

A Different Price for the Same Ticket: Hannah Arendt and James Baldwin on Love and Politics

Abstract

In 1962 after publishing his most famous essays on race, James Baldwin received a letter from Hannah Arendt. It read: "In politics, love is a stranger ... Hatred and love belong together ... you can afford them only in private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free." This letter is curious, because delving past the alleged sentimentalism of Baldwin's writing reveals an almost Arendtian account (had she not so mischaracterized it) of the effects of racial hierarchy on the political realm. While Arendt's world-love rooted in the enlarged thought of judgment leads her to propose institutional remedies to address racial inequality, Baldwin's ideal of love emphasizes judgment's roots in feeling as a resource for fundamentally reimagining a political world where black lives matter.

Keywords

Hannah Arendt, James Baldwin, love, race, judgment

1. Introduction

In the fall of 2015, leaders in the Movement for Black Lives were able to have an exchange with Hillary Clinton backstage at a campaign event, and that exchange was recorded.¹ In the recording, organizer Julius Jones questions Clinton about her views on racism in light of her previous support for policies implicated in mass incarceration, among other problems Black Lives Matter seeks to address. Jones asks Clinton, “What in your *heart* has changed that is going to change the direction of this country? ... How do you actually *feel* that’s different than you did before?” While Clinton grants that racism is an “original sin” of American history, she questions the idea that what matters most is the content of people’s hearts, arguing that such focus may win “lip service” but little else. Instead, she calls on Black Lives Matter to organize around policy proposals, and when she is pressed again by Jones to recognize the root issue as the way white people “feel in their hearts” towards black people, she pushes back: “Look, I don’t believe you change hearts. I believe you change laws, you change allocation of resources, you change the way systems operate.”

This episode highlights a tension within political theory between on the one hand the desire to address feelings of social animus that condition our politics, and on the other hand a

¹ Video of the entire exchange and an interview with Julius Jones is available from *Democracy Now!* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7o4noK5LFLs>

focus on political practices that are largely constrained to public institutions.² This tension is the practical face of a deeper question about the role of love in politics, a question as important now as ever. In this paper, I attempt to better understand the relationship between love and politics by examining the difference that feelings about race make in two important commentaries, the first from Hannah Arendt and the second from James Baldwin. These theorists provide a fruitful point of investigation, because both of them reimagine democratic politics in light of a form of love.

Even while Arendt desired to quarantine interpersonal forms of love away from the space of politics, she advocated for “a love of the world” for its own sake. In terms of race, this led her to favor formal constitutional remedies to integrate African-Americans into American political life. By contrast, Baldwin envisions a form of political love that respects the public sphere by keeping it in tension with its potential exclusions. He articulates a new political aesthetics of community, a loving image of the world that might also subvert entrenched societal animosities. This difference was not lost on Arendt, and it troubled her enough that shortly following the publication in 1962 of Baldwin’s most famous essays on race, she wrote to him to convey her

² Liberals, not without good reason, have an interest in making feelings of social inequity legible as claims on an ostensibly neutral set of public institutions. Cf. Patchen (2003) *Bound by Recognition*, pp. 165-171. Critical theory also attempts to translate these types of ‘feelings,’ often clarifying them in terms of a more radical nexus of (primarily economic) power relations. However they more often attempt to reimagine political institutions accordingly. Cf. Nancy Fraser (1997) *Justice Interruptus*.

anxieties. In her letter she writes, “What frightened me in your essay was the gospel of love which you begin to preach at the end. In politics love is a stranger ... hatred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free” (Arendt 1962).

Arendt mistakenly conflates Baldwin’s invocation of love with a plea for mere compassion. Instead of parsing the political register in which Baldwin argues for the necessity of love, she is moved directly to warn him of its dangers. Ever vigilant in maintaining the distinction between public space and social space, Arendt saw public, legal discrimination as a political issue, but social discrimination as a fact of life.³ Because she did not see the effective denial of personhood to African-Americans, she missed the way in which Baldwin’s understanding of love resonates with her own account of freedom and a love of the world. Contrasting judgment to compassion, Arendt thus misreads Baldwin’s real argument, which is not a call to public sentimentality, but is instead an imaginative reemphasis on the role of feeling in judgment. Baldwin’s account of love, emphasizing this capacity to feel, seeks to make

³ Arendt writes for instance, “that it is not the social custom of segregation that is unconstitutional, but its *legal enforcement*.” (Arendt 2003, 202). As seen in her judgment of the context of school integration in her “Reflections on Little Rock,” Arendt insists on “enlarged thought” (thinking from my position where actually I am not) as the appropriate response to racism. She contrasts this to compassion or pity, which on her account disables the capacity to judge freely and which she (incorrectly I believe) associates with Baldwin. Cf. Danielle Allen (2009) *Talking to Strangers*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

possible a world to which Arendt should be sympathetic, echoing as it does her own notion of a political world and the love she argues is apposite to it.

After first explaining Arendt's viewpoint, I will then offer an interpretation of Baldwin's account of love and politics that delves past the surface of his alleged sentimentalism to draw significant parallels to Arendt. In so doing I attempt to articulate the unrecognized commonalities between their analyses of love and political freedom. Finally, I evaluate the productive points of distinction that emerge through a comparison of Arendt's notion of judgment as enlarged thought and Baldwin's emphasis on the role of feeling. On my account, the root of Baldwin's emotionally charged appeal lies in the vicious effects of racism on public politics, effects that serve to eclipse black political manifestation. Baldwin helps us cultivate a more robust analysis of the unreality of racial and other forms of social superiority, one that allows us to theorize beyond the institutional reforms Arendt offers to sketch an ethico-aesthetic sensibility capable of sustaining shared political institutions.⁴ While Arendt advocates for

⁴ The term 'ethico-aesthetic' is used by Félix Guattari (1995) to describe a paradigm in which Kantian aesthetic judgment, rooted in the 'disinterestedness' of the subjective spectator relating to other judging spectators, is clarified so as to make conscious the way "certain semiotic segments achieve their autonomy," and become part of the psyche (13). As I understand him, Guattari argues that thinking in terms of the ethico-aesthetic makes us reflect not just on the sensibility of our senses (the way our tastes fit us into the *sensus communis* of our community), but also why we have certain sensations in the first place. Why, for instance we feel beauty and not disgust in a given aesthetic object (or as Arendt appropriates Kant, a political phenomenon). This is an aspect of judgment that Baldwin helps to illustrate further.

constitutional remedies as a lever for political change, Baldwin argues that ending what he called our “racial nightmare” requires a shift not just in our shared institutions, but in our shared political tastes.

2. Arendt’s *Amor Mundi* as the Love Proper to Politics

It is necessary to contextualize the sentiments in Arendt’s letter to Baldwin in terms of the conceptual distinction she draws between interpersonal forms of love and an ethos of love necessary to politics as such. Dating from her doctoral dissertation on St. Augustine and continuing to her last publications, Arendt articulated a recurrent interest in the relationship between love and the political sphere. Arendt (2005) argues that love as we typically understand it, for example in the friendships of social intimacy (“where one heart reaches out directly to the other”) or in romance (where “the world goes up in the flames”), is inappropriate and destructive to political life (202). However, she also clearly argued in favor of a “love of the world,” a love that has as its object an enduring “space of appearances,” a public, political space enacted and sustained through political action (1998, 198-9; 2005, 116-7).

Love as it is commonly understood is politically problematic for Arendt, because it is a private sentiment that, when politicized, becomes phony and “destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others” (Arendt 1998, 242). Love (understood as charitable,

filial, or amorous) leads us to neglect the public and permanent for the private and consumptive, and it limits or silences the speech and action that make spaces public, where we act together and assert our individual distinctiveness. Arendt saw the form of love mobilized by the Civil Rights Movement (in which Baldwin was a vocal figure) as politically dangerous for three main reasons. First, she argues that political claims made in the name of interpersonal love brought what she saw as private matters (such as social discrimination) into the public sphere for adjudication. This she believed to be futile and irresponsible.⁵ Second, she argues that this type of charitable love reflexively seeks liberation (from oppression, from poverty, from injury) without regard to the more difficult task of founding and constituting a space of shared political freedom (Arendt 2006b, 123). This she believed would always doom attempts to use love to achieve freedom as a constituted, worldly reality.⁶ Third, she argues that love becomes hollow and fraudulent in the political sphere, where it is used to deceive and manipulate, and where it

⁵ Arendt simply saw nothing wrong with social discrimination in the private sphere. Note the passage in “Reflections on Little Rock” where she states that such discrimination is “only an extension of the right to free association” (Arendt 2003, 206). She was not alone in a general approach to social discrimination that embraced rather than rejected its implications for reasons of personal and cultural pride. (Cf. Zora Neale Hurston’s (1955) *Orlando Sentinel* letter discussing harmful myths of white superiority.) Even more fundamentally however, she saw the search to identify underlying motives behind political acts as dangerous. In this regard she says that because matters of the heart can neither be fully known to people themselves, let alone accurately displayed under public light, “the search for motives ... transforms all actors into hypocrites; the moment the display of motives begins, hypocrisy begins to poison all human relations” (2006c: 88).

⁶ Cf. “...the cry for bread will always be uttered with one voice. In so far as we all need bread, we are indeed all the same, and may as well unite into one body” (2006c, 84).

claims the force of a “natural” equality that is the “exact opposite” of political equality, properly understood (98). The effects of these three phenomena serve to eclipse freedom.

Somewhat curiously however, Arendt identifies a key defense against the corrupting power of love and other threats to the political realm that is itself a form of love, a love of the world, “*amor mundi*” (2005, 201-3). Many theorists who have commented on this concept including Shin Chiba (1995), Lauren Barthold (2000), James Martel (2001), and Ella Meyers (2013) have argued persuasively that what underwrites Arendt’s concept of politics is an affective orientation of love towards the political realm. Arendt theorizes this love of the world as a constitutive element of the types of political action that serve to sustain a public, political space (203). Unlike compassionate, charitable love (which by definition must be enacted privately and unselfconsciously) and romantic love (which transports lovers out of the world), a love of the world desires a sphere of public freedom and the happiness associated with sharing in its public discourse. *Amor mundi* is thus a fundamental human value that animates our “concern for the world,” one “without which those who are both concerned and political would not find life worth living” (106).

While she never defines *amor mundi* systematically, Arendt articulates it in her celebration of political action, which was for her the only real bulwark against modern nihilism.

In *The Human Condition*, which was itself originally to be titled *Amor Mundi*,⁷ she describes for instance, “the joy of inhabiting together with others a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all” and likewise a “will to live together with others in the mode of speech and action” (1998, 244-6). The most explicit reference she makes comes at the end of her “Introduction into Politics.” There she says, “In the last analysis, the human world is always the product of man’s *amor mundi*, a human artifice whose potential immortality is always subject to the mortality of those who build it and the natality of those who come to live in it” (2005 203).

Arendt’s first mention of a “love of the world” comes in her dissertation on Augustine. Here she distinguishes *caritas* as a spiritual love that fearlessly seeks out eternity but is otherworldly, and she contrasts that love to *cupiditas*, a love that seeks a home in the world but fears death’s dispossession (1996, 17-33). Arendt then outlines an early account of another type of love that contains aspects of both: a love of the world. This type of love is like *cupiditas* in that it is worldly and focused on plural men and women. However, it is also similar to *caritas* in that it desires an object not frustrated by death and enjoyed for its own sake, namely, the public world inaugurated by each successive generation.

⁷ Cf. Elizabeth Young-Bruehl’s (2004) reference to a letter from Arendt to Jaspers discussing the title of what would become *The Human Condition*.

Arendt describes a love of the world as the means by which “man explicitly makes himself at home in the world” (1996, 67). And this ‘being at home in the world,’ rather than the mere ‘worldliness’ that is frustrated by the fear of death, results from a gratitude and remembrance of birth as “the transmundane source of [our] existence” (51-52). It is thus both worldly and transcendent. It prepares us for political action that seeks “a potential earthly immortality,” in the enduring space of political freedom (1998, 55, 247). It elevates our natality, our capacity to begin, as “the miracle that saves the world” (247). It gratefully recognizes the beauty of a home in the world where new beginnings can take place, and where plural men and women can achieve distinction amongst equals.

Politically speaking, then, love is an ambiguous concept for Arendt, and this is because it so often misdirected. When exploited as a means to achieve specific ends, it becomes a shade over the light of the public sphere. This is because action carried out “in the name of love” is compulsive, and as a result it contains the capacity to unleash terrific violence. However, when it is directed toward the political world as *amor mundi*, love does not foreclose public freedom, because its object is not a specific group or specific set of ends. Instead, its object is that specific space in which we act with one another in speech and deed, gaining a sense of the world’s reality, and disclosing our unrehearsed public personas. In this way, *amor mundi* is the political

value that animates our social imagination, as it desires a public freedom that can only be experienced in a plural community of others.

It is for this reason that *amor mundi* is such a central (and unquestioned) premise of Arendt's political thought, and it is for this reason that Arendt considered the politicization of other forms of love as part of a broader surrender to conditions of worldlessness inherent in modernity. This worldlessness, the destruction of shared political space that she described as "the withering away of everything between us," can only be overcome through political acts rooted in *amor mundi* (2005, 201). As Lucy Cane (2014) has recently pointed out, Arendt's (2006a) discussion of principles helps us see how we can normatively evaluate action first as having been inspired by a principle (and not "mere instrumentalism, sentimentalism, or ideology"), and second as to whether its principle is "degenerative" or "(re)generative" of a shared political world (14). *Amor mundi* is crucial to understanding this distinction, because it is the desire, the fundamental orientation towards the world, that allows world-*generating* (and not world-*degenerating*) principles to be the sort that inspire us. Both Cane and Lawrence Biskowski (1993) aim to show that principles offer certain evaluative norms for the judgment of action. However, it also seems clear that on Arendt's account these world-generating principles ('honor or glory,' 'love of equality,' 'distinction or excellence') are only inspiring to those who

possess a love of the world. This is because it through a love of the world that we find the courage to act out of these principles and not others (such as 'fear,' 'distrust,' 'hatred').

Arendt saw fear as one of the greatest political threats. "So great is the fear of men, even of the most radical and least conventional among them, of things never seen, of thoughts never thought, of institutions never tried before," she writes (Arendt 2006b, 250). On Arendt's account there are two responses to these fears, adjustment or endurance. On the one hand, people can adjust their lives to the deep isolation (the "loneliness") that modern worldlessness entails through private escapism, through psychotherapy, or through anti-political mass movements (2005, 201-202). On the other hand, people can resist modern worldlessness by enduring a deformed political world and working to rehabilitate it. *Amor mundi*, as the desire to live and participate in a constituted political world, is at the root of both the passion (the capacity for endurance) and action (the courage to appear in word and deed), that Arendt called "the conjoined faculties" (202). As such, it helps us endure in a world marked by political isolation, and it marks those persons able to overcome the fear of political engagement and "summon up in themselves the courage that lies at the root of action" (2005, 202). In this sense, internal dispositions and sensibilities ('feelings,' perhaps) can be of some political importance, even to Arendt. Baldwin's pushes this analysis further. His project seeks to come to grips with the way racism and other oppressions warp us even internally.

3. Re-evaluating Baldwin's Political Aesthetics

One way of interpreting the difference between Arendt and Baldwin, the way in which Baldwin is perhaps most commonly interpreted, is through the importance he places on sensuality and emotion as they relate to social awareness. Dating back to his emergence as an essayist and novelist in the 1950s and 60s, readers have commented on the way that Baldwin's writing appeals to the power of sensual forms of love to overcome racial oppression and the way he ties ideas about masculinity to their political manifestation in both white and black communities.⁸ Relatedly, Baldwin has been re-read by more contemporary theorists who examine the intersection of sexuality and public politics.⁹ In this way he is often seen as a

⁸ See for instance the discussions of Baldwin's reception by Addison Gayle, Robert Bone, and Colin MacInnes in Consuela Francis' *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin* (2014, 7-34).

⁹ James Dievler, for example, argues that sex is the linchpin of Baldwin's critique of both homophobia and racism and that as a result he is "advocating a postcategorical, poststructural concept of sexuality that we might call 'postsexuality'" (1999, 163). Emmanuel Nelson (1983) argues that "blackness and homosexuality" serve as metaphor for Baldwin, a metaphor of "agony as well as means of redemption ... they bring suffering, but if dealt with courageously they can lead to ... genuine self-identity" (28). Susanna Feldman (2000), likewise, highlights the depiction of bisexuality in *Another Country* to show how "Baldwin locates the repressed history of racism in a fear of sexual equality (or sexual sameness), in the threatened collapse of the symbolic structure of sexual difference" (93). Similarly, Lorelei Cederstrom argues that Baldwin offers "a glimpse of love which is free of political patterns of dominance and subordination" (Francis 2014, 49). Likewise Marlon Ross argues that Baldwin contributes to an understanding of how white supremacy "needs a sexual norm in order to perpetuate the myth of whiteness as a racial norm" (73).

thinker engaged in what José Muñoz calls “queer world-making,” the critical evaluation of a world that deconstructs rigid identity categories by locating the space of free play within and between them, producing a new social imaginary in the process (2009, 40).

Clearly, the sensual is an important part of Baldwin’s political analyses and should not be denied. Baldwin himself writes, “White Americans do not understand the depths out of which ... ironic tenacity comes, but they suspect that the force is sensual, and they are terrified of sensuality and do not any longer understand it” (1998, 311).¹⁰ On this reading Baldwin is a writer who overturns the white, hetero-sexed aesthetic order primarily through depictions of sexual freedom, emphasizing quotidian sexuality of the sort in which Muñoz argues we catch glimpses of “utopian bonds, affiliations, designs, and gestures that exist within the present moment” (2009, 22-23). Baldwin does this in his essays by highlighting lived experiences that transcend the boundaries of the world as given.¹¹ Similarly in his novels, particularly *Another Country* and *Giovanni’s Room*, we read about characters who are both complex and compelling,

¹⁰ By ‘sensual,’ however, Baldwin does not simply mean the explicitly sexual or sexualized, referring instead to the capacity “to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself” (311). In this sense his account resonates strongly with Audre Lorde’s discussion of the uses of the erotic. Cf. Lorde, Audre. “Uses of the Erotic,” from *Sister Outsider* (1984). She makes this distinction through an invocation, similar to Baldwin, of “feeling”: “... pornography is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling” (54).

¹¹ In describing life in Harlem Baldwin recounts, “... we ate and drank and talked and laughed and danced and forgot all about ‘the man.’ We had the liquor, the chicken, the music, and each other, and had no need to pretend to be what we were not” (1998, 311).

who illustrate sensual confrontations with (and evasions of) entwined sexual and racial oppressions.¹² In both genres, Baldwin revalues these experiences, articulating them as both tragic and sublime, as fully and profoundly human.

This claim to a voice, one made with the recognition that sexual repression is infused within the structures of political power, is often understood as a queer politics *avant la lettre*. As Roderick Ferguson contends, Baldwin offers a “rearticulation of queer identity,” one that “posits a new valuation of black inner-city communities as sites of a regenerative nonheteronormativity, establishing a link between reconfigurations of African American queer identity and African American culture” (2004, 108). This interpretive move has great merit, particularly as an evaluative heuristic for the differences between Arendt and Baldwin. Arendt’s vision is profoundly democratic in many ways, but still uncritically assumes patriarchal, heteronormative, and racist social relations that in some ways preclude the foundational re-ordering Baldwin envisions.¹³ Yet it is also important to avoid constraining Baldwin, to ‘cruise’ him as the progenitor of a queer politics that emphasizes the deconstruction of norms and is perhaps not as concerned (as I argue Baldwin is) with a constructive political project. In other words, we should not lose sight of the way Baldwin connects the sensual ability to feel, to confront our

¹² Cf. Joel Shlosser’s (2012) “Socrates in a Different Key: James Baldwin and Race in America,” for an excellent discussion of the political implications of Baldwin’s fictional representations of race and sexuality.

¹³ Cf. Kathryn T. Gines (2014), who charges Arendt (convincingly) of “symbolic violence” (112).

racial and sexual vulnerabilities and the oppression they produce, to a political ability to bear freedom—a world—that is predicated on just such a confrontation.

Baldwin's intervention is of course aesthetic and sensual. It offers a way of re-visioning the world informed by non-normative modes of being. However, it is not (at least not simply) the always-impossible utopia that Muñoz describes, because it uses a language of love to describe freedom as a real political possibility in the world.¹⁴ Because of this, Baldwin's aesthetic does more than challenge norms as such. It emphasizes as well the stakes between the normative and the non-normative, and it articulates an attunement towards a common politics, one that remains cognizant of freedom as both subversive and shared.¹⁵ For Baldwin, any vision of sensual freedom, when it lacks this shared attachment or responsibility, represents an attempt “to have one's pleasure without paying for it,” and accordingly, such freedom becomes devoid of meaning (1998, 234). It becomes, as he puts it in his essay on Gide, “a search for pleasure which grows steadily more desperate and more grotesque” (234). Thus when Baldwin speaks about love in relation to politics, we do well to see that it anticipates a potential world, a world where

¹⁴ Cf. “For I do not for an instant doubt, and I will go to my grave believing, that we can build Jerusalem, if we will” (1998, 704).

¹⁵ As Matt Brim (2014) notes, what makes Baldwin's writing so special is that it, “...extends the moment when the queer and the unqueer exist in unpredictable, unresolvable, untenable relation” (6). For Brim, Baldwin “offers a flash point,” one that “eclipses a subversion/constraint or oppositional paradigm” (6).

our pleasures are not only liberated but felt in relation to their worldly conditions, one resembling the political world Arendt portrays as an appropriate object of our love.

4. Baldwin's Invocations of Love: Strange Similarities?

If the prevailing wisdom about Baldwin among today's readers is often within a framework of his contribution to theories and critiques of sexuality, then I seek here not to dismiss that wisdom but to complicate it. This is because in order to fully appreciate Baldwin's contribution, it is necessary to attend to the ways he not only questioned dominant (racial and sexual) norms, but also how in questioning these norms he held out hope in the possibility of a shared politics. Specifically, in his analysis of what constitutes reality, his use of metaphor to describe public engagement, and the central place of a shared world in his political aesthetics, Baldwin's account of love can be read in surprisingly consonant ways to the world-love of Hannah Arendt.

The question of what constitutes reality for Baldwin is seen for instance in "My Dungeon Shook," where he describes how white people "are losing their grasp of reality" (294). The "reality" to which he refers is one in which African-Americans had been an objectified mass, one operating as "a fixed star" around which white America had organized their world, had secured a

privileged judging perspective through an ideology of racial superiority (294).¹⁶ He does take quite a different tone from Arendt in the emphasis he places on love in the context of racial politics, referring to whites as “lost, younger brothers,” and blacks as people who “with love, shall force our brothers to see themselves as they are” (1998, 294). On her account politics involves building a public space through the enactment of mutual promises, not through the invocation and reliance on forms of ascribed kinship – familial, racial, spiritual, or otherwise. However, by claiming this new “reality,” Baldwin is doing the world-building work of establishing African-Americans as political interlocutors. This forces race to become more than a social problem of discrimination or an interior matter of the heart. It demands that we take race and its effects as a public, political question, part of the political world that matters to everyone.¹⁷

Similar to Arendt then, Baldwin describes an intersubjective phenomenology of reality.

However, in applying this to conditions of racism, he shows why change is so difficult. He

¹⁶ “Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shining and all the stars aflame. You would be frightened because it is out of the order of nature. Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one’s sense of one’s own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations” (294).

¹⁷ While Arendt described the infiltration of administrative bureaucracy into politics as “a plague,” she took for granted that political questions (such as integration) should be debated by citizens as equals. Cf. Hill (1979, 316-17). Moreover, she discusses the role that “unwelcome facts,” such as the recognition of race, must play in informing our politics (Arendt 2006c, 236). To do otherwise is, in her words, to retreat into the “superiority of a more or less well-equipped cloud-cuckoo land” (1968, 18).

argues that as the Civil Rights Movement increased the visibility of black people who “refused to be controlled ... whites were abruptly and totally lost. The very foundations of their private and public worlds were being destroyed” (694). This resonates with Arendt’s conceptualization of freedom as “the impossibility of remaining unique masters” in “a world whose reality is guaranteed for each by the presence of all” (Arendt 1998, 244). However, Baldwin helps make explicit the implication of this non-sovereign vision of freedom in the context of racial hierarchy, namely that it requires a radical reevaluation of how the world has been constructed and the false premises upon which it continues to justify itself (244).¹⁸ His argument attempts to shift our thinking away from seeing black bodies as another object among which white America orients itself in the world, and it pushes the political imaginary to encompass black citizens as constitutive equals.

¹⁸ Patchen Markell (2003) develops from the “spirit” of Arendt’s account of non-sovereign freedom an understanding of political recognition that is likewise non-sovereign, that requires mutual “acknowledgement” of our incapacity to ever be fully or perfectly recognized, try as we might (65-66). He argues that Arendt provides a political theory that helps us realize via action what the Greek tragedians attempted to help us realize via drama, namely “action’s unpredictability” and “the ineliminable possibility of suffering” (65). I do not disagree with those arguments. Instead, I attempt to show how Baldwin may represent an even louder echo of the Aristotelian notion of “*anagnôrisis*” that Markel reads into Arendt. This is because Baldwin not only highlights (through the lens of race) the non-sovereignty of political recognition; he seeks to confront and question more explicitly the modern avoidance of tragedy. As I will attempt to show, Baldwin theorizes racism as a paradigmatic outcome of the modern avoidance of feeling, and in poetically confronting this and other forms of oppression, he seeks to force the world’s tragic limitations to become comprehensible to modern ears.

This becomes even more apparent in the metaphors both authors employ to describe political engagement, especially through tropes of ‘masks’ and ‘light.’ Baldwin, for instance, discusses the roots of white racism as involving the projection of white psychic fears and desires on to black bodies. He describes these twin impulses as “the white man’s profound desire not to be judged by those who are not white” and “the white man’s equally profound need to be seen as he is, to be released from the tyranny of his mirror” (1998, 341). He says here that the power of love, the reason it is both “desperately sought” yet “cunningly avoided,” is that it “takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within” (341). This echoes a description that Arendt herself employs at the end of *On Revolution* in describing the happiness associated with political freedom.

There Arendt cites the poet René Char’s description of the “*épaisseur triste*” of private life, one to which he would be forced to return if he survived the German occupation.¹⁹ What Arendt tells us Char had discovered was “that he needed no mask and no make-believe to appear, that wherever he went he appeared as he was to others and to himself, that he could afford ‘to go naked’” (2006c, 272). This for Arendt represents the way in which he had discovered the joys of acting in the world, the pleasures of un-rehearsed engagement with others that she associates

¹⁹ Arendt quotes him as saying, “If I survive, I know that I shall have to break with the aroma of these essential years, silently reject (not repress) my treasure” (2006c, 272).

with loving the world (272, 111). When read alongside Baldwin's quote regarding 'masks,' we see again the political valence of his account of love. Moreover, because he more fully explicates the pretensions and fears that prevent us from feeling the full breadth and plurality of the world, his account may help us better imagine the type of courage that Char discovers under occupation.²⁰

Another parallel between Baldwin and Arendt's illustrations is in their description of publicity as a form of light. In the essay "Nothing Personal," Baldwin writes, "One discovers the light in darkness ... but everything in our lives depends on how we bear the light. It is necessary, while in darkness, to know that there is a light somewhere ... What the light reveals is danger, and what it demands is faith" (1998, 704). Here Baldwin uses light as a metaphor connecting the capacity for love (premised on honest feeling) with the ability to bear a world of others with whom we give and receive light, be it in the form of publicity, shared meaning, or simple affirmation. This metaphor continues in an essay he wrote on the painter Beauford Delaney, where he describes Delaney's use of light as having a power "to illuminate, even to redeem and reconcile and heal," because it "leads the inner and the outer eye, directly and

²⁰ Arendt, despite her clear partisanship for 'the world,' often seems reticent to explicate how we cultivate that type of love in modern times. I will touch on why one of the potential candidates she gives for such a mechanism, political judgment, may not be fully satisfactory in what follows. Instead, I argue that Baldwin, by examining the moral content of what it means to feel and who counts in a community of judgment, goes a step further than Arendt to help us understand why, as he puts it, "the truth cannot be told, even about one's attitudes," (1998, 698).

inexorably, to a new confrontation with reality” (721). For Baldwin this image of light shows how crucial it is that we develop both this inner and outer eye, to perceive both the world and one’s position in it with a light, one both dangerously perceptive and powerfully sustaining, that is similar to what shines in love. If we develop this capacity, we may gain the hope “to illuminate,” “to redeem and reconcile and heal.” And while this turn inward might seem dangerously Rousseauian to Arendt, what Baldwin is politicizing is not some specific feeling, but the capacity to feel at all. Read alongside Arendt’s praise of Karl Jaspers, it is clear that both authors invoke light at least in part to show how we come to realize a world conditioned by the presence of others, one that exists in part through our affective reception of it.

In “Karl Jaspers: a laudatio,” Arendt praises the subjective personality that distinguished Jaspers as a public intellectual (Arendt 1968). In emotive language she discusses the way he exemplified a life engaged in public concerns. Arendt says that Jaspers affirmed the public sphere because he “loved light so long that it marked his entire personality,” that he had “an innate pleasure in making manifest, in clarifying the obscure, in illuminating the darkness” (Arendt 1968, 75). This love of light brings into the public sphere a “realm of the spirit,” “the realm of *humanitas*” that is “worldly,” “present and of this world,” created by reason and where “freedom reigns” (80). It is for these reasons that she argues Jaspers’ “*humanitas*,” the personal element he brought to the public realm, helps to “overcome our distrust” of the public sphere and

“feel what honor and joy it is to praise one we love in the presence of all” (74). In these passages Arendt describes the affective register with which participation in a public world and the bonds forged therein are often felt.²¹ In so doing she, in resonance with Baldwin, describes a loving mission to preserve and pass along the light of public life.

This final parallel between Arendt and Baldwin, their hope for the possibility of a shared world is evident in their respective impressions of modernity. They are both essentially ‘anti-social’ thinkers: Arendt to the extent that society eclipses the space necessary for private thought and public action, Baldwin to the extent that he associates society with an unflinching whiteness that refuses to acknowledge history and that disregards black life.²² Despite these shared

²¹ Arendt concludes, “Those who enter [the public realm of *humanitas*] recognize one another, for then they are ‘like sparks, brightening to a more luminous glow, dwindling to invisibility, alternating and in constant motion. The sparks see one another, and each flames more brightly because it sees others’ and can hope to be seen by them” (80). As Von Tevenar (2014) points out, this metaphor is extended in her discussion of Brecht and his desire to give voice to “those in darkness” (43).

²² It is worth noting here that both Arendt and Baldwin expressed pessimistic views about modern psychotherapy as part of their ‘anti-social’ approach to politics. Arendt remarks, “Modern psychology is desert psychology ... Insofar as psychology tries to ‘help’ us, it helps us ‘adjust’ to those conditions ... precisely because we suffer under desert conditions we are still human and still intact; the danger lies in becoming true inhabitants of the desert and feeling at home in it” (2005, 201). This resonates with Baldwin’s comments on how the American “adulation of simplicity and youth”—in other words, the desire to avoid confronting the tragic—explains “some of the stunning purposes to which Americans have put the imprecise science of psychiatry” (1998, 703). He continues, “This is not at all the same thing as ‘adjusting’ to reality: the effort of ‘adjusting’ to reality simply has the paradoxical effect of destroying reality...” (703-4). They take these notions in opposite directions: Baldwin arguing that we should endeavor to honestly understand our selves, Arendt arguing that self-knowledge is at best a distraction and at worst an impediment to political action (Arendt 1998, 244; 2006c, 86-88).

anxieties over modern society—both its ‘massification’ of administrated populations and its hollow, white monoculture—both writers offer reasons to remain hopeful for the world. Arendt and Baldwin both stress the constant possibility of change represented by the coming and going of each subsequent generation. Arendt argues that human natality, our ability to begin new projects that is represented in the birth of each unique individual, provides us with exemplars by which we can come to love the world.²³ Baldwin argues furthermore that this means we must learn “to be able and willing to change,” to overturn the constructs and the myths that reinforce an unfeeling stasis, so that the freedom implicit in a love of the world will be achieved (1998, 339). In this sense, he shares Arendt’s concern for the world, yet he articulates it in terms of its complications within a racial hierarchy.

Baldwin does this by showing how the political effects of white American ‘innocence,’ the unwillingness to reckon with the past and feel anything from it, acts as a political double-bind for black Americans. Particularly, in the letter to his nephew James titled “My Dungeon Shook,” Baldwin uses ‘innocence’ ironically to help us apprehend how the world has been and continues to be constituted and organized in contexts of unequal power relations. He writes, “This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should

²³ Cf. Arendt (2005) “In the last analysis, the human world is always the product of man’s *amor mundi*, a human artifice whose potential immortality is always subject to the mortality of those who build it and the natality of those who come to live in it” (203).

perish ... You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black and *for no other reason*" (293). What he imparts in this essay is a denied history that conspires against black people, a foundational history whose effects white America refuses to confront. These effects it has instead projected onto black bodies in order to safeguard a fragile, white identity.

Whereas Arendt sees the history of political foundation in the act of constitution (one that symbolically inaugurates a people and ratifies their will, that is freely chosen out of "love of public freedom," and that is held together by the promising and forgiving inherent in "the will to live together with others in the mode of acting and speaking"), Baldwin reminds us that this love and its promise have never been fully shared (2006c: 116, 127, 196; 1998, 246). While Arendt does note the explicit and effective historical exclusion of black people from constitutional equality, she never probes the real roots of this exclusion and its lingering effects. Baldwin's writings, in analyzing the roots of American racial exclusion, articulate a conscience capable of imagining how political founding and world-building can only occur between those who deem each other capable of fully sharing this "love of public freedom" and keeping its promises.

Whereas Arendt claims "conscience is unpolitical," because "It is not primarily interested in the world ...," Baldwin counters with a notion of love that does not just help us to be more responsive to moral feeling, but ultimately helps us achieve a vision of democratic politics.

The famous last passage of *The Fire Next Time* shows how conscience for Baldwin is intimately related to a concern for the world. While it can be read as relating love and politics in ways Arendt fears, it can also be read to invoke love in terms of the pre-political conditions for a political world that are not fully examined by Arendt's political phenomenology. There he states:

If we – and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of the others – do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time! (1998, 347)

Arendt seems to have read this as an exhortation to embrace each other like family and to seek justice under threat of violence. However, when read in light of the foundational ethico-aesthetic Baldwin is invoking, Arendt's interpretation seems all too flat. Baldwin is, in effect, rhetorically re-constituting an entirely new community, one where each other's capacity to share in the freedom of a world is recognized, a community that has never heretofore existed in America. He argues that people must work "*like* lovers," must become those who (same as for Arendt) "create," who insert something new ("a consciousness," "a country") into the world.²⁴ In this

²⁴ Cf. Arendt (1998), "The child, this in-between to which the lovers now are related and which they hold in common, is representative of the world in that it also separates them; it is an indication that they will insert a new world into the existing world" (242).

sense Baldwin helps make politically legible the implicit moral character of Arendtian world-love and recovers the historical and aesthetic resources with which to share it fully.²⁵

Thus instead of interpreting Baldwin as merely a sentimental moralizer, I think we should consider his discussion of love as relevant to the political world, one that seeks to constitute a political community of equals. Instead of harnessing pity towards revolutionary ends à la Robbespierre or retreating from the world out of moral convictions à la Thoreau—Arendt’s two totems of moral incursion into politics—Baldwin seeks political engagement to bring to light the moral implications of a world built ostensibly on a shared love of freedom.²⁶ On Baldwin’s account, white America has never fully achieved such a world, because it has avoided reckoning with feeling, avoided challenging itself to imagine the full equality of black people that such a country would reflect.²⁷ Calling this avoidance, “the tyranny of the mirror,” he argues that white America has shored up its own identity by displacing its fears and feelings (of death, of sexuality) onto black bodies (1998, 341). And in this inhuman denial of black Americans’

²⁵ To appropriate from Seyla Benhabib, Baldwin intervenes between the “moral good” and the “moral right” to provide an “ethos of democratic participation,” and while his is no Habermasian discourse ethics, it does effect an ethico-aesthetic confrontation with racial exclusion that helps to engender solidarity “through the actual confrontation in public life with the point of view of those who are otherwise strangers...” (Benhabib 2001, 200-201).

²⁶ Cf. Arendt on Thoreau’s “conscience” (1972), p. 60, and Arendt on Robbespierre’s “pity” (2006c), p. 80.

²⁷ Cf. “...white Americans have never, in all their long history, been able to look at [the Negro] as a man like themselves” (1998, 339).

humanity, Baldwin argues that white America has denied itself the fuller freedom of a political world of judging equals.

5. Arendt and Baldwin at the Intersection of Moral and Political Judgment

In the final analysis, what ultimately distinguishes Arendt's and Baldwin's approach to love and politics is not simply a stylistic divergence, either the emotional "heightening and playing exquisitely on every bit of melodrama" or an irony that is "all cleverness and no eloquence" as Norman Podhoretz (1963) claimed. Nor is it a stark thematic divergence, where on the one hand freedom is characterized in terms of a self and on the other it is characterized in terms of a public world. It should by now be fairly clear that these distinctions are overly simplistic and should be set aside. Moreover, they are not helpful in gaining a critical purchase on the issues of racial and other forms of oppression that continue to haunt our politics and for which judicious responses are still urgently needed. To this end, a better way of understanding the divide between Arendt and Baldwin's political thoughts on love is to examine how loving the world can have both a moral and political character, and how the former may, in certain contexts, take precedence.

Despite Arendt's broad distinction between matters of public concern and matters of the heart, we see clearly that certain internal dispositions and feelings, namely those related to a love

of the world (“political passions—courage, pursuit of public happiness, the taste of public freedom, an ambition that strives for excellence”), have a special significance for her (2006c, 227-68). What she theorizes as the connective tissue, so to speak, between these two frames—the internal relation of one to one’s self and the external relation of citizen to citizen—is the judgment that grows out of thinking about the world and what appears in it. This judgment she calls “the manifestation of the wind of thought” in the world (1978, 193). In the political context, private thinking becomes public judgment by imaginatively representing to oneself the standpoints of others and drawing one’s own conclusion, an opinion that has subjective validity. In non-political contexts or in political crises, private thinking becomes public not as judgment but as ‘truthtelling,’ whereby historians and novelists put sets of facts into meaningful narratives, and whereby philosophers transform speculations about morality into “exemplary truth” (243-44).²⁸ In both contexts (judgment and ‘truthtelling’), what lies at the heart of political thinking for Arendt is a love that cares for the world, that either fits us into the world by reconciling our subjective positions to one another, or that grants acceptance of the world by making meaningful narratives and exemplars out of worldly phenomena.

²⁸ Arendt argues that truths are political inasmuch as “no human world destined to outlast the short life span of mortals within it will ever be able to survive without men willing ... to say what is” (2006a, 225). Notably for Arendt, truthtelling becomes political in times of crisis, “where a community has embarked upon organized lying on principle” (247). It is this sort of a role I am claiming for Baldwin, for whom America has been a country where “we live by lies” (1998, 698).

For Arendt, modern conditions (a mass society of laborers, flawed and unresponsive political institutions, the loss of compelling authoritative guides) make it exceedingly difficult to ground judgment in *thinking*. When we have little space in the world for thinking and little hope that the judgments that thinking produces will be heard and intelligible, it becomes easy to simply forsake the political world and escape into a social cocoon, where we become nearly powerless to resist anti-democratic forms of government that thrive on such conditions.²⁹ Given these modern conditions, where world alienation is almost a matter of course, Arendt's judgment led her to re-imagine institutions that might recapture the revolutionary spirit of action in the world. This is reflective of her belief that changing conditions (for better or worse) fundamentally alter the way we relate to the world. She argues for instance, "we can no more change a world by changing the people in it ... than we can change an organization or a club by attempting to influence its members in one way or another ... we can only revise its constitution, its laws, its statutes, and hope that all the rest will take care of itself" (2005, 106). This commitment to the world and to its organization is purposefully impersonal, arising as it does not out of sentiment but out of the disinterested reflection of judgment.

²⁹ Indeed Arendt's condemnation of Adolf Eichmann, which hinged on his unwillingness to share the world with Jews, examined how she believed this unwillingness arose from an inability to think—in his case, "the inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow's point of view" (even his own) (2006b, 30).

Arendt's proposals vis-à-vis race politics reflect this commitment. In response to the school integration protests that occurred in Little Rock, Arkansas, she argued that the federal intervention was paternalistic and an assault on the freedom of association of both white and black families. She proposed instead a "pilot project" akin to a charter school where concerned families who wanted educational integration could send their children, and she argued that only if state authorities contested this sort of undertaking should the federal government intervene (2003, 195). This is but one example of the emphasis she placed on *institutional* frameworks for addressing the fundamental questions of political community that racism makes evident. She argues elsewhere that "an explicit constitutional amendment, addressed specifically to the Negro people of America," is needed, and that "we need not be surprised that the present belated attempts to welcome the Negro ... are not trusted" (1972, 91).³⁰ Here we see the limitations of her approach to political judgment as it applies to race. Namely, what is offered as a moral claim against educational segregation, she hears as a social claim about status opportunities, and she responds with a political claim about the structural parameters of racism. By emphasizing the important empathetic power of feeling over the reflective power of thinking, Baldwin occasions a different type of moral imagination rooted in love to appear.

³⁰ This is why, moreover, she argues (somewhat curiously given the typical context of the protests she witnessed) that civil disobedience groups be granted an official function in Washington akin to any other lobby, "the same recognition for the civil-disobedient minorities that is accorded the numerous special-interest groups" (1972, 101).

In Baldwin's approach to judgment, the inability to accept the world is related to "an inability to *feel*," an "aversion to experience," a "fear of life," (Baldwin 1998, 12). First, this account is not the type of loving sentimentality that Arendt fears. Indeed, he makes nearly the same warnings as Arendt. He defines sentimentality as "the ostentatious parading of excessive and spurious emotion," calling it both "the mark of dishonesty" and "the inability to feel" (12).³¹ He continues (sounding very similar to Arendt describing Rousseau or Robespierre), "the wet eyes of the sentimentalist betray his aversion to experience, his fear of life, his arid heart; and it is always, therefore, the signal of secret and violent inhumanity, the mask of cruelty" (12).³² For Baldwin, the difference between sentimentality and feeling is the willingness to "make a further journey," one initiated by artists and novelists, who not only make events meaningfully comprehensible and thus reconcile us to the world (as they do on Arendt's account), but also

³¹ Moreover, this is very reminiscent of Arendt (2003) in "Collective Guilt and Responsibility." On both accounts the sentimentality of diffuse responsibility displaces any real redress of the present situation when action is what is most needed, or as Baldwin puts it succinctly, "Guilt is a luxury we can no longer afford" (1998, 712).

³² In this distinction he is clearly aligned with Arendt's discussion of "pity" as the transformation of compassion into a sort of unbounded public objectification of mass suffering. In Robespierre's pity, Arendt argues, "he lost the capacity to establish and hold fast to rapports with persons in their singularity" and, as a result, was led "to a glorification of its cause, which is the suffering of others" (Arendt 2006c: 79-80). Compare this to Baldwin's warning that a "devotion to the human being" should not be confused with a "devotion to Humanity," because the latter is "too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are notoriously bloodthirsty" (1998, 12).

confront the world's freedom and tragedy granting us the shock or wonder involved in authentic feeling (12).

Second and relatedly, Baldwin's approach to judgment, while not systematic, emphasizes the capacity to be moved, to feel, in such a way that an honest reflection actually occurs. For him experiences of feeling that activate honest reflection rarely ever occur in racial discourse or in political discourse generally.³³ As such, the question of race becomes for him a flashpoint in a broader struggle to maintain our humanity under conditions of unfeeling, of "democratic anguish," similar to the world alienation Arendt describes (1998, 173).³⁴ In fact, Arendt herself recognized forms of indifference as a signal political problem—she calls it "the greatest danger"—but she demurred in proposing countermeasures other than institutional change and the exemplarity of good judgment.³⁵ Baldwin helps respond to indifference more directly by

³³ Cf. "Many Thousands Gone": "The ways in which the Negro has affected the American psychology are betrayed in our popular culture and in our morality; in our estrangement from him is the depth of our estrangement from ourselves. We cannot ask: what do we *really* feel about him—such a question merely opens the gates on chaos. What we really feel about him is involved with all that we feel about everything, about everyone, about ourselves" (1998, 19).

³⁴ As he says late in life, "I think Americans are terrified of feeling anything ... I never met a people more infantile in my life" (Baldwin 2014, 64).

³⁵ Cf. "Some Questions of Moral Responsibility": "In the unlikely case that someone should come and tell us that he would prefer Bluebeard for company, and hence take him as his example, the only thing we could do is to make sure he never comes near us. But the likelihood that someone would come and tell us that he does not mind and that any company will be good enough for him, is, I fear, by far greater. Morally and even politically speaking, this indifference, though common enough, is the greatest danger" (2003, 146).

connecting racial ideology not just to an unwillingness to reflect properly on our feelings about race (as Arendt might), but also to an inability to be moved at all.

He argues that feeling, our ability to be authentically moved and cede the security of our ideologies, is triggered through imagination.³⁶ Imagination, which for Arendt is crucial in *responding* to feelings and representing the opinions of others to our own judgment, is on Baldwin's account what *activates* feelings by facilitating aesthetic or experiential encounters with representations that we have not confronted, forcing us to crawl from behind our worn-out ideologies and habituated responses.³⁷ He describes one imaginative encounter thusly, "The white policeman ... Even if he is gifted with the merest mustard grain of imagination, something must seep in. He cannot avoid observing that some of the children, in spite of their color, remind him of children he has known and loved, perhaps even of his own children" (1998, 177). In this way, imagination helps us encounter what Baldwin calls "that suffering and dancing country" that has been constructed as black such that we actually feel (authentic pleasure or perhaps

³⁶ Baldwin writes for instance, "It is really quite impossible to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question; one is doomed to remain inarticulate about anything which one hasn't, by an act of imagination, made one's own" (1998, 96). I am grateful to Andrea Dworkin for bringing out this aspect of Baldwin's thought for me. In her essay "Communion," she addresses themes of imagination in Baldwin's writing to argue, "The person with imagination is pushed forward by it into a world of possibility and risk, a distinct world of meaning and choice; not into a bare junkyard of symbols manipulated to evoke rote responses" (2006, 60-61).

³⁷ Linda Zerilli (2005b) also argues that Arendt had a more limited political account of imagination. In Zerilli's words, "she never really considered the imagination in its freedom, for she never thought of it as anything more than reproductive" (163).

displeasure), but it is only through this feeling that we are able to then think and reflect, that we gain the potential for revaluing that country as American.³⁸

Third and finally, Baldwin's account helps raise two important and related questions that Arendt's account of judgment otherwise evades. The first relates to the sensation of the "it-pleases-or-displeases-me," with which Arendt's account begins. Here she says we reflect on the "it-pleases-or-displeases-me" of the internal sensations an object triggers in terms of common sense, the imagined tastes of others who might also judge it (1992, 66). Baldwin calls into question not this pattern of thinking and reflecting, but its unquestioned and unexamined reliance on the internal sensations of pleasure and disgust.³⁹ For Baldwin, the real question we ask in forming a judgment is not, "Does this please or displease me?"⁴⁰ Of course this question and the mode of reflection it entails is important, but we must also inquire as to *why* we feel pleasure or disgust in the first place. Are we really feeling this or that, or are we just repeating ingrained and reflexive responses? Arendt argues that these inner sensations "are overwhelmingly present,"

³⁸ Baldwin is forever hopeful that really feeling, really confronting the world, will lead us to love it. He argues that this might allow white America "to become a part of that suffering and dancing country that [it] now watches wistfully from the heights of his lonely power and ... visits surreptitiously after dark" (341).

³⁹ Linda Zerilli (2005a, 2005b) offers a brilliant approach to Arendt's unfinished theory of judgment, particularly in how it is neither reducible just to subjective feeling or community norms. However I am not aware of her addressing either of the two questions I associate with Baldwin here.

⁴⁰ Or perhaps more precisely, "Does the judgment resulting from the immediacy of my subjective feelings in anticipation of judging others please or displease me?"

“are immediate, unmediated by any thought or reflection” (66). However, we also have good reason to believe that they are learned, historically contingent, and malleable.⁴¹ Moreover, while determining the authenticity of our feelings may be a trivial endeavor in judging most things (‘the beauty of the rose,’ etc.), it can be a life or death matter when the feelings relate to the presence of black and other marked bodies.

The second question Baldwin raises relates to how Arendt idealizes a political *sensus communis*, the common sense which we imagine and to which we appeal as we form our own opinions through the representation of the potential opinions of others (72). Baldwin’s project seeks to uncover how our ideals of community (be they ‘progressive’ or regressive) always make assumptions about who is represented without attending to the foundational question of who should be represented. If for Arendt political judgment is how we come to determine our community, how we “choose our company” amongst those with whom we share in freedom, then for Baldwin this choice is not simply political but also has an ethical relevance in determining who belongs and who matters.⁴²

⁴¹ Jennifer Nedelsky has a very interesting discussion of what she calls “affective failure,” where someone judging has “failed to assign the appropriate affect to the event they confronted” (Nedelsky 2001, 238). She argues with Arendt that, “We do need to avoid simply acting on our affective starting point, by examining them critically, and comparing them to others for the purpose of genuine judgment,” but continuing as I do with Baldwin, she argues, “we also need to transform these starting points themselves” (244).

⁴² Cf. Susan Bickford’s essay in response to Kristie McClure’s discussion of the propriety of Arendtian judgment in “The Odor of Judgment” where, as she puts it, “we may choose our company by telling our choices, but we are quite

In responding to these two questions about the importance of feelings and their relationship to communities of judgment, Baldwin argues that, given conditions of racial inequality, invisibility, and terror, we require an ethico-aesthetic confrontation with the racial (and other) constructs that condition us. This confrontation he hoped might foster a re-visioning of black life and the political spaces where it might truly matter. Only then might it be possible not just to love the world but to share this love fully, and only then will we no longer cling to “chimeras,” those myths, “by which one can only be betrayed, and the entire hope – the entire possibility – of freedom disappears” (1998, 339). In this way Baldwin pushes further than Arendt, not just in helping us think and rethink how we judge, but in helping us to feel, to recognize the affective contours involved in determining what really counts and who really matters within a given political community.⁴³ He reveals the moral undercurrent of political judgment that becomes significant during periods of political crisis and which conditions of racial and other forms of oppression serve to obscure. In so doing he expands our exemplar for judging beyond the “enlarged thought” of Arendt (“being and thinking in my own identity where

likely to be telling them to a company whose company we didn’t choose and whose proprieties we do not believe in” (Calhoun and McGowan 1997, 89).

⁴³ Arendt argues that this moral character is most necessary during emergency situations “when the chips are down,” but Baldwin helps us realize how the exclusion of specific groups of people constitutes an emergency, and how this moral character is then present in deciding who belongs, who matters foundationally, and with whom we will share our love (of the world).

actually I am not”) towards that of the “mutual stretching” across difference that Audre Lorde describes and the “loving perception” that Maria Lugones theorizes.⁴⁴ He shows how the judging community must be reimagined in order for judgment to be fully reflective and for the world it realizes to be truly equal.⁴⁵

6. Conclusion

In the political theory of Hannah Arendt and James Baldwin we find innovative and productive ways of conceptualizing the connections and ruptures that exist between love and political freedom. Arendt’s is a vision of a love of the world where political actors come together to be seen and distinguished from one another; it is the joy felt in freely acting together and engaging in the public business, in building the world together. It is a love felt by citizens

⁴⁴ Lorde argues for instance, “We have many different faces, and we do not have to become each other in order to work together. It is not easy for me to speak here with you as a Black Lesbian feminist, recognizing that some of the ways in which I identify myself make it difficult for you to hear me. But meeting across difference always requires mutual stretching...” (1985, 57). Lugones describes “loving perception” as a form of “world traveling” whereby we realize our mutual dependence. She says, “We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood without which we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. Travelling to each other’s ‘worlds’ enables us to *be* through *loving* each other” (394, 1190). For Arendt these notions are beside the point (2006a, 237).

⁴⁵ In this sense my interpretation of Baldwin resonates with Iris Marion Young’s (1997) critique of Arendt. She writes, for instance, “When we try to represent a multiplicity of viewpoints to ourselves, we have merely aggregated a series of subjective and self-regarding perspectives, rather than adopting a new, more objective thinking derived from them all. If we represent to ourselves all the perspectives, we still have not represented that upon which these are perspectives” (57).

for the world they create and maintain. Baldwin also develops a political account of love that seeks to forge a common world. But his account, stemming as it does from a reckoning with life's tragic constraints, remains more closely attuned to the potential exclusions of political community. As Lawrie Balfour puts it, "Baldwin's celebrations of the individual and his understanding of the impact of exclusion and powerlessness ... are connected to an unsentimental appraisal of the human weakness that make democracy such a risky undertaking" (2001, 26).

In this sense we can see that, far from a cloying entreaty to love one another or a simplistic reversal of oppressor and oppressed, he offers a compelling addendum to Arendt's vision of *amor mundi*. This is because Baldwin shows not just why we should love the world, and what is at stake in our attempts, but he also illustrates more fully the moral and political intersections of such a love, namely, that a public world is only possible when its effective *and* affective equality is shared fully. In articulating an ethico-aesthetic that helps us appreciate love's political relevance, he also provides a motivating rationale for developing the moral capacity to feel, to honestly reckon with the world, what pleases and disgusts, and why. In the words of Joel Schlosser, Baldwin provides both a "survival tool," an ethic that reintegrates self into community, and a "political practice of resistance," a counterhegemonic politics that redeems plurality in the name of the oppressed (2012, 496-7). As we see time and again,

Baldwin maintains both a commitment to the world—the conciliatory possibility of a politics shared among equals and passed down to succeeding generations—*and* an acknowledgement of the staggering reimagining necessary for such a world to be truly shared.

The upshot of this comparison between Arendt and Baldwin is a fuller appreciation of the depth of their concern with freedom and how, though inspired by very different intellectual and experiential heritages, they shared a fundamental concern for a world in which freedom exists. This concern is a love that cuts against the grain of our conventional notions. Reading Baldwin in dialogue with Arendt is to push against the limits of the sort of freedom possible within a political world characterized by stark inequalities and forms of discrimination. While Arendt brings to bear the theorist’s prerogative with clarifying and distinguishing concepts, Baldwin brings a novelist’s sensibilities to help us see the interstices of those concepts, how they are also defined by what they do not apprehend. He helps us reimagine our political space and tastes, so the freedom that they make possible is fully reckoned with and meaningfully shared by all.

Returning to the exchange between the Movement for Black Lives leaders and Hillary Clinton that opened this discussion, we see again the tensions between a politics that demands feeling versus one in which actors are assumed to never fully know themselves or the ultimate outcomes of their acts. For the political theorist, the institutionalist position that Clinton takes (“Look, I don’t believe you change hearts. I believe you change laws, you change allocation of

resources, you change the way systems operate”) resonates strongly, and it is reinforced by examining the work of Hannah Arendt. However, if we take James Baldwin seriously as a theorist in his own right, an alternative impression of the exchange becomes more accessible. This is because the questions posed (“What in your *heart* has changed that is going to change the direction of this country? ... How do you actually *feel* that’s different than you did before?”) take on new meaning and significance as we begin to grant with Baldwin the political relevance of feeling. In this context, such questions sound less like “the search for motives,” which so troubled Arendt, and more like a means of reconciliation, an invitation not to confess past failures, but to exchange the encounter with feeling that now produces a judgment of black people as mattering in a fundamental, foundational way. On Baldwin’s account, such an exchange is important, because it is only through this sort of reckoning (with history, with one another, with our political tastes) that we begin to pull back the curtain of the myths and ideologies that comfort us, and trigger the feelings upon which love—even a love of the world—is borne.

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