

(2024 March 23) Love, Arendt and Augustine (Popova)

<https://www.themarginalian.org/2019/02/25/love-and-saint-augustine-hannah-arendt/>

When Hannah Arendt's *Love and Saint Augustine* was published in 1998, I was nearing the apogee of my life in environmental politics, a life that had years earlier taken me to her masterful works of political philosophy, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1953) and *On Revolution* (1963). I was sporadically dipping into her her culminating works on moral philosophy *The Human Condition* (1958) and her posthumous, unfinished, *The Life of the Mind* (1978), while simultaneously returning periodically, doggedly, to the work of her college professor and lover, Martin Heidegger, in a years-long effort to understand his densely suggestive and linguistically fascinating exploration of phenomenological ontology.

As Popova notes in her review linked here, *Love and Saint Augustine* began as Arendt's 1929 dissertation under Karl Jaspers (by choice, rather than under Heidegger, under whose influence she had started it) and was finally published after fifty years of thinking about it as she translated it into English. Augustine remained a major influence on her thinking as he had for Heidegger and centuries of other thinkers.

Twenty years on, I continue returning to Arendt's and Heidegger's work, and to *Love and Saint Augustine* in particular, not only for its meticulous clarification of Augustine's thinking, or for insights into Arendt's and Heidegger's own thought (she, born and raised as a Jew, he as a Roman Catholic), but for a better understanding of love, the topic in question and ongoing enigma in my own life (and primary subject of my hopefully near completion work-in-progress, *Times Two*).

As a very non-Christian graduate student of the Middle Ages there was no way I could escape Augustine. His theology, especially in regard to matters like trinitarian doctrine and the good-evil conundrum of creationism, was enormously influential (becoming centuries later central to fundamental faith-and-grace Protestant doctrine), but I found it less intriguing than his way of thinking as a trained Roman rhetorician marinated in Stoic (preScholastic) logic and neoPlatonic cosmology.

His mastery of rhetoric was highlighted in a seminar I took at Penn State with Kenneth Burke (whose influence on my own way of thinking I cannot overestimate), and in Burke's own rhetorical tour de force, *The Rhetoric of Religion* (1961).

Augustine's neoPlatonic cosmology came into focus during my decades-long writing of *Pound Laundry* as I dug into Pound's expropriation of Pseudo-Dionysios, Gregory of Nyssa, Iamblichus, Duns Scotus Eriugena, Hugh of St Victor, Robert Grosseteste and other so-called "philosophers of light," whose metaphoric metaphysics captivated Pound as it had Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, and the generations of troubadours before them whose music Pound transcribed and whose words he translated.

Love and loss, *caritas*, *appetitus* and *amor*, and so it goes on a lovely, blustery Sunday morning with spring in full swing.

