



The Portable Hannah Arendt

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Although Hannah Arendt is considered one of the major contributors to social and political thought in the twentieth century, this is the first general anthology of her writings. This volume includes selections from her major works, including **The Origins of Totalitarianism**, **Between Past and Future**, **Men in Dark Times**, **The Jew as Pariah**, and **The Human Condition**, as well as many shorter writings and letters. Sections include extracts from her work on fascism, Marxism, and totalitarianism; her treatment of work and labour; her writings on politics and ethics; and a section on truth and the role of the intellectual.

The Portable Hannah Arendt Details

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From Reader Review The Portable Hannah Arendt for online ebook

Tim says

brilliant

Jenny says

i can't say enough good things about the way arendt writes about our modern times and conditions. i think she's razor sharp. this is the kind of book i get in trouble with the library over. i should probably buy it. in the meantime, special shoutout to the "labor, work, action" essay. here's a quote to give you an idea: 'Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men...corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition - not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* - of all political life'.

Peter says

Contains the jewel of her reporting on the Eichmann trial. Did the Nazi regime work some magic on him? Was he pre-disposed to toe the line, regardless of what was being done? Was he aware of what was to become of the Jews who he arranged to ship to the camps? Wasn't the fact that the names for shipping were chosen by the Jewish community enough? (This creepy, thought-provoking fact alone was worth the entire book.) For the answers to these and other pressing questions, read the book. Also contains other insightful essays on history and authority by Arendt, who clearly knew a whole hell of a lot more intellectual history than pretty much any talking head in today's tottering Republic.

Jan Peczkis says

Hannah Arendt--"Only a Philosopher" Owing to Her Unwelcome Findings on Jewish-Nazi Collaboration, Shows a Clearly Sophisticated Understanding of It, Putting Her Critics in Their Place

Evidently, for some, whenever you dislike the message, go after the messenger. In response, Hannah Arendt had the following rebuttal to the criticisms of Gershom Scholem:

JEWISH-NAZI COLLABORATION IS A REAL ISSUE, AND MUST BE FACED

Arendt wrote, "This issue came up during the [Eichmann] trial and it was of course my duty to report it. This constitutes our part of the so-called 'unmastered past,' and although you may be right that it is too early for a 'balanced judgment' (though I doubt this), I do believe that we shall only come to terms with this past if we begin to judge and to be frank about it. I have made my own position plain, and yet it is obvious that you did not understand it. I said that there was no possibility of resistance, but there existed the possibility of doing nothing. And in order to do nothing, one did not need to be a saint, one needed only to say: "I am just a

simple Jew, and I have no desire to play any other role." Whether these people or some of them, as you indicate, deserved to be hanged is an altogether different question. What needs to be discussed are not the people so much as the arguments with which they justified themselves in their own eyes and in those of others. Concerning these arguments we are entitled to pass judgment." (p. 394).

ARENDT: DO NOT LUMP ALL JEWISH EXPERIENCES UNDER THE NAZIS AS THE SAME. NOT ALL JEWISH CHOICES WERE "CHOICELESS CHOICES". NOR WERE JEWS UNILATERALLY OR CONSISTENTLY POWERLESS UNDER THE NAZIS

Hannah Arendt warns against, for example, confusing the die-now (disobedience) or die-later (obedience) choiceless choice facing the Jewish body-cremating Auschwitz SONDERKOMMANDO, and that of the much freer Jewish ghetto policeman.

With reference to the later, she perceptively notes the following, "Moreover, we should not forget that we are dealing here with conditions which were terrible and desperate enough, but which were not the conditions of concentration camps. These decisions were made in an atmosphere of terror but not under the immediate pressure and impact of terror. These are important differences in degree, which every student of totalitarianism must know and take into account. These people had still a certain, limited freedom of decision and of action. Just as the SS murderers also possessed, as we now know, a limited choice of alternatives." (p. 394).

Mont says

Let us return to Arendt in this age of Trump! Arendt's account of the trial of Adolf Eichmann gave us the indelible phrase and much-misunderstood notion of "the banality of evil." A journalist-philosopher, Arendt suggests that the very worst deeds are not perpetrated by monsters but by ordinary people motivated by conformity and self-interest.

Craig Bolton says

The Portable Hannah Arendt (Penguin Classics) by Hannah Arendt (2003)

Jelle de Jong says

I loved reading it, although it was a challenging read for me. Spread throughout the book are true parcels of insight. But there's also a lot of text that's hard to understand. I don't know if it's Hannah Arendt or the consequence of being a selection of writings, but sometimes the argument seems to start in mid-air and seems to lead nowhere in particular. It feels like listening in awe to one of the most individual and intelligent thinkers of the previous century while she's talking to one of her fellow intellectuals over a cup of thee and slice of cake, or coffee with a brownie, of beer with pretzel or cappuccino with croissant (I don't know which habit she would have had because she's lived everywhere I believe). Instead of reading a well structured treatise. Of course that isn't true, not even a bit. Her lists of used literature are enormous. I really enjoyed her explanations of Greek, Latin and modern history writing. I still try to grasp her distinction between labour, work and action. Which in my opinion is very useful. But most of all I like her ability to

change her mind and her stubborn own way of thinking. I will most certainly return to this book and see if I will understand more than I did in this first sitting.; 0

Benson Hawk says

I purchased this online thinking that it was an anthology of Arendt's works. I discovered to my surprise that it is an extensively expurgated version of her major pieces. Arendt is challenging though that it is hard to work from fragmentary texts. I will ultimately have to go to the originals. My rating should apply to the editorial work that was done in this piece, rather than to Arendt's works in general. On the positive side, I found the editor's introduction to be cleverly written and magisterial in its command of the totality of Arendt's body of work.

Reid Holkesvik says

This volume is a very helpful introduction to the thought and writings of a remarkable and original political philosopher. Her firsthand knowledge of Germany in the 1920's and 1930's, as well as European and US culture in the 30's, 40's, 50's and later, her roots as an assimilated Jew in German and broader European culture, her knowledge, independence, originality, intelligence, and candor give her writing a freshness and relevance 50 years after these pieces were written. What went on in Germany leading to the Third Reich? After the first World War, what did socialists in Germany, eastern Europe and Russia care about, what did they try to do, and how did it turn out? Names like Rosa Luxemburg and Adolf Eichmann rise from the pages as real people; she lived in their world, knew the air they breathed. And especially, what are we to make of it now, after the gigantic human catastrophes brought about by the Nazis and the Communists? Her thought eludes simple answers, offers perspectives and reflections and convincing insights that could not fit in a sound bite or on a bumper sticker. She makes you think.

Natalynn says

I'm way too unintelligent for this book. I don't even mean it in a self-deprecating humorous way. I mean it as a fact. No matter how hard I tried, I only got half way through the book and thought to myself that there is so much more reading out there to be doing that I'll actually enjoy.

I found myself lost and unsure as to what she was trying to argue or even say. (Talk about having an unclear thesis...) Perhaps I feel this way because the book is a fragmented collection of her writing across many years and subjects. It often felt like she was in the thick of her argument or the current selection was on a tangent from her original argument. The way she writes isn't accessible to everyone nor is it easy. I found it convoluted. (although I'm sure I'm finding it convoluted because I just don't understand what she's saying)

There are some really good parts of the books however. Although I disagree with her stance on desegregation, Little Rock's Social Question, her reflection on desegregation in the US, was really interesting. Her stance on human rights and how it can be enforced is interesting as well. Her interviews and some letters were easier to read and I found some quite interesting.

There is a lot of good stuff in this book, but honestly, I just couldn't be bothered sitting through it. Anyhow,

perhaps I'll give myself a few years and I'll return to it then. I definitely want to understand why so many people love her.

Jack Ferreri says

This is a volume I'd long been wanting to read. I've seen her cited in many places. I enjoy the podcast Entitled Opinions out of Stanford and Robert Harrison is always talking about her in ways that caught my attention.

This is not an easy read. Some of her things ... on Stateless Persons, on Totalitarianism, on the Eichmann trial and the Final Solution, on Rosa Luxemburg, on Race Relations in the US were fascinating. Rich in understanding, nuanced in expression, and well argued. When she got into more philosophical topics -- the Vita Activa, the Life of the Mind, and Freedom and Authority, things were tough going. She seizes on a specialized vocabulary (from her philosophical and sociological training) and pushes it pretty hard, beyond my desire to follow point for point.

What's great about Arendt is her representation of a lost European or Western tradition ... of the deeply-educated, thoughtful intellectual steeped in the Jewish tradition of learning. She's deeply read, well versed in the classics. She is no popularizer. When you look at the 25 or so pieces in this anthology, each of them requires work to get through. She treats serious topics seriously,

Arendt felt that human rights meant nothing unless there was a means to enforce them. Since the Nazis thought the Jew and others were sub-human, they had little qualms about treating them inhumanely.

She was leery of Israel's moral position in carry out Eichmann's execution, feeling it would have been better handled by a world court or an Allied court. Her articles (and then book) on Eichmann set off a storm of protest.

She was nervous about feminism, which was rising up as she was growing older (she died at 69 in 1975).

She was brought up to react strongly anti-Semitism, and that stayed with her for her entire life. She was early Zionist, but later changed her mind and thought a theocratic Israel was a bad idea.

She made it clear that totalitarianism as we see it in the twentieth century is a totally new social phenomenon, with its harnessing of propaganda and the belief that 'everything is permitted.' And this leads to death camps, an almost inconceivable thought. Totalitarianism boils the complexities of life into simplicities.

She was against forced US school segregation ("Reflections on Little Rock"). She feels that color makes for a much more difficult integration issue (vs Italians, Irish, Jews, etc.). Laws against segregation must be fought and overturned. But bussing forces the children to make the societal change and isn't fair.

Discrimination must be limited to private sphere and kept out of the public sphere. Forcing parents to send their children to a mixed school is simply not legal.

She spends much effort regarding the Vita Activa (vs Vita Contemplativa) breaking human activity down into three elements: LABOR, effort spent to get food, reproduce, get shelter; WORK, production of things we need and transforming the environment in which we live; and ACTION, our ability to initiate a new course of events, our freedom. I was never comfortable with this terminology or her arguments surrounding

it.

Revolutions too often work from the top down, despite their rhetoric. This leads to disaster.

A provocative book by a very opinionated author with vast knowledge and talents.

Bruce says

I had not previously read any of Arendt's works, so this was new to me. Of course, this book represents snippets of her works, so I can't comment on them in their entirety. But I found the material contained here very interesting and thought-provoking. She covers so many topics - freedom, authority, totalitarianism, public vs private realms, etc - and she set me pondering and stretching my mind for many evenings. I enjoyed the way she wrestles with terms and concepts, tracing their historical development. Highly recommended.

Kristina says

I don't know that I can ever agree with her, esp. regarding forced desegregation, but hey.

Leif says

As such collections encourage, I skimmed and skipped from selection to selection, spending the most time here with introductory material, letters and excerpts, and the material from Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil. That material was and remains shocking, and unlike the reactionary caricatures of Arendt's vision of Eichmann's role and significance, I find Arendt always lucid and utterly precise. Her "crime," if that is the word, is her cool and razor-sharp style. At the same time, she is no calloused rag and bone picker through historical dustbins and archives: Arendt's brows feel arched even as she writes of laughter, tense and knotted when she writes of pain, yet never stooped with misery or vacuous with the false fires of sentimentalism. Still keen to see the human amid the symbols and understand the role — and aspiration — of law in a transforming international context.

Arendt has much still to teach us.

Martin Roberts says

The Portable Hannah Arendt (Penguin, New York, 2000)

Hannah Arendt ignited controversy for writing what has become the best known addition to this anthology of her work, her coverage of the Eichmann trial, and a recent film seems to have rekindled the whole debate. Her detractors have charged her with giving succour to that most evil of enemies, the Nazis, or at best that she was a good philosopher but a bad historian.

Until I have time to read her critics in detail, I personally thought I had better start by reading Arendt in her own words. It is beyond the scope of a general reader's review of an anthology to quote the chunks of her

writings that would be required to refute her critics point by point, or at least put their critiques in context, but I can now at least say that her conclusions are demanding, and that often leads to misunderstanding or misquoting.

To fully grasp her ideas would in fact require reading shelves full of books, especially when it comes to her academic texts, although Arendt helps the reader by adeptly summarising in order to share her easy familiarity (she read Kant at 14) with centuries of thinking while she develops her arguments, step by step. One other thing that transpires from her works is her consistency and intellectual honesty, and any rebuttal of them needs to be well grounded indeed.

First of all, I think reading her essay on the oft-forgotten Rosa Luxemburg ought to put paid to any notion that Arendt was a poor historian. It was interesting to learn not only about the Polish-born revolutionary's life here (yes, I used to have a poster of her on my wall), but how her work brought her into conflict (but not enmity) with Lenin – somewhat surprising for a Marxist, one might have been tempted to think -- and anticipated many of the failings of the Soviet Union.

But that's not all, by any means. Arendt points out that Luxemburg's murder (and that of Karl Liebknecht) in 1919 was sanctioned by the Weimar authorities and thus marked a tipping point that led to Hitler. She explains this far better than I, so if you want to know more, read the book.

Now for her famous series of reports in *The New Yorker* on the 1961-2 trial in Jerusalem of Eichmann, who had organised the deportation of millions of Jews from across German-occupied Europe to Nazi death camps during the Second World War.

In her subtitle to the piece Arendt coined the now famous phrase 'the banality of evil' because she concluded Eichmann was not a born monster, but rather an utter non-entity as a person who came to do monstrous deeds in a monstrous society. Indeed, Eichmann comes across as a puffed-up bureaucrat in the archive footage used in Margarethe von Trotta's much-maligned biopic.

Eichmann was well aware of what he had done, and even used to boast about it, but he was simply thoughtless, incapable of thinking beyond Nazi clichés and even when the hangman slipped the noose around his neck. To have depicted Eichmann as a monster would have been akin to the Devil appearing in a medieval morality play, which reminds us that Shakespeare's Iago was far more terrifying precisely because he was human (although Arendt says Eichmann was duller than Iago, but that proves her point).

That went against the grain for many, who effectively said – and still say – that that was tantamount to letting Eichmann off the hook. What raised even more hackles was her contention that there was "cooperation between the Nazi rulers and Jewish authorities" (N.B. by no means Jews as a whole) leading to the destruction of the latter's own people, because Eichmann negotiated with Jewish leaders over who was to be deported from each community. Only one such leader testified in Jerusalem, and Arendt charged the court with "the gravest omission" in not devoting more time to the issue.

One riposte to her report included in the anthology is from the American playwright Lionel Abel, who "charged that Arendt had made Eichmann aesthetically palatable and the Jews aesthetically repugnant".

While nobody is above criticism, I submit the obvious point that Arendt suffered from persecution and nearly found herself on one of Eichmann's transports. The point is often elided and it is one Arendt never dwells on (incidentally, I think it's to von Trotta's credit that she resists the temptation to recreate Arendt's escape from Camp Gurs). In this light, it is highly unlikely Arendt would have failed to sympathise with anyone who has suffered persecution, let alone her fellow Jews, including countless close friends and relatives.

Besides, Arendt had already given her reasons for focussing on the Judenräte:

"I have dwelt on this chapter of the story, which the Jerusalem court failed to put before the eyes of the world in its true dimensions, because it offers the most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society."

Tragically this rings true, because the Nazis were perversely and infamously capable of making others do some of their dirty work for them, including Jews such as the Kapos and the Brenners chillingly portrayed by Russian war correspondent Vasily Grossman in his epic work *Life and Fate*.

As to the hand-wringing testimony of the former community leader who rhetorically asked the court, "What

could we have done?" Arendt answers that while resistance was impossible, it would have been better for the Jewish leaders to simply do nothing. Chaos would have been more helpful and such people as were able to flee before boarding the transports had at least a chance to survive.

In her own words again, she summed up her approach as *fiat veritas et pereat mundus*, which translates as 'let the truth be told, though the world may perish', or to put it another way, issues cannot be ducked just because they are thorny. If that sounds trite to anyone, then I invite them to read Arendt's thirty-page disquisition on the inevitability of truth winning out.

If I have one criticism to make of the anthology, it is that her academic work is often less readable than the Eichmann report, but as I said earlier, the former is inevitably demanding but always thought-provoking and illuminating.

For instance, it was by no means immediately obvious what the point is of her long exposition on the differences between the public and private domain, until I next read a passing reference to the theme in 'The Social Question'. As an example of her consistency, it crops up again in her discussion of forced desegregation in the 1950s, which she said was none of a government's business, and as a non-American I wouldn't mind reading more about that.

If my reading of other texts is correct, Arendt believes the French Revolution to have paved the road to hell with good intentions, namely to have paid too much attention to the pressing needs of the destitute masses, which she deems to be a private rather than a public matter.

The American Revolution, she adds, was superior to the French one because it was not swayed by such inappropriate and self-defeating aims. She does recognise that the American Revolution was open to charges of hypocrisy because its claims of equality before the law did not apply to the 20% of the population who were slaves, but says slavery was Europe's fault. I beg to differ with this latter point, because the new Republic was much slower than the mother country in ending it.

Another quibble I have was the short space devoted to her views on Heidegger, but maybe that is more personal and not central to her work. My main beef with the anthology, however, concerns the preface, which is leaden and dispensable.

Above all, I was left wondering what happened to such readable repositories of vast learning like Arendt? Here was someone who could deftly quote from Plato in Greek, from Heine in German or Shakespeare in English, and describe her approach to the truth by paraphrasing medieval Latin axioms. All of this, mind you, from someone whose chosen field was philosophy.

Again, this does not make her infallible, but it certainly makes her arguments most compelling and very readable.

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