**

It is to this background of contemporary claims on (behalf of) the Khoi-San that I turn to now. The contemporary situation of the so-called Khoi-San revival is as important as a real understanding of the San genocide and a brief history of the emergence of coloured identity in articulating the problematic of alterity and humanism, and especially in my turn again to aesthetics at the end of this chapter. Many of these topics hinge on the question of representation — in a very real sense, in institutions of power. Put as a simple question, are there Khoi-San representatives in Parliament of South Africa? (Not really.) Are there Khoi-San writing Khoi-San history? Again, mostly not. I think the dearth of academics who identify as Khoi-San is particularly important to highlight in the context of my own work.\textsuperscript{132} The only visible Khoi-San

\textsuperscript{131} Trotter, “Trauma and Memory,” 72.

\textsuperscript{132} Mohamed Adhikari kindly answered my inquiries on this topic in a personal email, 27 November 2018. I had reached out to Adhikari thinking that he himself might be Khoi-San, but he replied that “both my parents were born within spitting distance of Indian rice paddies.”
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scholar is Yvette Abrahams. Abrahams, who has also worked extensively as an activist, says she “was born in Cape Town in the early 1960s to struggle parents of slave and Khoekhoe descent.”\textsuperscript{133} Her advocacy was instrumental in the discussion of what to do with the remains of Sara Baartman, an early-nineteenth-century Khoikhoi woman who was displayed on tour in Europe. Baartman’s remains were preserved by Georges Cuvier, the French naturalist, and displayed in the Museum of Natural History in Paris until they were buried in South Africa in 2002. Abrahams’ role was determinative in some crucial decisions made in the context of the repatriation debate, so much so that she was singled out for criticism as “profoundly antiscience” in a 2006 monograph on Baartman by Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully.\textsuperscript{134} Other Khoi-San voices are visible in the scholarly record, but in almost all cases the gatekeepers remain white academics.\textsuperscript{135}

Since at least 1998, a constellation of groups that have proliferated in what a number of scholars have termed “Khoi-San revivalism.”\textsuperscript{136} Probably the first group to demand restitution explicitly for the Khoi-San (as opposed to, say, the Griqua) was the Cape Cultural Heritage Development Organization, set up in 1996. The organization of a conference in 1997 led to the creation of the National Khoisan Forum (later National Khoisan Council) in 1998. This body remains the primary representative of the Khoi-San in the eyes of the government of South Africa, though many organizations and people claim some kind of authority or heritage. The

\textsuperscript{133} See the brief profile of Abrahams provided by UCT News at https://www.news.uct.ac.za/images/userfiles/downloads/media/Bio_YvetteAbrahams.pdf.
\textsuperscript{134} Crais and Scully, \textit{Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus}, 160.
\textsuperscript{135} See Gabototwe, “The |Xam and the San Youth of Today.” Gabototwe, a San man from Botswana, was invited to write a paper by the conference’s (white) organizers Pippa Skotnes and Janette Deacon; see the introduction to Deacon and Skotnes, \textit{Courage of |kabbo}.
politics of indigeneity that provide grounds for restitution across the world are complicated by the peculiar racial history of South Africa.\textsuperscript{137} It is worth noting especially that the existing mechanisms for redress (especially the Land Claims Commission) have a cut-off date of 1913 — preventing meaningful restitution for Khoi-San claims that may date back to the eighteenth century. While many recognize this as an issue, what exactly should be \textit{done} is another matter. Many bills have foundered in Parliament, while government officials have made vague statements and promises to little effect.\textsuperscript{138} Even the heady momentum of Khoi-San revivalism fails to penetrate the bureaucratic thicket of post-apartheid restitution debates.

One common approach adopted by Khoi-San activists is “strategic essentialism”: stressing ideas of purity, continuity, and unalienable essences (often based on popular stereotypes) in order to achieve political or economic goals. This is the guiding practice of many groups in Khoi-San revivalism, as Rafael Verbuyst observed in his work with activist communities in Cape Town:

The constructed nature of Khoisan identity (as all ethnicities and identities) is not a secret which if revealed would discredit the whole endeavour; it can in fact become a source of humour and relativism … I remember how (naively) surprised I was when talking to the master of ceremony after a traditional Khoisan !Nau ceremony had been completed in Botrivier and he told me that he also had to invent parts of the ceremony because much of the traditional culture had been “lost.” Another activist concurred and told me that I, as a researcher, had to be aware of the fact that the Khoisan were in the process of “re-inventing” themselves.\textsuperscript{139}

At the same time, we should not reduce the debates over Khoi-San land claims to negotiations of identity and culture. Material conditions also matter. Indeed, there have been widespread demands for land claims on behalf of the Khoi-San. Just 1\% of South Africa’s 128 million

\textsuperscript{137} For an insightful study of this and related matters see Comaroff and Comaroff, \textit{Ethnicity, Inc.}
\textsuperscript{138} For a wealth of detail on this tangled history see Verbuyst, “Claiming Cape Town: Ethnographic Interpretations,” 48–62.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 66.
hectares of land belong to the coloured community, which makes up about 9% of the
population. Activists make their frustration with this injustice (and its concomitant poverty
and lack of social mobility) quite clear — not least by voting for the EFF, a far-left party. A
poignant example of such frustration is a protester’s sign from August 2018 that said: “KEEP
THE LAND!! Just give me a FOKEN JOB.” Such sentiments are encapsulated in an article in
the online newspaper *The Daily Maverick* that concluded:

Our government’s decision to give our country’s most vulnerable communities a stake in the land
that they have lost, but continued to service, will afford them greater protection from exploitation
and a legacy to lift future generations out of poverty. But, most importantly, it will begin to
restore the dignity they were stripped of. In due time, they won’t have to look out car windows,
marvelling at land that was once theirs.

One of the most interesting recent developments has been a movement to amend the
constitution to allow for land claims before the 1913 cutoff — thus opening the door for redress
based on the eighteenth-century San genocide. Thus, in 2018 there appeared before the
Constitutional Review Committee a self-proclaimed representative of the Khoi-San community:
Anthony Williams, the CEO (sic) of Indigenous First Nation Advocacy South Africa
(IFNASA). IFNASA claims to advocate

the restoration of the Khoi and San Identity, Culture, Language, Land, Socio-economic
empowerment, through Research and Policy Formulation in promoting Social Integration and
Cohesiveness amongst All South Africans, which must based [sic] on Equality, Fairness and
Justice for All.

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140 This figure comes from the University of the Western Cape’s Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, available at [https://www.plaas.org.za/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/No1%20Fact%20check%20web.pdf](https://www.plaas.org.za/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/No1%20Fact%20check%20web.pdf). On this point see also Zandberg, *Rehoboth Griqua Atlas*.


142 Louw, “Will the Land Ever Be Returned, and Dignity Restored?”

143 I have searched to the best of my ability the available documents for other Khoi-San testimony but have found none. Unfortunately, an email to the committee secretary has not been answered. My suspicion is that there are written submissions from Khoi-San, but I doubt there is more oral testimony that is publicly available.

144 From IFNASA’s “About Us” page, available at [https://www.ifnasa.co.za/about-us/](https://www.ifnasa.co.za/about-us/).
Williams argued before the committee that the constitution was “prejudiced against the indigenous first nation’s dignity,” going on to say that the “indigenous first nation people” had not been “part of the conversation regarding land expropriation.”\textsuperscript{145} Williams also invoked the Coat of Arms of South Africa as “direct proof that the so-called ‘Coloured’ people were the first nation people of Southern Africa,” going on to say that “the so-called ‘Coloured’ people should not be referred to as ‘black’ people, because black people did not exist.” This testimony provoked mixed reactions, to say the least, from members of the Constitutional Review Committee; Mncedisi Filtane of the Universal Democratic Movement (UDM, a small center-left party) “asked from which part of Southern Africa the Khoi-San people originated, and where was the evidence to prove that they were the first indigenous people be [sic] found” while Floyd Shivambu of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF, a controversial and fast-growing far-left party) asked “how one determined who the first indigenous people were, and from which part of South Africa they had originated.” This debate over land claims encapsulates in miniature the tangle of Khoi-San revivalism.

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One other salient place we find these debates today is in the building of a new radio telescope — the Square Kilometer Array — on precisely those /Xam ancestral lands that //Kabbo sketched with Bleek. Today’s dispossession by an astronomical project undertaken “for the world” perversely echoes the first dispossession of /Xam people in the Karoo by white settler farmers: after all, the “pristine,” empty environment radio astronomy seeks plays precisely into

\textsuperscript{145} This and the following quotations are from the minutes of the Constitutional Review Committee, available at https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/27029/. See also the video recording at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kj2HijpMf — though unfortunately the first few minutes seem not to have been recorded.
the old myth that the Karoo is empty of people. By disregarding the persistence of /Xam people even past the eighteenth-century genocide, this narrative renders the Khoi-San less-than-human in a way not that different from the Boers in the eighteenth century who explicitly saw the Khoi-San as vermin. In partial recognition of this, the planners of the Square Kilometer Array signed an agreement in 2017 with the San Council of South Africa (SCSA). This is not an unalloyed success, though. Other actions the SCSA has taken have come under attack from other San groups. For instance, the SCSA struck an agreement with commercial ventures to share profits from the use of a succulent plant — yet this agreement was later questioned by local communities who felt unrepresented by this overarching group.¹⁴⁶ Here as in other parts of the Khoi-San revival, asserting political claims on behalf of the Khoi-San necessarily means making them legible to hegemonic capitalist, modernist, and nationalist logics — in ways that inevitably alienate some of the very people these activists claim to represent.

This is one place where I think an Arendtian politics can help us parse rights-claims. For Arendt, the world is made by people in their plurality. /Xam descendants have a capacity for political action, like every human being — but this is not a political voice granted either because of some mythic “common human essence” or because of membership in a specific historical group. For Arendt, equality is not really about having the same rights, but is rather the equality created by recognizing other humans’ capacity to act. To have rights in the Arendtian sense, after all, is less like having a bicycle and more like having a party — i.e., participating in the constant making and shaping of your rights.¹⁴⁷ Thus, I believe Arendt would be heartened by the Khoi-San revival as a clear example of people taking political action and thereby making a world

¹⁴⁷ I borrow this analogy from Maxwell, “To Have.”
together — a common world that is capacious enough to accommodate ontological difference while making space for common politics.

**“THE BROKEN STRING”; OR, A RETURN TO AESTHETICS**

I think the resources Arendt offers in negotiating rights-claims among politics in South Africa today are quite clear. *The Human Condition* is at its core a lesson in giving dignity to politics as a fundamental capacity of human beings. If we take this claim seriously, though, we need to reckon also with matters beyond politics (truth, art) and beyond the human (at least, as humanism defines it). One step in this direction is to reckon with the stakes of politics outside of the Western humanist tradition. In that respect, writing a political history with the Khoi-San as subjects is already a revolutionary act. Yet the promise for me of Arendt’s thought lies not in its emphasis on subjectivity but rather, paradoxically, in its turn again to objectivity — the bête noire of so much postmodern thought. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt does not plead with us to accept human plurality. She takes that as the *sine qua non*, quite literally the very condition for the world to exist at all. What she elaborates in *The Human Condition* is rather the importance of work and action in creating something *out there*, in objects we fashion together. Thus, Arendt writes that:

> The objectivity of the world — its object- or thing-character — and the human condition supplement each other; because human existence is conditioned existence, it would be impossible without things, and things would be a heap of unrelated articles, a non-world, if they were not the conditioners of human existence.  

For Arendt, reality itself

> is not guaranteed primarily by the “common nature” of all men who constitute it, but rather by the fact that, differences of position and the resulting variety of perspectives notwithstanding, everybody is always concerned with the same object. If the sameness of the object can no longer

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be discerned, no common nature of men … can prevent the destruction of the common world.149 If a plurality of human subjectivities is the very condition of the world, it is objectivity that prevents its destruction. In her thought, then, Arendt offers us the following question: if we take a plural politics as our starting point, how do we reckon with categories that seem to escape this very human realm? In other words, how do we come to terms with objectivity as it manifests in truth and art? As I have argued above, it is with these questions in mind that Arendt turned to Kant and the questions of aesthetics toward the end of her life.

It is to this question of art that I would then like to turn now. There is one object in particular that has gently pulled on my attention ever since I first encountered it: the poem known as “The Broken String,” which was originally told by Diakwain in /Xam and recorded by Wilhelm Bleek. I am not the only one to feel the pull of this poem. Nancy Jacobs, a historian of South Africa, wrote in her journal in 1984 of first encountering the poem and feeling that it made “deep sense” to her.150 Similarly, Mohamed Adhikari quoted the poem in the conclusion to his 2011 monograph, The Anatomy of a South African Genocide. There, Adhikari prefaces the poem by writing that “Stephen Watson’s poetic rendering of Xaa-ttin’s requiem for the /Xam captures a sense of irreparable loss, an emotion that must have seared the consciousness of many Cape San people contemplating the rupturing of their ancient culture and the demise of their way of life.”151 In 2009, “The Broken String” was re-translated by Harold Farmer (who praised its “innate poetry”) and published in Poetry magazine.152 In that version, the poem reads as follows:

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149 Ibid., 57–58.
150 Personal communication to author, 26 March 2020.
151 Adhikari, The Anatomy of a South African Genocide, 94.
152 Diakwain and Farmer, “The Broken String.”
The Broken String

Nuing-kuiten my father’s friend
was a lion sorcerer
and walked on feet of hair.
People saw his spoor and said:
“The sorcerer has visited us.
He is the one who treads on hair.
This big animal prowling
was Nuing-kuiten.”

He used to travel by night—
he did not want to be seen
for people might shoot at him
and he might maul someone.
At night he could go unseen,
after other lion sorcerers
who slink into our dwellings
and drag out men.

The sorcerer lived with us
hunting in a lion’s form
until an ox fell prey to him.
Then the Boers rode out
and shot my father’s friend,
but he fought those people off
and came home to tell father
how Boers had wounded him.

He thought father did not know
he was wounded in his lion form.
Soon he would have to go
for he lay in extreme pain.
If only he could take father
and teach him his magic and songs,
father would walk in his craft,
sing his songs, and remember him.
He died, and my father sang:

“Men broke the string for me
and made my dwelling like this.
Men broke the string for me
and now
my dwelling is strange to me.

My dwelling stands empty
because the string has broken,
and now
my dwelling is a hardship for me.”
In presenting this poem in full, I do not want to suggest that we see in it some kind of unmediated access to the voice of Diakwain. Yet neither do I want to suggest that the poem exists only as a political object, deployed to purposes determined by subjective political goals. I want to call this poem rather an object of beauty. This is not a claim about pleasure; this would be a merely subjective judgment of “The Broken String.” But of course, a judgment that this is beautiful is not merely objective. Judgments of the beautiful (if we follow Kant and Arendt) are subjective yet contain something in them that demands universal assent as to their beauty. This something is in fact common sense; in our plurality of subjective judgments of the pleasurable, we yet retain a *sensus communis aestheticus* that makes possible some kind of objective beauty. This transformation of subjectivity to objectivity does not hinge on rationality; Arendt looked to Kant’s aesthetics because that was where he started from the recognition that men exist in plurality, and not as singular man.

The popularizers of “The Broken String” exemplify precisely this plurality of subjectivity. Indeed, the diverse uses of “The Broken String” show in miniature the broad story of essentialism and multiculturalism I sketched in the history of the Khoi-San above. For instance, a 2004 collection of stories edited by Neil Bennun is entitled simply *The Broken String: The Last Words of an Extinct People* — a clear gesture towards the trope of the Khoi-San as “living fossils” that is invoked again and again. By contrast, the 2016 collection of stories collected in the Karoo by José Manuel de Prada-Samper includes “The Broken String” to make precisely the converse claim — that the Khoi-San do in fact persist. In her 2008 film *The Broken String: The

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153 This is the most common interpretation; thus Farmer describes Diakwain as “the repository of a vast amount of oral lore” of which “nothing was left … but their stories” (ibid.).
154 Cf. the end of chapter 2, above.
155 Bennun, *The Broken String: The Last Words of an Extinct People.*
3. JUDGMENT AND HISTORY: RETURNING TO THE KHOI-SAN

*Story of a Lost Language*, Saskia von Schaik told the story of the Bleek-Lloyd collection in an accessible documentary. In her telling, Schaik once again claims that the Khoi-San are extinct. Even though she bookends her film with contemporary footage of a coloured community celebration, implying continuity between these communities and the Khoi-San she laments as an extinct people, Schaik does not interview any coloured people today — focusing instead on (white) historians and curators. Watching the film for the first time two years ago was painful and immensely frustrating to me: Schaik’s camera comes agonizingly close to the celebrants but avoids any of their actual voices. Schaik writes that her film tells “the story of a lost language” and presents San practices as existing since “time immemorial.” Our only link to the Khoi-San, if we take Schaik at her word, is the unmediated access provided by the Bleek-Lloyd collection. No non-white voices of today need be present. It is easy to slot her use of “The Broken String” into this narrative. Like Bennun, Farmer, and many others, Schaik uses the poem as evidence of the poor Bushman lost to the ravages of time.156

This critique is well-warranted. Yet it reduces the status of the poem to a political plaything and its ubiquitous appearance in narratives about the Khoi-San to a corollary of blinding racism. What if there is more to it? What if “The Broken String” is not an object in this reductive sense, but contains precisely the kind of demand of beauty that Kant described? In other words, what if Schaik and Bennun and Farmer feel the same gentle pull of beauty from the poem that I and Mohamed Adhikari and Nancy Jacobs and, indeed, Diakwain himself felt? To go a step beyond criticism of Schaik and Bennun in this way is to take a risk — the risk of love. To find commonality in how all of us are affected by the beauty of “The Broken String” is, to draw again on the words of Cornel West,

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156 A comprehensive and critical look at this story is Gordon, *The Bushman Myth.*
to be jazzlike: protean, flexible, fluid, open-minded and, therefore, in close conversation and sometimes in very close intellectual proximity to gangsters. … [Yet] to be a prisoner of hope is to choose at the level of humando [the “ground-level” of being human, of “wrestling with wounds” in the dirt, in the humus] to be a certain kind of lover of wisdom, lover of justice, lover of neighbor, and, for me, lover of enemy that you keep in motion.\footnote{West and Mendieta, “What It Means to Be Human!,” 155–56.}

Our hope, our orientation towards a future-oriented ethics, rests on our decisions to continue to take the risk of asserting something’s objective beauty and the risk of loving a gangster. Thus, we choose to love even the worst offenders of South African colonialism as a risky act, but an act that is necessary in our humility and hope. This attitude is, of course, deeply Christian. As West notes, for him, “coming out of [Martin Luther] King’s tradition and being a Christian, ‘love thy neighbor’ and, for me, love thy enemy, has as close to a priori status as anything.”\footnote{Ibid., 156.} Yet admitting the Christianity of this kind of love should not frighten us; after all, no philosophy of history can truly be exorcized of its theological ghosts. Yet a frank self-examination of these Christian roots is already a more profoundly courageous act than Hegel ever undertook. What both Arendt and West choose to do in returning to the Christian commandment to “love thy neighbor” (via Augustine and King, respectively) is to commit to a more-than-secular philosophy of history. To side with Kant, Arendt, and West is to agree in the first place that philosophy (of history or of anything else) is only good insofar as it is useful in advancing the rights of the common laborer. No pseudo-secular philosophy of history would serve this purpose well. Instead, both West and Arendt begin with the commandment to love thy neighbor and see what kind of ethics, what kind of aesthetics — that is, what kind of world — we can create together.

To love the crass popularizers of “The Broken String” is risky in much the same way that it is risky to assert that the poem itself is an object of beauty. In both cases, the easy retreat from
objectivity is to subjectivity: to recognize our subject-position and attendant politics — in other words, to give up the hope of objective historiography only to cling to a non-judgmental plurality of subjectivities. This will not do. Yes, Arendt agrees, politics does and must start from this place of plurality. Yet political action is the act of making a world together — in other words, the act of taking a risk together, of realizing a world that is a commons shared (in the transitive sense of the verb) by people. We begin with the plurality of subjectivities but (borrowing from the best of young Marx) realize our species-being in objectification: in moving from this subjecthood to create something in the world. This is the kind of action we take when we say that “The Broken String” is beautiful. This judgment is of course merely subjective in the first place, but it contains within it the expectation of universal assent by appeal to what is common — the in-between, the Arendtian world.

In choosing to end my chapter with “The Broken String,” I am of course taking a subjective, political action — an action fraught, of course, with the ethical conundrums of appropriation and representation. Yet this act is not merely subjective. My very birth, Arendt says, endows me with the capacity for action; but this action creates an objective world. My actions have created the object you are holding in your hands at this moment (or, more likely, reading on a screen). Hopefully, this object becomes something durable, part of the world that endures past the impermanence of its members. The world is made of objects that produce subjective judgments of pleasure yet that expect universal assent — in other words, objects of beauty. Our politics, our world-making, can aspire at best to this kind of objectivity of the beautiful. After all, making a world together is the highest form of virtuosic practice.
**EPILOGUE: THE END OF THE WORLD**

What should one do before the end of the world? Let us take seriously the proposition that the world is ending. Indeed, the world has ended before; settler colonialism leaves little in its wake but the fragments of worlds shattered by its expansion. And these are just the ends of the world we know about; how did our ancestors respond to the cataclysms brought by the teetering climate of the past 2.5 million years — the best analogs for our present crisis? To acknowledge that the end of the world has already happened is firstly to muddle temporalities. Apocalyptic narratives are as a rule future-oriented (the kingdom to come); to imagine the world already having ended is to stretch this genre to its breaking point. Yet this project has shown again and again how worlds can and have come to an end. If a world is fundamentally relational, a matter of being-with-others, then for the world (the Mitwelt) to end is for that relationality, that in-between, to be destroyed. Thus the end of the world is both genocidal and more-than-genocidal: for to be decimated by disease, forcibly resettled and re-educated, to have your language and cultural memory eradicated, amount to precisely how the world ends — means to an end that are as evident in Xinjiang and North Dakota today as they were once in Germany and the Cape.

So, what do we do in the face of the end of the world? If an empire is intent on crushing your (in second person plural) very existence, what do you do? One option is to fight tooth and nail. Devote every last ounce of your energy to opposing the colonial machine; throw your entire life into the fight for climate justice; never give in and never give up the fight. Another option is to look elsewhere. Lean into the very tradition that is being threatened. Make art afresh; create little pockets of air in which to breathe elsewise. These options are in fact different ways of answering the question: what is it to be free? Should we resist, in the firm belief that anything we
can save is worth saving? Or should we redirect our energy into making something new — to creating art, for world-making is at its core a virtuosic practice?

Like most dichotomies, this is of course a false one: we should all be both activists and artists. Yet this project, by its very existence as much as in its various argumentative strands, has come down firmly on the side of world-making as liberatory practice. What it is to be free is to make something. Commensality makes community; art makes a common world; reading common texts articulates a shared vocabulary. In the face of the end of the world, how can it possibly make sense to devote your life to reading, writing, and speaking? To affirm the value of art and scholarship — which look much the same in the right light — is to assert that these are as political of actions as any activism. To live before the end of the world is to commit to politics, a politics that is immanent in the world we always already make together. The most genuine act of hope — for hope is not a statement about how the world will be, but an action that changes that future — is to make a world together.
HOW DO WE MAKE A WORLD?

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