

Intensive Course: Hannah Arendt's Ethics

Hannah Arendt, a well-known figure in twentieth-century Western intellectual life, is particularly renowned as a political theorist. The vast majority of studies of her thought are concerned with the political concepts she illuminates. Exploration of Hannah Arendt's ethical thinking often seems to be relegated to second place in the literature. This course aims to begin rectifying this imbalance by providing a rigorous and critical engagement with Arendtian ethics. We will analyse Arendt's thought on ethics as contributing to that body of moral philosophy which asserts that the crimes of the Holocaust revealed a shift in ethics and the need for new responses to a new kind of evil. Arendt's moral philosophical ideas have an intuitive appeal requiring deeper analysis: the concept of the banality of evil, for example, captures something real and tangible about modern evil. Yet it requires dissecting and evaluating in order to assess how useful it is for understanding contemporary evil, including an analysis of the consequences of this concept for traditional moral philosophical issues such as responsibility, blame and punishment. In this course the disassembling and appraisal of Arendt's ethical ideas reveals four key aspects: first, the concept of the banality of evil; second, the positing of a link between thoughtlessness and evildoing; third, Arendt's idea of 'living with oneself' (which is separate from but related to her characterisation of thinking) as a prophylactic against evil; and, finally, her account of the 'nonparticipants' who refused to be complicit in the crimes of the Nazi period and their defining moral features. In this course we draw out the most salient and valuable aspects of Hannah Arendt's moral philosophical thought, whilst simultaneously providing a critical review of those elements which seem, *prima facie*, intuitively appealing, but which appear upon further investigation to be philosophically problematic. The course includes preparatory reading, student presentations, lecturing, self-study sessions and seminar discussions.

SUGGESTED TIMETABLE

June 9:

10-12 [all times stated are normal times, NOT uni hours] – session 1

14-16 – session 2

16-18 – session 3 [self-study]

June 10:

10-12 – session 1

14-16 – session 2

16-18 – session 3 [self-study]

June 16:

10-12 – session 1

14-16 – session 2

16-18 – session 3 [self-study]

June 17:

10-13 – final session

[self-study time to be used for reading and maybe preparing presentations]

[total time including self study = 21 hours or 28 uni hours]

PREPARATORY READING

Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006)

Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken, 2003) – focussing on the essays ‘Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,’ ‘Thinking and Moral Considerations,’ ‘Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,’ and ‘Collective Responsibility’