Nietzsche and/or Arendt?

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Introduction

In recent years, a number of philosophers and political theorists have pointed to Nietzsche's influence on various aspects of Arendt's thought. It is possible, for instance, to recognise traces of Nietzsche's thinking in Arendt's theory of action, her valuation of appearance, her rejection of 'the social question', her critique of utilitarianism and her generally critical stance towards modernity[1]. Nevertheless, it should be equally clear to any serious reader that there are many respects in which these two thinkers stand opposed to one another. In this paper, I shall defend the paradoxical claim that Nietzsche and Arendt could – indeed, should – be read together precisely in light of their very opposition to one another. Hence, instead of trying to force Nietzsche and Arendt into the straitjacket of mutual consistency, I shall focus on the central conflict between their projects and approaches. This conflict can be variously described as the conflict between the life of the mind and life in the world – in Arendt's terms, the *vita contemplativa* and *the vita activa* – or the conflict between the philosopher and the political thinker, which itself mirrors the ancient conflict between the philosopher and the polis. Moreover, this conflict is itself a crucial theme in both Nietzsche's and Arendt's respective works[2]. Hence Nietzsche famously maintains that 'anyone who has the furor philosophicus will have no time whatsoever for the furor politicus' and that '[any] philosophy that believes that the problem of existence can be altered or solved by a political event is a sham and pseudo-philosophy. […] How could a political innovation possibly be sufficient

1 For a summary of some of these arguments, see the essay by Dana Villa elsewhere in this volume.

2 Nietzsche discusses this tension in various other contexts. See for instance SE for an extended treatment of the opposition between philosopher and polis, as well as HH 235, 438, 465. In Arendt's case, the essay entitled 'Philosophy and Truth' in BPF provides an extensive account of this tension, as does her essay on 'Philosophy and Politics' (1990).

to make human beings once and for all into contented dwellers on this earth?' (SE 4).

Arendt agrees with Nietzsche that the very nature of the *furor philosophicus* stems the philosopher antagonistic towards the *furor politicus*, although she generally thinks that this reflects badly on philosophers rather than on those who concern themselves with politics. What is more, both thinkers bemoan the suspension of this very conflict in the modern world. Thus Arendt laments that '[in] the world we live in, the last traces of this ancient antagonism between the philosopher's truth and the opinions of the market place have disappeared' (BPF 235)[3], while remarking later on that 'it is only by *respecting its own borders* that [the political] realm … can remain intact, preserving its integrity and keeping its promises' (BPF 263–4, my italics). Nietzsche in turn offers a telling note that contains the following indictment of modern philosophy: 'it destroys because there is nothing to hold it in check. The philosopher has become a being who is detrimental to the community. He destroys happiness, virtue, culture, and ultimately himself' (30[8] 7.733 f.).

In light of these remarks, it seems to me that a good argument for reading Nietzsche and Arendt together would have to take the conflict between them – and, by implication, the conflict between philosophy and politics – seriously, and then go on to demonstrate how this conflict can be made fruitful for understanding their respective projects. The point of such an argument would be to read Nietzsche and Arendt together precisely by remaining true to the opposition between them. This is the argument I intend to make.

I shall begin by situating this conflict in the context of Nietzsche's and Arendt's shared criticism of modernity as the most iniquitous instance of the moral interpretation of the world. I then turn to their respective attempts at overcoming this interpretation, together with the resentment of the world that has been bound up with it. My aim here is to demonstrate that what is at stake in the opposition between Nietzsche and Arendt is the inescapable conflict between two notions of reconciliation between self and world: a worldly – or political – reconciliation (Arendt), and a much more radical, philosophical notion of reconciliation (Nietzsche), that ultimately does away with all distance between self and world. In order to make this claim, I investigate Nietzsche's conception of *amor fati* in part two of my paper, which I then contrast with Arendt's notion of *amor mundi* in part three. In the fourth and final part,

3 The full titles of Arendt's texts

I try to show how the opposition between *amor fati* and *amor mundi* relates to the conflict between the *furor philosophicus* and the *furor politicus*. My intention in this concluding section of the paper is not to force a choice between these two alternatives – hence: Nietzsche *or* Arendt, philosophy *or* politics – but precisely to argue the importance of maintaining the conflict between these two dispositions towards the world and of availing ourselves of Nietzsche and Arendt while doing so.

1. The desert

For the purposes of my argument, I want to suggest that we situate Nietzsche's and Arendt's respective critiques of modernity – modern philosophy and politics included – within a particular metaphorical landscape. This is the landscape of the desert. We find in both thinkers a diagnosis of modern existence as desert existence, characterised by the twin experiences of homelessness and loneliness. To inhabit a desert is to lack a home – more accurately, to lack a sense of home – understood both as a *locus* of security and as a place to which one belongs and from where one is able to relate to others. Nietzsche writes, for instance, of '[t]he tremendous surging of human beings on the great desert of the earth, their founding of cities and states, their warmongering, their restless congregation and opposition, their running through one another, their copying from one another, their contradictory outwitting and stepping down on one another, their shouting in distress, their pleasure in fighting' (SE 5). Elsewhere he refers to 'the last human beings sitting on the dried-out desert of the decayed earth [*Denken wir uns den letzten Menschen auf der ausgedörrten Wüste des morschen Erdballs sitzen*]' (29[181] 7.706). Arendt similarly characterises the modern world as a desert. More precisely, she argues that it is in fact the very absence of a world – the worldlessness – of modern existence that casts us back on ourselves, on our basic species existence, our animality, and thereby relegates us to a desert-existence[4].

Both Nietzsche and Arendt develop an account of the conditions under which the world has become a desert in just this sense. I only

4 Perhaps the most poignant evocation of the desert can be found in her conclusion to an unpublished lecture course from 1955 entitled 'The History of Political Theory' reprinted as the Epilogue in *The Promise of Politics*, 201–204.

want to pick out one strand of argumentation that spans both their accounts. Nietzsche and Arendt agree that the process of desertification is bound up with the moral interpretation of the world that underlies our philosophical, political and religious tradition. On this interpretation, the contingent world that circumscribes human existence is to be valued only *for the sake* of some external, non-contingent ground or principle. This is what is at stake in the age-old schism between the true world and the apparent world, being and appearance, which has informed our tradition from its inception.

The predicament of modernity as identified by Nietzsche and Arendt both is that we have lost the unquestioning belief in any such ultimate ground, any definitive 'for the sake of', while we are nevertheless still plagued by the continued longing for precisely such a ground. This is the paradox of the modern condition, which Nietzsche captures in the well-known formula: 'the world as it ought to be does not exist, and the world as it is, should not exist' (WP 585; cf. 9[60] 12 297 f.). Arendt herself points out that '[the] end of a tradition does not necessarily mean that traditional concepts have lost their power over the minds of men' (BPF 26). We are still in thrall to the most basic assumption of the very tradition that no longer binds us, namely the belief that the world that circumscribes our existence must be redeemed from its contingency by an eternal standard of value. With the loss of such a standard, we have lost a world of unquestionable meaningfulness, in which we could also be unquestionably 'at home'. What remains is the world in which we actually exist, but which now appears entirely bereft of meaning; a world that is in no way a home to us, and in which it has become impossible to endure our own existence. Nietzsche recognises this resentment at the bottom of a wide range of symptoms, such as cultural decline, the emergence of the 'last man', the proliferation of petty politics, utilitarianism, socialism, etc. In Arendt's account, the worldlessness of modern human beings is directly related — though not always causally so — to the rise of mass society and the political horrors of totalitarianism.

While it is important to understand this critical aspect of their thinking, I want to devote the rest of this paper to the positive aspect of Nietzsche's and Arendt's critical enterprise, namely the overcoming of the moral interpretation of the world and the resentment that springs from it. Given the nature of resentment, this overcoming would have to entail a reconciliation with the world that is no longer predicated on principles, categories, or 'yardsticks' derived from a tradition that has lost its validity for us. Stated differently, if the resentment that in-

forms the moral interpretation is directed against the world as it is given to us, the overcoming of such resentment would involve coming to love the world as it is. And indeed, both Nietzsche and Arendt hold out a vision of redemption from resentment that is predicated on love: *amor fati* and *amor mundi*, love of fate and love of the world.

It might strike us – and correctly so – that the love of fate is both more abstract and more encompassing than love of the world, and that Nietzsche's proposed project of overcoming must therefore be different in kind to that of Arendt. This difference might have to do with their conflicting diagnoses of the *locus* of the desertification of the world. Arendt writes in this regard:

> The modern growth of worldlessness, the withering away of everything *between* us, can also be described as the spread of the desert. That we live and move in a desert-world was first recognized by Nietzsche, and it was also Nietzsche who made the first decisive mistake in diagnosing it. Like almost all who came after him, he believed that the desert is in ourselves, thereby revealing himself not only as one of the earliest conscious inhabitants of the desert but also, by the same token, as the victim of its most terrible illusion. (PrP 201)

To illustrate Arendt's point, here is Nietzsche on the desert:

> The desert grows: woe to the one who harbours deserts!
> Stone grinds against stone, the desert ensnares and strangles,
> Glowing brown monstrous death stares
> And chews, – its life is its chewing …
>
> Do not forget, human, consumed by lust:
> you – are the stone, the desert, are death … (DD 6.387)[5]

I now want to explore the opposition between Nietzsche and Arendt as demonstrated by these two citations by relating it to the notions of *amor fati* and *amor mundi* in sections 2 and 3 of my paper.

2. Nietzsche: *amor fati*

We have seen that Nietzsche diagnoses the resentment that is embedded in our philosophical and religious tradition and which has persisted in modernity as a symptom of the moral interpretation of the world. On this interpretation, the world and everything that belongs in it is to be

5 See also Z IV Daughters of the Desert 2.

loved for the sake of some external principle ('creator', 'idea', 'truth'), in so far, but *only* in so far, as the world bears the imprint of this higher reality. The predicament of modernity is that we have lost the unquestioning belief in any such ultimate 'for the sake of', which has left the world and our existence within it bereft of meaning. In Nietzsche's account, overcoming this predicament does not depend on discovering yet another ultimate purpose, such as 'progress', 'peace', 'justice', 'universal brotherhood' or whatever new gods we should like to devise for ourselves, but in overcoming the moral interpretation of the world altogether. Against a moral interpretation that measures the world as it is against the world as it ought to be and finds it wanting, Nietzsche advocates a revaluation of all values from a standpoint beyond the good and evil of traditional morality. As part of this revaluation process, he posits an 'illogical original relationship with all things' (HH 31). On this view, everything exists by virtue of its relationship to everything else and there is no external 'for the sake of' to which such existence must conform.

While I cannot argue this here, I would contend that Nietzsche's theory of the will to power is an attempt to think this illogical relationality of all to all. The most important point for our purposes is that Nietzsche tries to argue, contra the moral interpretation of the world, that the rejection of any aspect of existence amounts to the rejection of all of it, since there is no way of separating out any aspect of reality from the force-field of power-wills to which it belongs. The converse also holds: to care for anything at all and to will it to exist requires one to affirm the existence of everything that exists (Z IV Drunken Song 10).

The highest form of affirmation that explicitly *wills* the existence of everything that exists in eternal entanglement is love. Nietzsche's formula for this affirmation is *amor fati* – the love of fate: 'that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in nature, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not merely to endure that which happens of necessity, still less to dissemble it – all idealism is untruthfulness in the face of necessity – but to love it …' (EH Clever 10). In fact, it seems that the central idea of *amor fati* is loving that which is necessary – and Nietzsche describes it in this way on more than one occasion (see, for instance, 15[20] 9.643; 16[22] 9.664). This attitude is not a mere passive acceptance of the world as we find it, but to *will* the world to be as we find it, knowing that the whole of our existence – including the very fact of our willing – is bound up with it. On this view, we are manifestly implicated in the fate

of the world and the love of fate also means to love the world as our fatality.

Against this background, the vision and the riddle of eternal recurrence can then be understood as this same conception of the illogical relationality of all to all, applied to time. Hence Nietzsche, by mouth of Zarathustra, presents us with a vision of the 'moment' as a knot which ties together everything that was necessary for it to exist and everything that will follow from its existence[6]. Instead of a moral-teleological time-conception in which what *is* is always justified with reference to some final intention, Nietzsche offers a view in which the ultimate purpose of existence is achieved in every moment[7].

On this reading, the conjunction of the thought of eternal recurrence and *amor fati* cannot be said to amount to a new categorical imperative along the lines of: live your life in such a way that you can will it to return eternally. In the first place, it is not merely one's own life that is in play here, but *the whole of existence*, the best and the worst of it. We cannot select what to affirm and what to exclude from affirmation. Secondly, precisely because we ourselves are bound up with all that is, we are not the masters of our own lives. We do not stand over and against fate, against the world, freely deciding to form our lives one way rather than another. Nietzsche's concern is with our perspective – affirmative or negating – towards the one reality of which we are part, and this reality is not a static condition or set of facts, but everything that is in its ever-changing relationality of all to all. Nietzsche thus confronts us with the most radical reconciliation with the world that does away with the distance between self and world altogether, as well as with any distinction between 'is' and 'ought', instant and eternity, particular and universal. In the words of Eugen Fink (2003 213): 'Man dissolves in universal becoming; the world concentrates itself into man'.

In light of these insights, one could argue that Nietzsche's conception of redemption from resentment entails a personal transformation or con-

6 'Must not all things that can run have already run along this lane? Must not all things that can happen have already happened, been done, run past? […] And are not all things bound fast together in such a way that this moment draws after it all future things? Therefore – draws itself too?' (Z III Vision).

7 Nietzsche writes in an unpublished note: 'Becoming must be explained without recourse to final intentions; becoming must appear justified at every moment (or incapable of being evaluated, which amounts to the same thing); the present must absolutely not be justified by reference to a future, nor the past by reference to the present' (WP 708, cf. 11[72] 13.34).

version from 'experience' to 'innocence'. This innocence is not goodness, but rather a perspective from 'beyond good and evil' that no longer weighs and measures the world with reference to an unconditional 'ought' to which it must conform[8]. We find this transformation clearly captured in *Beyond Good and Evil* 56, as well as in an unpublished note, where Nietzsche evokes the name of the god Dionysus to describe this supreme affirmation that follows upon the most extreme negation:

> Such an experimental philosophy as I live anticipates experimentally even the possibilities of the most fundamental nihilism; but this does not mean that it must halt at a negation, a No, a will to negation. It wants rather to cross over to the opposite of this – to a Dionysian affirmation of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection – it wants the eternal circulation: – the same things, the same logic and illogic of entanglements. The highest state a philosopher can attain: to stand in a Dionysian relationship to existence – my formulation for this is amor fati. (WP 1041; cf. 16[32] 13.492 f.)

It should be clear, therefore, that Nietzsche envisages the escape from the desert as a philosophical project. The world is not to be transformed by what we do in it, but by transforming ourselves by means of a philosophical thought-experiment. On this view, the overcoming of resentment requires overcoming the desert in oneself. Upon this self-overcoming, one would no longer be homeless, because one would feel oneself at home everywhere, no longer lonely, because one would be diffused with the sense of one's intimate relation to everything else.

It is precisely in this conception of the most appropriate means for overcoming resentment that Nietzsche comes into conflict with Arendt. In the same text in which she pointedly opposes Nietzsche's diagnosis of the origin of the desertification of the world, she writes:

> What went wrong is politics, our plural existence, and not what we can do and create insofar as we exist in the singular: in the isolation of the artist, in the solitude of the philosopher, in the inherently worldless relationship between human beings as it exists in love and sometimes in friendship – when one heart reaches out directly to the other, as in friendship, or when the in-between, the world, goes up in flames, as in love. (PrP 202)

And yet, I have indicated that Arendt's attempt to overcome the moral interpretation of the world is also predicated on love. How then are we

8 Arendt herself considers the eternal recurrence Nietzsche's 'final redeeming thought' precisely in so far as it proclaims the '*Innocence* of all becoming' (*die Unschuld des Werdens*) and with that its inherent aimlessness and purposelessness, its freedom from guilt and responsibility' (LM VOL. II 170).

to understand her notion of *amor mundi*, and how does it differ from Nietzsche's more radical and encompassing conception of *amor fati?*

3. Arendt on *amor mundi*

In a letter to her old teacher Karl Jaspers, Arendt writes: 'I've begun so late, really only in recent years, truly to love the world […] Out of gratitude, I want to call my book on political theories [the book that would become *The Human Condition*] *Amor Mundi*' (AJC 264). In light of this remark, we can begin to see that, to love the world, for Arendt, is a matter of our relations with one another in the world rather than a matter of self-transformation. Furthermore, her notion of *amor mundi* has an undeniable political dimension.

For Arendt, the world is the realm in which human beings appear, not as instances of biological life, but as individuals. That is to say, the world is a space of appearances, in which we appear to one another in our distinctness rather than in our sameness as members of a biological species. This 'space' is not only constituted by the durable things we fabricate and by which we surround ourselves, but also by the fragile network of relations that springs up between human beings when we engage in action and judgement.

What would it mean, then, to love the world in all these facets? More importantly, perhaps, why *should* we love the world in any of them? Any attempt to make sense of Arendt's notion of *amor mundi* must do so against the background of her interpretation of the concept of love in St. Augustine. The most important idea she takes over from Augustine is that in birth we enter a world that is 'strange' to us because it exists before us. At the same time, we are also strangers to the world; 'newcomers' to a play that is not of our own making, and for whom there are no scripted parts. In this sense the world is not a home to us, but an unfamiliar environment in which we, as newcomers, perforce must live[9]. For Arendt, the question is not how to escape the world into which we enter as strangers, but precisely how to reconcile ourselves to it. In her dissertation on Augustine, she makes much of the notion that our being *in* the world does not yet make us *of* the world (LA 66); the mere fact of our being-here does not yet make 'here' into home.

9 Arendt points to Augustine understanding of 'the particular strangeness in which the world as a "desert" (*eremus*) pre-exists for man' (LA 67).

In Arendt's analysis, it is precisely the inability to reconcile ourselves to a world that precedes us and that will outlast us – a world that therefore does not coincide with our specific arrival in it – that has led to the twofold flight from the world into an eternal realm (which is also Augustine's solution) and into the self (which is the specific solution that characterises modernity). In the context of our present discussion, one might argue that both of these flights are merely two different manifestations of an underlying resentment towards a world in which we are not perfectly at home. Against this background, *amor mundi* can then be understood as a way of reconciling ourselves to the world by fitting ourselves into it – that is to say, by making ourselves at home where we are not. In this regard, Arendt's argument is diametrically opposed to the notion that we can only be at home in the world by fabricating – which generally means: by destroying and remaking – the world in accordance with human needs and interests. Her point, in other words, is not that we can be more at home if only we work harder at making the world conform with our requirements, but rather by choosing to fit ourselves into a world that is not in the first place 'for us'. Thus to love the world is in the first place to choose the world as one's home: 'it is through love of the world that man explicitly makes himself at home in the world, and then desirously looks to it alone for his good and evil. Not until then do the world and man grow "worldly"'(LA 67). In an unpublished lecture entitled 'Basic Moral Propositions', Arendt remarks that 'it is love of the world that fits me into it, in so far as it determines to whom and to what I belong'[10].

Again appealing to Augustine, Arendt proclaims on more than one occasion that 'there is no greater assertion of something or somebody than to love it, that is to say: I will that you be – *Amo: Volu ut sis*' (LM VOL. II 104). On this view, love is the very opposite of possession or assimilation, both of which only understand the object of love as an extension of the one who loves. Moreover, in an earlier reference Arendt speaks of 'the great and incalculable *grace* of love' which nevertheless does not depend on our 'being able to give any particular reason for such supreme and unsurpassable affirmation' (OT 301, my italics). Clearly, then, this affirmation of something or someone cannot be brought about by argument, persuasion or threat. Rather, it is a matter of 'grace'.

10 This quotation is from an unpublished lecture entitled 'Basic Moral Propositions', container 41, p024560, Library of Congress, cited by Beiner (1992 173 fn 149).

If we assume the love of the world to entail precisely such an affirmation without ultimate justification, as I am doing here, we can begin to see how *amor mundi* stands in contrast to resentment. To resent the world as it is given springs precisely from wanting the world to be *other* than it is, or from the view that the world has not provided one with a good enough reason for loving it. As in the case of Nietzsche's vision of *amor fati*, Arendt also fails – or refrains – from providing such reasons. To make the point in a rather pedestrian way, we might say that Arendt recognises, as Nietzsche does, that we cannot be argued into love; it can only be stated as a possibility to which we either do or do not respond. This is also the relevance of her reference to 'gratitude' in the Jaspers letter quoted above: the fact that the world calls up love in us is something to be thankful for precisely because it cannot be willed.

Nevertheless, while both Arendt and Nietzsche understand love in this sense of affirmation without an appeal to further grounds, which in both thinkers stand as the counter-force resentment, there is an important difference between their respective approaches. Whereas, as we have seen, Nietzsche conceives of *amor fati* as the most extreme affirmation of everything that is, to the point of wishing its eternal recurrence, Arendt's conception of love is best understood under the two-fold banner of discrimination and moderation. While, like Nietzsche, she advocates an *unconditional* affirmation of the world, this is nevertheless not an *uncritical* affirmation. That is to say, it is an affirmation that does not refrain from asking whether any aspect of or appearance in the world 'pleases' or 'displeases'. This discriminating love is not conditional upon the world conforming to any external principle or yardstick. It says, rather: *because* I love the world it matters to me what appears in it, and therefore I shall take a stand with regard to the things in it. One might say that, in Arendt, the extremity of the love of the world that would indiscriminatingly affirm the world in all its aspects, is tempered by care for the world – which is of course itself a kind of love – and that this care expresses itself in judgement and discrimination.

This understanding of what Arendt means by loving the world casts a different light on her concern with our 'reconciliation' with the world. Certainly, this reconciliation stands as a counterpart to the resentment that has fuelled the 'world alienation' characteristic of modernity (HC 254), but it nevertheless does not involve a complete identification of self and world. For Arendt, to love the world does allow a measure of reconciliation with it, 'but ironically, which is to say, without selling one's soul to it' (MDT 14). As I have interpreted her here, Arendt's conception

of *amor mundi* retains the distance between self and world that Nietzsche's notion of *amor fati* dissolves. This does not mean that she conceives of us as in any way independent of the world, but rather that she considers a certain distance from the world as a precondition for exercising our judgement about what should and should not be allowed to appear in it.

With regard to this conception of *amor mundi*, Arendt remains a political thinker – that is to say, a thinker of the *polis*, the arena of human affairs. The relevant point in this regard is that the world that conditions our existence can itself only exist on the basis of certain limits and conditionalities. To think politically, which is precisely to concern oneself with this very world, is therefore to set boundaries, draw distinctions, to discriminate – not in the first place because excess, lack of discrimination or unconditional attitudes and actions threaten our souls, but because they threaten the world that lies between us. Arendt wants us to recognise that an excessive, indiscriminate love of the world can bring it to ruin as much as indiscriminate resentment, in so far as radical affirmation prevents us from taking a stand against anything; from the judgement that 'this ought not to have happened; this must not be allowed to happen'. In simple terms: the world of human affairs, which is not the context of the solitary philosopher but the context in which we speak and act together with our fellows, can only survive if we learn to love it within the limits of political judgement.

In the next and last part of my paper, I want to explore the contrast between Nietzsche's conception of *amor fati* and Arendt's conception of *amor mundi* in relation to the conflict between philosophy and politics. Although it might seem at this point as if we could only justifiably speak of Nietzsche *or* Arendt, not Nietzsche *and* Arendt, this last part of my argument is also designed to demonstrate to what extent Nietzsche and Arendt remain related in their very opposition to one another.

4. *Furor philosophicus*, *furor politicus*

The best route into the conflict between the *furor politicus* and the *furor philosophicus* is provided by Arendt's essay, 'Philosophy and Politics'. Here, the conflict between these two enterprises is traced back to the original conflict between the philosopher and the polis, which in turn is co-equivalent with the emergence of philosophy as a distinct mode of questioning. In Arendt's view, the conflict did not arise because the philosopher and the citizens had radically different and incompatible interests,

but precisely because a philosopher – Socrates – wanted to make philosophy relevant for the polis (PP 443). She argues that Socrates wanted to help his fellow citizens become better citizens by helping them discover the truth of their own *doxa* – that is, the truth in the different ways in which the world opened itself to each of them (PP 433). However, this Socratic enterprise carried a particular danger for the citizens and the polis, and it was this danger that became the source of the conflict between them. The danger in Socrates' attempt to help the citizens of Athens think through their *doxai* was simply the discovery of the groundlessness of these very opinions, once they have been thought through to the end. To state the point in Nietzschean terminology: to discover the truth of one's own *doxa* is to discover that there is no truth. Arendt writes in this regard:

> The search for truth in the *doxa* can lead to the catastrophic result that the *doxa* is altogether destroyed, or that what had appeared is revealed as an illusion. This […] is what happened to King Oedipus, whose whole world, the reality of his kingship, went to pieces when he began to look into it. After discovering the truth, Oedipus is left without any *doxa*, in its manifold meanings of opinion, splendor, fame, and a world of one's own. Truth can therefore destroy *doxa*, it can destroy the specific political reality of the citizens. Similarly, from what we know of Socrates' influence, it is obvious that many of his listeners must have gone away, not with a more truthful opinion, but with no opinion at all. The inconclusiveness of many Platonic dialogues […] can also be seen in this light: all opinions are destroyed, but no truth is given in their stead. (PP 442)

By reason of this destructive impact on the opinions by which we navigate in the world, the philosopher indeed poses a danger to the polis, not only for the Athenian citizens of Socrates' day, but for all of us in so far as we are inhabitants of the world and not dwellers in the realm of ideas. For without any trust in our opinions – what Arendt refers to as our 'common sense' – it is not possible to live together in the world. Nietzsche understands this very well: 'Without untruth there can be neither society nor culture. The tragic conflict. Everything that is good and beautiful depends on illusion: truth kills – indeed, it kills itself (insofar as it recognises that its foundation is error)' (29[7] 7.623). And it is perhaps not by accident that he lays a moving soliloquy on loneliness in the mouth of Oedipus:

> I call myself the last philosopher because I am the last human being. No-one speaks to me except I myself, and my voice comes to me as the voice of someone who is dying. Let me still commune with you for only an hour, beloved voice, with you, the last trace of the memory of all human happiness;

> with your help I will deceive myself about my loneliness and lie my way into plurality and love; for my heart refuses to believe that love is dead; it cannot bear the shudder of the loneliest loneliness and it forces me to speak as if I were two.
>
> Do I still hear you, my voice? You whisper when you curse? And yet your curse should cause the bowels of this world to burst! But it continues to live and merely stares at me all the more brilliantly and coldly with its pitiless stars; it continues to live, as dumb and blind as ever, and the only thing that dies is – the human being. (19[131] 7.460 f.)

What Oedipus as 'the last philosopher' and 'last human being' learns is that philosophy is the loneliest of all enterprises precisely because it destroys all *doxa* – opinion, splendor, fame, and a world of one's own – and thereby destroys the precarious grounds for all human togetherness.

However, in Arendt's account there is also a second way in which philosophy and the opinions of the world are in conflict with one another, which can be characterised in terms of a conflict between wonder and common sense. The conflict here has to do with the origin of philosophical questioning versus the origin of the opinions by which we navigate in the world. In simple terms, the difference is that philosophical thinking originates outside the world of human affairs – which of course does not mean that this thinking does not concern itself with the latter – while opinions originate in the world we share with one another. Arendt argues that the original experience that gives birth to the philosopher's questioning is the experience of *thaumazein:* 'the wonder at everything that is as it is' (PP 449). This experience is not wonder at any particular thing in the world which subsequently calls up the wonder at everything else. Rather, the philosopher's *thaumazein* is a kind of 'shock', in which 'Man in the singular, as it were, is for one fleeting moment confronted with the whole of the universe, as he will be confronted again only at the moment of his death' (PP 450–1). Arendt recognises this moment of shock in Nietzsche's description of the philosopher as 'a man about whom extraordinary things happen all the time' (PP 450). Nietzsche himself refers to the philosopher as 'a human being who constantly experiences, sees, hears, suspects, hopes, and dreams extraordinary things; who is struck by his own thoughts as from outside, as from above and below, as by *his* type of experiences and lightning bolts' (BGE 292). At issue here is not so much the content of philosophical thinking itself, but the original experience that gives rise to this mode of thinking and questioning. This experience does not itself originate in the world of human affairs in the course of speech and action, but springs from a wonder that is itself a

kind of astonishment, a bolt of lightning, 'a flying spark between two flint stones' (PP 451). This 'spark' is neither an ultimate truth that can be grasped, nor an immediate understanding of anything at all. The only result of this experience can be expressed as: 'Now I know what it means not to know; now I know that I do not know' (PP 449). And for Arendt, ever an admirer of Socrates, it is this pathos of not-knowing that is the origin of the ultimate questions of philosophy.

At the same time, however, it is the very experience of wonder that brings the philosopher in conflict with the 'common sense' of the polis. The difficulty here is twofold. In the first place, the experience of *thaumazein* strikes the philosopher in his or her singularity and therefore leaves him or her permanently at odds with the polis in so far as the latter is the realm of human plurality, which only exists in the endless play of opinions. In the second place, this moment of wonder is not an experience *in* the world that springs from any particular thing within it. As a confrontation with 'all that is', it is an experience that is 'speechless'; that is to say, it cannot be translated into the 'common sense' language of everyday speech without sounding like 'non-sense' (PP 451).

At this point, it is worthwhile to revisit the two conflicting conceptions of redemption presented by Nietzsche and Arendt in the light of our analysis of the difference between philosophical and political thinking. I would suggest that Nietzsche's vision of the eternal recurrence and *amor fati* is best understood as an attempt on his part to capture something of the original philosophical experience of *thaumazein.* That is to say, his notion of a reconciliation with the world that dissolves all boundaries between self and world, immanence and transcendence, is an attempt to effect a return to something of the original 'shock' or 'flying spark' of wonder at everything that is as it is. Since, as we have seen, this experience of wonder does not originate in the world where we live together in the manner of speech, it is a thought that is indeed incommunicable and ungraspable, but Nietzsche is not somehow 'at fault' for this. We will not be able to make sense of this vision of redemption as long as we treat it as an opinion among other opinions that must somehow compete with them for our allegiance. From a 'common sense' perspective, Nietzsche's vision of Dionysian affirmation and *Übermenschlichkeit* indeed seems like 'non-sense', but this is not the perspective from which Nietzsche addresses us. He is not trying to persuade us to change our opinion about the world; he is trying to convey an experience of wonder before which all resentment of what is, all difference between self and world, all wanting anything different, even opinion itself, disap-

pears. As such, it is indeed a vision of something – which is of course no 'thing', but a sensibility, an experience, a thought-event – that lies beyond the human condition. In so far as we as we try to understand what Nietzsche is saying from *within* this condition, we are bound to misunderstand him. It is only to the extent that we are able to imagine the experience from which his vision of redemption springs that we might grasp something of what this vision itself would entail.

This understanding of the background to Nietzsche's thinking also throws new light on the conflict between his conception of redemption and that of Arendt. The main point for consideration here is that this conflict should not be couched in terms of an 'either-or'. It is not a matter of a head-on confrontation over the 'right' way to overcome the resentment of the world, but rather of different perspectives that stand in tension with one another that cannot be resolved in one direction or another. There are two reasons why this conflict cannot and should not be resolved. In the first place, we should keep in mind that it is precisely by way of the conflict between them that each keeps the destructive force of the other in check. We have already seen that the kinds of thinking and questioning that spring from the philosopher's initial experience of wonder are destructive of the world because they undermine the very opinions by which the world opens itself to us. As such, this questioning destroys the conditions for human living-together in the world in so far as the latter depend on the provisionality and plurality of opinions. Moreover, the unconditional affirmation of all that is and of the world as part of that one reality also undermines the conditions for taking a stand with regard to anything *in* the world, which in its own way can be equally destructive. However, there is a danger to the world from the side of common sense and opinion as well. To exist in a wholly immanent world in which it is generally taken for granted that there is something rather than nothing, in which opinions are never confronted with their own groundlessness and where the flying spark of wonder never halts us in our tracks is a world that has been reduced to the kind of organised living-together that both Nietzsche and Arendt denigrate as 'the life of society'. As Dolan (2004 273) puts it: 'When the tension between common sense and the wonder at being is destroyed, we enter the bleak realm of the 'social', of programmed life and poll-tested politics'. This socialised existence is not a form of reconciliation with the world; it is, instead, an indifference towards it, which no longer cares to ask whether we are 'at home' in the world or not, 'pleased' or 'displeased' with what appears in it. In our own time, it is perhaps this indifference, far more than the explosive events of

the death of God and the despair of nihilism, that indicates that the world has become lost to us.

The second reason why the conflict between the two notions of reconciliation with the world represented by Nietzsche and Arendt cannot be resolved is that the conflict does not merely lie between these two thinkers; it also exists within ourselves. In so far as we are both 'of the world' and therefore formed by as well as constitutive of the world's plurality *and* singular beings who at times withdraw from the world, both kinds of thinking – and thus both kinds of reconciliation – are of relevance to us. As beings who live with others, we need to learn to love the world 'within the limits of political judgement'. However, in so far as we are not only with others, but also with ourselves, we may hope, in a rare moment, to be struck by the 'flying spark' of Nietzsche's 'Dionysian affirmation' of the world as it is, without subtraction, exception, or selection'. Perhaps we might say that, to experience both kinds of reconciliation with the world – which nevertheless cannot be reconciled with one another – is to realise what Nietzsche calls the 'uncanny difference within us' (GS 369) and to which Arendt refers as our 'inner plurality'.

It is therefore my contention that a joint reading of Nietzsche and Arendt such as I have attempted here confronts us precisely with this necessary conflict between wonder and common sense, between loving the world in unconditional affirmation and loving it within the limits of political judgement, both for the sake of the difference that we are and for the sake of the world to which we belong.

In conclusion, however, it must be admitted that the conflictual relationship between Nietzsche and Arendt is still more complex than I have portrayed it here. We have seen that Arendt considers Nietzsche a philosopher who has made the very experiences of homelessness and loneliness that characterise modern desert existence into the subject of his own reflection, and whose proposed overcoming of these conditions involved a flight inwards, a philosophical self-experiment conducted in solitude. And yet, paradoxically, it is precisely *in* this very flight into solitude that Arendt recognises the beginning of genuine political thinking on Nietzsche's part. She writes:

> Nothing is more difficult and rarer than people who, out of the desperate need of loneliness, find the strength to escape into solitude, into company with themselves, thereby mending the broken ties that link them to other men. This is what happened in one happy moment to Nietzsche, when he concluded his great and desperate poem of loneliness with the words: '*Mit-*

tags war, da wurde eins zu zwei, und Zarathustra ging an mir vorbei'. (ONT 359)[11]

For Arendt, the recognition of one's inner plurality – that I myself am not one but always at least two – is a precondition for acknowledging the plurality of the world in which we necessarily exist in relation with *and* distinction from others. And it is the recognition of plurality in this sense that is the condition for all genuine politics, and consequently also the proper focus for political thinking. In light of this passage, it seems that Nietzsche represented for her that rare instance of one whose *furor philosophicus* – the withdrawal from the world in order to think – contained the kernel of the *furor politicus.*

I therefore want to conclude by suggesting that perhaps Arendt was something of a Nietzschean after all – both because he acted as a foil against which she could develop many of her own ideas, but also, paradoxically, because for her he represented at least the *possibility* of the beginning of a genuine political philosophy. On this reading, Nietzsche was not a political philosopher in what he had to say about politics, but rather in what he had to say about the plurality of self and world. And, as Arendt writes in the concluding passage of her essay on philosophy and politics: 'If philosophers, despite their necessary estrangement from the everyday life of human affairs, were ever to arrive at a true political philosophy they would have to make the plurality of man, out of which arises the whole realm of human affairs – in its grandeur and misery – the object of their *thaumadzein*' [sic] (PP 453).

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11 See also OT 477.

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