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Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought by Margaret Canovan; Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion by Jeffrey C. Isaac

Review by: Seyla Benhabib

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But, for the most part, this book does indeed accomplish what Weinberg claimed. He consistently weighs the effect of one campaign on other fronts, and his remarks usually carry conviction. Thus, for example, he asserts that the struggle for Guadalcanal was not a diversion from the Allies' "Europe first" strategy "as it looked to many then and to some since," but "had major positive implications for the European theater" (p. 347) by denying Japan the chance to dominate the Indian Ocean and cut off Anglo-American access to North Africa and Russia. Or again, he affirms that strategic bombing was critically important, not for accomplishing its announced goals but because it hindered Germany from bringing new weapons into action that might have altered the course of the war (pp. 580, 771–74). And throughout he is at pains to point out how often deciphered codes affected success and failure in action.

But for me, at least, the most delightful aspect of this book was all the new bits of information scattered throughout its pages. Some are trivia like the fact that the Remagen bridge was captured intact because it had been rewired to make it hard to destroy after the explosives on another Rhine bridge at Cologne had been ignited by Allied bombs (p. 811). Some are far more significant, for (largely because I was in the European theater in 1945), I was simply ignorant of the scale of land fighting in the Philippines that accompanied the more famous (to me) Battle of Leyte Gulf. Other readers with other ignorances will find other things to learn from Weinberg's pages; but even World War II buffs are sure to find some things they did not know before, simply because Weinberg has devoted so many years and such enormous diligence to compiling his magnum opus.

Overall I feel that he did indeed succeed in achieving a panorama of the war, crammed with details; and his narrative is held together, loosely but well, by the passages in which he tells us about how the handful of men who made strategic decisions saw things at successive intervals of time throughout the struggle. Russian documents, if they become available, will fill out Weinberg's account and may alter some details. But this book will still stand as a very competent summary and distillation of Allied and German official documents and the enormous secondary literature that sixty years have since produced. As such it is a magnum opus, with defects that make its author merely human, like the rest of us.

WILLIAM H. McNEILL

*University of Chicago, Emeritus*

### **Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of Her Political Thought.**

By *Margaret Canovan*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. ix + 298. \$54.95.

### **Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion.** By *Jeffrey C. Isaac*.

New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992. Pp. xi + 320. \$30.00.

Nearly twenty years after her death in 1975, Hannah Arendt's political thought is experiencing a major renaissance. The two books under review are only a sampling of the numerous monographs, collected and edited volumes that have been devoted to her work in the last ten years.<sup>1</sup> In many ways this is surprising. For despite the high esteem

<sup>1</sup> Margaret Canovan's first book on Hannah Arendt appeared in 1974 (*The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* [London, 1974]); in 1979 several former students of Arendt collaborated to

and admiration she enjoyed among certain circles, Arendt's reputation as a political thinker was always hotly contested. Some found her work to be too journalistic and therefore not "real political science"; others thought that in comparison with thinkers in the liberal tradition, like Isaiah Berlin, she still remained much too Germanic and obscure in her analysis of political phenomena. The current Arendt renaissance is being carried out by younger scholars who do not share the pathos and the bitterness with which the first generation of German-Jewish émigrés responded to Arendt's work—recall here Gershom Sholem's cruel phrase that Arendt had "no love of the Jewish people."<sup>2</sup> At the heart of the current Arendt renaissance is a shift in contemporary political sensitivity. After the demise of Eastern European and Soviet-style communisms, the worldwide theoretical retreat of Marxism-Leninism, and the banalities of self-congratulatory liberalisms, Hannah Arendt's political thought is emerging as one of the few vibrant doctrines of radical and democratic renewal.

As Jeffrey C. Isaac writes in his provocative book *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion*, "Both Camus and Arendt develop what might be called a political ethic of revolt, one that seeks to resuscitate the modern, universalist ideals of human autonomy and democratic self-governance by embedding them in an ethic of limits. Both, in other words, seek new intellectual foundations for a reconstruction of contemporary political life" (p. 104). It is this vision of a democratic "rebellious politics" (p. 15) that places Arendt, along with Camus, among a generation of intellectuals whose insights need to be recovered.

Isaac succeeds in delineating the general themes and moods of contemporary political sensitivity against which Arendt's insights need to be retrieved, but a new interpretation or a novel reading of Arendt's main theoretical works and concepts does not result from his book. By contrast, Margaret Canovan is a master of careful and detailed analysis and of the painstaking reconstruction of texts and arguments. This is not her first book on Hannah Arendt. In 1974 she published a brief introduction to Hannah Arendt's ideas, which remained the most influential reading of her work until the appearance of Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's book, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, Conn., 1982). Canovan's new book is a major reinterpretation of Arendt's work in the light of Arendt's unpublished papers. It is the only one in the current literature that has so far undertaken the painstaking work of sifting through the seventy-odd boxes of papers, manuscripts, and correspondence that were bequeathed

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produce a collection of essays entitled *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York, 1979). In the early eighties there were also a number of Arendt publications: B. Parekh, *Hannah Arendt and the Search for a New Political Philosophy* (London, 1981); Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, Conn., 1982); George Kateb, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, N.J., 1984). In this period the edition of Hannah Arendt's *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* by R. Beiner also played a major role (Chicago, 1982). A selective list of monographs since 1989 devoted to her work would include: L. Bradshaw, *Acting and Thinking: The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Toronto, 1989); Shiraz Dossa, *The Public Realm and the Public Self: The Political Theory of Hannah Arendt* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1989); Dagmar Barnouw, *Visible Spaces: Hannah Arendt and the German-Jewish Experience* (Baltimore, 1990); Michael S. Gottsegen, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Albany, N.Y., 1993); Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt* (London and New York, 1994); and the recent collection by Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays* (Albany, N.Y., 1993). I would like to thank Patchen Markell for helpful observations around issues raised by this review.

<sup>2</sup> Gershom Sholem, "'Eichmann in Jerusalem': An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Sholem and Hannah Arendt," *Encounter* 22 (January 1964): 51–56.

to the Library of Congress after her death in 1975 and that will become public domain in 1995. Yet, oddly enough, at the center of Canovan's interpretation is an issue so obvious that one almost has to ask why it could have been ignored in the first place. Canovan explicates that her new reading of Arendt is motivated by "setting Arendt's ideas in context" (p. 279; see also pp. 7 ff.) and in particular by placing her views on Zionism, Jewish politics, and totalitarianism at the center of her political thought. Why was this not possible before? After all, the major writings on which this reinterpretation is based, like *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) and Arendt's writings on Jewish and refugee issues, were available much earlier. Ron Feldman had collected some of Arendt's writings on the Jewish question into a volume with the title of *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* as early as 1978. Why would it take so long before the centrality of *The Human Condition* and its "Graecophilia" (to use a phrase coined by Hanna Pitkin) could be challenged in coming to grips with Arendt's thought?<sup>3</sup>

The answer lies with the fate and reception of Arendt's theory of totalitarianism.<sup>4</sup> Rejected by the Left because of its problematic analogies between Stalinism and National Socialism, denounced by the Right for its irreverence toward the polarizing thinking of Cold War Camps, and derided by empirical political scientists for its overly journalistic, literary, and philosophical generalizations, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* became one of those infamous texts of twentieth-century political theory. Canovan shares this unease about Arendt's theory of totalitarianism and concludes her book with the observation that "if we trace her thought trains to their source, it must be admitted that the first thing we find when we do go back to her thinking about Nazism and Stalinism may be something of an embarrassment: a brilliant, ambitious and highly questionable interpretation of totalitarianism and modernity" (p. 279).

Canovan's reinterpretation of Arendt would have been considerably stronger if she had stated more directly what exactly her misgivings are about Arendt's "interconnected accounts of totalitarianism, modernity, and 'society'" (p. 280). Arendt did not subscribe to the "slippery slope" view that totalitarianism was an inevitable growth of western modernity; in many ways, she regarded it as a total perversion of much that was essential to the western tradition.<sup>5</sup> Like many social theorists of her generation,

<sup>3</sup> The magnificent correspondence between Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, which adds a tremendous amount to our understanding of these issues as well as illuminating the agony of German intellectuals like Jaspers after World War II, was not available in published form till 1985. See *Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers: Briefwechsel, 1929-1969*, ed. Hans Saner (Munich, 1985), translated into English as *Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers Correspondence, 1929-1969*, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert Kimber and Rita Kimber (New York, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, the bitterness of the reaction to *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York, 1963) and the controversy following it may also have played a role in wanting to distance oneself from the more controversial aspects of Arendt's work, by focusing instead on her more philosophical treatises.

<sup>5</sup> I think Canovan's claim that "the seeds of totalitarianism were deeply planted in modernity itself" (p. 202) is not an adequate characterization of Arendt's position. Arendt never ceased to emphasize the "contingency" of totalitarianism, stressing that it could have been otherwise. One should perhaps recall her somewhat ingenuous claim that after the death of Lenin the Soviet system could have headed in a different direction. "At the moment of Lenin's death the roads were still open. The formation of workers, peasants, and middle classes need not necessarily have led to the class struggle which had been characteristic of European capitalism. Agriculture could still be developed on a collective, cooperative, or private basis, and the national economy was still free to follow a socialist, state-capitalist, or a free-enterprise pattern. None of these alternatives

however, she did see a link between the growth of mass society, the creation inside and outside the borders of European nation-states of a mass of “superfluous human beings,” and totalitarianism. For Arendt the breakdown of civil and associational life, the experiences of uprootedness, statelessness, and homelessness were phenomena that preceded and enabled the rise of totalitarianism. Clearly under the influence of Martin Heidegger’s analysis of “das Man,” she described the fundamental ontological experience of the individual that would fall prey to totalitarianism as that of “isolation.” Herein lies something of a paradox in Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism. The contemporary experience of posttotalitarian societies in Eastern and central Europe proves the normative centrality and desirability of reconstructing civil society and associational life for the success of democracy. By defining totalitarianism as an “iron band” that squeezed people together until they became one, thus eliminating the “public spaces” between them, Arendt was onto something central about the political experience of totalitarianism. Yet as explanatory categories, the experiences of isolation and the formation of superfluous masses are limited. Not only are there asymmetries here among the National Socialist and Stalinist experiences but recent historical research has shown the degree to which previously existing local organizations and associations were not destroyed by the Nazis but, to the contrary, could often be successfully integrated into their power hierarchy.<sup>6</sup>

Jeffrey C. Isaac is more confident than Canovan in the perspicacity and wisdom of Arendt’s specific political interventions in the controversial issues of this century. Isaac admits that to treat Arendt and Camus together is somewhat unusual, for “there is no evidence of which I am aware that Camus even read any of Arendt’s work. It is certain that Arendt read some of Camus’s writings, but it is equally certain that she misunderstood his work in the fashion typical of many of his readers” (p. 16). Nonetheless, the shared “political ethic of revolt” leads each to fundamentally similar judgments regarding the highly controversial questions of human rights, collective identity, nationality, and statehood. Arendt’s reflections of Zionism and Camus’s positions on the Algerian question share an affinity. Camus was an outspoken critic of French colonialism, yet remained harshly critical of “Third World Nationalism.” Likewise, although she advocated the formation of a Jewish army to fight against Hitler’s troops and worked with various Aliyah organizations in Paris for sending Jewish children to Palestine, Arendt never reconciled herself to the idea of an exclusively Jewish national state. Her model Jewish state would have been a federation based on common government but grounded in “Jewish-Arab community councils, which would mean that the Jewish-Arab conflict would be resolved on the lowest and most promising level of proximity and neighborliness.”<sup>7</sup> Isaac’s treatment of this complex set of issues under the heading of “Swimming against the Tide” (pp. 177 ff.)

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would have automatically destroyed the new structure of the country” (*Origins of Totalitarianism* [San Diego, Calif., 1951], p. 319).

<sup>6</sup> See the massive project undertaken by Martin Broszat and his coworkers, documenting the involvement as well as resistance of provincial associations to the Nazi power machine: *Bayern in der NS-Zeit: Soziale Lage und politisches Verhalten der Bevoelkerung im Spiegel vertraulicher Berichte*, ed. Martin Broszat, Elke Froehlich, and Falk Wiesemann (Munich and Vienna, 1977). I would like to thank Danny Goldhagen for conversations around this issue.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac, p. 215, citing Hannah Arendt, “To Save the Jewish Homeland: There Is Still Time,” in *The Jew as Pariah*, ed. Ron Feldman (New York, 1978), p. 191. It is interesting that in the current negotiations surrounding Palestinian autonomy on the West Bank and the Gaza strip the question of ultimate Palestinian statehood is being “bracketed.” What may be emerging is a form of mixed political sovereignty based on a confederation among Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians. While

is exemplary. He does not mince his words about Camus's inability to see "the Arab as a historical subject, unable to appreciate the force of Arab political claims" (p. 204), yet his discussion of Camus's views on a new international democracy, based on a world parliament and an international legal code with "authority over national governments" will do much to revive interest in Camus's writings on world politics now that the new international disorder has set in (pp. 219 ff.)

Undoubtedly, the overall picture of Arendt's political thought that emerges from these two studies is a salutary corrective to the provocative but historically wholly decontextualized appropriations of her work now under way by those influenced by postmodernist political theory.<sup>8</sup> Canovan's work in particular is very helpful in getting the details straight on several issues: on the basis of one major manuscript not hitherto available to Arendt readers and delivered in 1953 in Princeton with the title "Karl Marx and the Tradition of Western Political Thought,"<sup>9</sup> Canovan is able to establish that the preoccupation with Marx and Marxism motivated much of Arendt's thinking in *The Human Condition*. Canovan is also successful in shedding preliminary light on Arendt's complex philosophical relationship to Martin Heidegger. More remains to be done in deciphering the ways in which Arendt overtook and altered Heidegger's categories of world, earth, disclosure, action, and speech. Canovan's claim that Arendt had a "hidden debate with Heidegger in which she worked out many of her positions by adapting and altering those of her master" is only a first step in this direction (p. 114). One should add that being among the first generation of Heidegger's students and devotees, very early on and much before the recent explosion of the "Heidegger affair," Arendt considered the problematic relationship between Heidegger's politics and philosophy. Her deep but ultimately inconclusive views on this matter left traces in her own thought about the interconnections of thinking, acting, and judging. Ultimately, the simple question of how one of the major philosophers of this century, and perhaps of all time, could espouse National Socialism even for a brief moment,<sup>10</sup> never stopped haunting her. The studies by Canovan and Isaac show that in coming to grips with the many political disasters and philosophical puzzles of this outgoing century, we cannot ignore Arendt's voice.

SEYLA BENHABIB

Harvard University

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Israel may still retain the right to control the movement along the borders, to administer water and electricity in the West Bank, Jordan is most likely to become Palestinians' passageway to the Mediterranean and the rest of the Arab and Muslim world in the North. Arendt was not wrong in thinking as early as 1942 that the formula of sovereign statehood based on the dominance of one nation would bring nothing but disaster in this region of the world, as it has for the past fifty-odd years.

<sup>8</sup> See the provocative reading of Arendt by Bonnie Honig, in *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1993), and "Toward an Agonistic Feminism: Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Identity," in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York, 1992), pp. 215–39; Dana Villa, "Beyond Good and Evil: Arendt, Nietzsche, and the Aestheticization of Political Action," *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (May 1992): 274–309; and Jeffrey C. Isaac's critical response to Dana Villa, "Situating Hannah Arendt on Action and Politics," *Political Theory* 21, no. 3 (August 1993): 534 ff.

<sup>9</sup> This is contained in MSS box 64, 3, in the Hannah Arendt Papers of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>10</sup> How long Heidegger had been and continued to remain a Nazi sympathizer is still being debated. See Victor Farias for the view that his sympathies were more long-lasting than had been hitherto assumed, *Heidegger and Nazism*, ed. Joseph Margolis and Tom Rockmore, trans. Paul Burrell (Philadelphia, 1989).