



Love and Saint Augustine

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Hannah Arendt began her scholarly career with an exploration of Saint Augustine's concept of *caritas*, or neighborly love, written under the direction of Karl Jaspers and the influence of Martin Heidegger. After her German academic life came to a halt in 1933, Arendt carried her dissertation into exile in France, and years later took the same battered and stained copy to New York. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, as she was completing or reworking her most influential studies of political life, Arendt was simultaneously annotating and revising her dissertation on Augustine, amplifying its argument with terms and concepts she was using in her political works of the same period. The dissertation became a bridge over which Arendt traveled back and forth between 1929 Heidelberg and 1960s New York, carrying with her Augustine's question about the possibility of social life in an age of rapid political and moral change.

In *Love and Saint Augustine*, Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark make this important early work accessible for the first time. Here is a completely corrected and revised English translation that incorporates Arendt's own substantial revisions and provides additional notes based on letters, contracts, and other documents as well as the recollections of Arendt's friends and colleagues during her later years.

Love and Saint Augustine Details

Date : Published April 26th 1998 by University of Chicago Press (first published 1928)

ISBN : 9780226025971

Author : Hannah Arendt , Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott (Editor) , Judith Chelius Stark (Editor)

Format : Paperback 254 pages

Genre : Philosophy, Religion, Theology, Love, Christianity

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From Reader Review Love and Saint Augustine for online ebook

Neil Gussman says

Wow! Hannah Arendt knows more about Christianity than most Christians I know.

Ian says

This book is a gem! The best title I have ever read on this unequivocal subject -- it should be mandatory reading on any reading list. It is deep, penetrating, and brilliantly researched.

Jon Stout says

The core of this book is a newly edited version of Hannah Arendt's 1929 Ph.D. dissertation on Saint Augustine's conception of love. As a student of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, she approached the topic from an existentialist point of view, that is by trying to grasp how Augustine understood love as a way of being in the world. Though surprising for a Jewish scholar to choose a Christian saint to study, the approach was not uncommon in German universities of the Weimar Republic. Her approach was in no way partisan or sectarian; she simply attempted to put the insights of Augustine into terms of the human situation, accessible to anyone.

This book came to my attention through my friend, one of the editors (who also wrote an interpretive essay), Judith Stark, who studied philosophy with Hannah Arendt at the New School for Social Research in the 1970's. I currently know Judith through her work in Environmental Studies at Seton Hall University, where she collaborates with the South Mountain Conservancy, in which I am active. Judith also contributed to *An Unconventional History of Western Philosophy: Conversations between Men and Women Philosophers*, which I reviewed recently and found eye-opening.

The contrast to which Arendt draws attention is between *cupiditas* and *caritas*, to use the Augustine's Latin terms for a possessive kind of love and for a selfless kind of love. Augustine presented these as the way we are in the world first in the state of sin, and then after having been redeemed in the Christian scheme of things. Arendt considers these as how we are enmeshed in the world in the normal, default state of affairs, as compared to how we extricate ourselves from our enmeshment in order to attain a free and responsible way of being toward the world.

Arendt poses the problem as a kind of conundrum. She interprets Augustine as saying that *caritas* involves loving our neighbor in the same way that God loves us, that is, with complete detachment and no thought of our own gain. And yet how can we form a community (Christian or otherwise enlightened) if we are emotionally detached from our neighbor?

The answer is in what Augustine scholars call the *Quaestio*, in which he says "I have become a question to myself." Augustine finds God in the place where he is a question to himself, that is, in the place where he asks, "Who am I? What am I going to do?" Augustine finds God in the same place where he finds himself. This leads to a selfless freedom in loving one's neighbor, as well as to a kind of detached compassionate

worldview which reminds me of Buddhism.

This way of interpreting Augustine is somewhat new to me and makes me want to go back to reading Augustine's *Confessions*, to see if I can find in Augustine what Arendt finds in him. Arendt's interpretation of the *Quaestio* is fascinating to me because it resembles the theologian Paul Tillich's conception of God as the "ground of our being." If God is found where "I am a question to myself," then God is where I shape my being from day to day. The resemblance is perhaps not surprising, because both Arendt and Tillich follow Heidegger. The book indicates that Arendt was interested in Tillich as a fellow émigré and fugitive from Nazi Germany, although it does not say if Arendt reacted to Tillich intellectually.

I have pulled out only a thread of the book's discussion, but I find it fascinating and enlightening to think, if Arendt's interpretation is sound, that Augustine, a formative Father of the Church, thought of God not as an agent out there in the universe, but rather as the foundation of our consciousness (though he would not have used that word). This is rather a hip reading of Augustine and runs counter to conventional wisdom about what Christians believe. This book inspires me to go back to Augustine to assess for myself if Arendt has applied a modernist gloss or if she has identified a deep meaning.

Stan Murai says

Love and Saint Augustine is a translation plus a philosophical analysis and interpretation of the dissertation of Hannah Arendt, one of the twentieth century's most well-known writers and political philosophers. It first appeared in German as *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin* in 1929, but was not reissued during her lifetime. This translation was partially completed by Arendt 1964/65 and revised by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Starkthe; the English-American edition came out only in 1996.

The dissertation itself is a work of approximately one-hundred-pages, which the only 22-year-old Hannah Arendt submitted in 1928 as a student in philosophy and theology in Heidelberg under the guidance of Karl Jaspers. It is a study of the concept love in the work of the Christian philosopher and teacher Augustine of Hippo (354-430). In researching his works, she uses the Christian Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, while developing her own fundamental distinction between three kinds of love, to which she assigns a religious and essentially existential-philosophical meaning:

Worldly love based on desire or "craving" (*appetitus*), which constantly strives for satisfaction, but never attains it.

Caritas (ἀγάπη): the love of God that aspires to the summum bonum, which allows entry into heaven, striving for God, and longing for the peace of paradise, but in so doing stands in permanent separation from a world rejected and that is compared with cupiditas, a mundane love which clings and is wrong.

Dilectio (στοργή): the love of one's neighbor (dilectio proximi), which anticipates the love of God in the free, non-desiring affection for another human being and thus making possible a godly position in the world.

The concept of love revolves thematically less about the relationship of man to God than about man to the world, worldliness and otherworldliness, the individual's tense relationship to the world as well as the problem of being with others in the world.

Thus, Arendt's essay belongs thematically to the existential philosophical tradition of Jaspers and Heidegger and - religiously to the demythologizing theology of Rudolf Bultmanns, thereby reflecting the thinking and influences of the author's three main academic teachers with her own strong independent views that also appear in the later works of her career.

Karl Jaspers, who evaluated the work, grading and assessing it, reported that Arendt's method though objective was at the same time forceful but neither historical nor philological. She ultimately authored a philosophical work on the thoughts of Augustine and sought to expressly freely her views outside the scope of Christianity. She also did not seek to uncover a systematic doctrine, but just tried to find contradictions and inconsistencies within Augustin in order to look at the existential origins of his thought.

For a long time, the dissertation was not counted as part of Hannah Arendt's original work canon, which tends to begin with her books written after the end of World War II. Arendt always referred to herself as a political theorist in later years, rejecting the term philosophy in relation to her work, but continued to occupy herself with topics that resonate in the dissertation without, however, referring to this text.

Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark wrote and included nearly a hundred pages of very thorough analyses of the revised dissertation in the second part of the book, entitled 'Rediscovering Hannah Arendt'. They

examine how Arendt treats Augustine's own discovery of himself and his relation to God. *Quaestio mihi factus sum* "I am become a question to myself." Basic themes and terminology are reviewed such as "natality", which Arendt introduces as a central concept as each human life enters the world through birth and is to be born again when taking action, which is opposed to Heidegger's obsession with death. In Arendt's reading of Augustine *Initium ut esset homo creatus est* "that a beginning be made, man was created". This she finds as an expression of freedom. Scott and Stark closely examine the evolution of Arendt's thought and how it was influenced by Heidegger and Jaspers.

The revised dissertation still remains a very academic work, difficult to read for non-scholars unlike most of her later works which are generally accessible to a more public audience of readers. But the whole book would appeal to those wishing to conduct research on the origins and full scope of Arendt's philosophical background. It will be an addition to the large body of serious studies on her life, work, and legacy that have been published since her death in 1975. She is widely regarded as one of the most important political philosophers of the twentieth century.

Pascal says

Religious text pretty much. Love is love of god, self love. Love is how you approach the world. It was the right book for me at the right time in my life.
I'm a convert!

Mike Enwright says

Dense

Sche says

Une analyse complexe et étendue de plusieurs notions chez Saint Augustin ... il faut s'accrocher...mais certains passages sont passionnants

Bernard says

Truly an enjoyable and accessible read.

says

Understanding society (a recent concept) and the individual soul was a lifetime passion for Arnedt. This is a very good book, and it is interesting she starts out her major writing career with Augustine.

Christian Krüger says

Ein beeindruckendes Buch. Es hat eine unglaubliche Dichte, die der Verständlichkeit aber nicht abträglich ist.
