



Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics

By Jeffrey Katz, Thomas Keenan



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Hannah Arendt is one of the most important political theorists of the twentieth century. In her works, she grappled with the dark events of that century, probing the nature of power, authority, and evil, and seeking to confront totalitarian horrors on their own terms. This book focuses on how, against the professionalized discourses of theory, Arendt insists on the greater political importance of the ordinary activity of thinking. Indeed, she argues that the activity of thinking is the only reliable protection against the horrors that buffeted the last century. Its essays explore and enact that activity, which Arendt calls the habit of erecting obstacles to oversimplifications, compromises, and conventions. Most of the essays were written for a conference at Bard College celebrating the 100th anniversary of Arendt's birth. Arendt left her personal library and literary effects to Bard, and she is buried in the Bard College cemetery. Material from the Bard archive—such as a postcard to Arendt from Walter Benjamin or her annotation in her copy of Machiavelli's *The Prince*—and images from her life are interspersed with the essays in this volume. The volume will offer provocations and insights to Arendt scholars, students discovering Arendt's work, and general readers attracted to Arendt's vision of the importance of thinking in our own dark times.



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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #8670266 in Books
- Published on: 2009-12-01
- Original language: English
- Dimensions: 7.70" h x .90" w x 9.10" l, 1.70 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 299 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Artfully balancing conceptual precision and editorial care with a deep sense of urgency, this volume of essays on one of the 20th century's great theorists of totalitarianism and anti-Semitism offers a stimulating examination of Arendt's political and philosophical writings. The pieces analyze the sociopolitical ramifications of her life as well as more focused discussions of key topics in the social and the political realms. Cathy Caruth offers an exemplary reading of the relationship between the Pentagon Papers and Arendt's notion of the modern political lie that attempts not simply to cover over mistakes but to replace reality entirely by fabricating new histories. Uday Mehta gives a fascinating outline of Arendt's views on politics and terror, while Christopher Hitchens offers some brief, idiosyncratic reflections on anti-Semitism. Contributors return repeatedly to Arendt's 1963 coverage of the trial of Nazi official Adolf Eichmann. The essays lack a consensus on Arendt's notion of the banality of evil, but it is precisely the rich variety of interpretations together with a wonderful selection of images from her personal library that make the collection so compelling. (Jan.)

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Review

"This book focuses on how, against the professionalized discourses of theory, Hannah Arendt insists on the greater political importance of the ordinary activity of thinking. Indeed, she argues that the activity of thinking is the only reliable protection against the horrors that buffeted the last century. These essays explore and enact that activity, which Arendt calls the habit of erecting obstacles to oversimplifications, compromises, and conventions." -Shofar "A collection of papers from a conference convened at Bard College to mark Arendt's hundredth birthday." -Harper's "This volume succeeds in approaching Hannah Arendt's philosophy with a fresh eye." -- Jill Stauffer John Jay College "A fascinating tribute to a fascinating writer." -Hindustan Times Blog "Artfully balancing conceptual precision and editorial care with a deep sense of urgency, this volume of essays on one of the 20th century's great theorists of totalitarianism and anti-Semitism offers a stimulating examination of Arendt's political and philosophical writings. The pieces analyze the sociopolitical ramifications of her life as well as more focused discussions of key topics in the social and the political realms. Cathy Caruth offers an exemplary reading of the relationship between the Pentagon Papers and Arendt's notion of the modern political lie that attempts not simply to cover over mistakes but to replace reality entirely by fabricating new histories. Uday Mehta gives a fascinating outline of Arendt's views on politics and terror, while Christopher Hitchens offers some brief, idiosyncratic reflections on anti-Semitism. Contributors return repeatedly to Arendt's 1963 coverage of the trial of Nazi official Adolf Eichmann. The essays lack a consensus on Arendt's notion of the "banality of evil," but it is precisely the rich variety of interpretations together with a wonderful selection of images from her personal library that make the collection so compelling. (Jan.)" -Publishers Weekly "These essays were written in honour of what would have been Hannah Arendt's 100th birthday, an apt occasion on which to commemorate this great theorist of natality. And what a gift this volume is! Packed with innovative readings of her work and life, *Thinking in Dark Times* re-embeds Arendt in the worldliness from which she proudly took her own bearings. The questions raised regarding political action, torture, truth in politics, intellectual life, antisemitism and the destructiveness to democracy of chatter, withdrawal, rage and dishonesty are, to say the least, pressing. Thus, the volume assaults the reader with its urgency. But it is also timeless, as the best scholarship is. It stands all by itself as testimony to why Arendt continues to grab the attention of scholars of politics, culture and literature." -- Bonnie Honig Northwestern University "Berkowitz, Katz, and Keenan have compiled a major addition to scholarship on Arendt while continuing her bracing,

argumentative, and life-promoting political commitments." -- -Kennan Ferguson University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

About the Author

Roger Berkowitz is the Director of the Hannah Arendt Center for Ethical and Political Thinking at Bard College, where he is also Assistant Professor of Human Rights and Political Studies. He recently edited (with Thomas Keenan and Jeffrey Katz) *Thinking in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics* (Fordham).

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