

## **Hannah Arendt in the 21st Century: A Global Discourse**

**Veranstalter:** Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism at the Technical University in Dresden and the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University

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On the 9th of November 2006, the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism at the Technical University in Dresden and the Center for Jewish Studies at Baylor University hosted a four day conference, „Hannah Arendt in the 21st Century: A Global Discourse.“ The conference took place in Waco, Texas.

The conference was a gathering of scholars from around the world to discuss some of the questions that already Hannah Arendt asked, but now set in the context of the 21st Century. The conference sought to ask the following question: What kind of politics do we need today in the face of war and politics of repression, the rise of religious fundamentalism, and a globalization that promotes unequal development.

The conference began with the presentation of three different papers covering Hannah Arendt's political philosophy in the 21st century. Nobutaka Otake of Johns Hopkins University presented a paper entitled, *Friendship in Dark Times: A Reevaluation of Hannah Arendt on Lessing*. Otake presented Arendt's thoughts on friendship and its possibilities for establishing political order through discourse as well as Arendt's belief that a figure who embodied such a type of friendship was Lessing. The main thrust of the paper is to reexamine this potential type of friendship exemplified by Lessing and the limitations Arendt attributed to it within the context of the 21st Century, a time characterized by modern „worldlessness.“

The next paper was presented by David Marshall of Kettering University and was entitled *A Phenomenology of the Word 'Polis' in Hannah Arendt*. Marshall's paper began by outlining the different definitions of the Greek word polis, a word often used by Arendt in her writings on politics, one of its meanings

being purely philosophical and the other purely historical. He then pointed out that the new understandings of Arendt's use of polis have sought to distance Arendt's philosophical use of the word from its possible historical context. Through an examination of Arendt's works, Marshall traces her use of the word and argues that there was in fact no general distinction between the two possible definitions made throughout Arendt's writings. He concludes by posing a question regarding the validity of Arendt's polis concept for changing the world today.

Terukazu Morikawa of Meijo University concluded the political philosophical session with his paper entitled, *Our Life Has Two Different Principles: A Reconsideration of Thinking and Acting in Hannah Arendt*. Morikawa began by noting that many of Arendt's critics have pointed out a gap between „acting“ and „thinking“ in the work of Arendt. What they miss in making such claims, Morikawa contends, is the way in which the two are interrelated within the context of political dialogue. Morikawa concludes that „acting“ and „thinking“ have a symbiotic relationship, one which has many important implications for Arendt's time as well as our own.

The evening session had the topic „Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism: Then and Now.“ Emilio Gentile of University of Rome La Sapienza began the session with his paper, *Fascism in Hannah Arendt's View*. According to Gentile's critical appraisal, it is absolutely essential that the Arendtian concept of Totalitarianism undergoes a critical examination. He argued that in its current application, it is not appropriate for historians interpreting the phenomena of Fascism, Communism, or National Socialism.

The next and final paper of the evening was presented by Sylvia Courtine-Denamy of the Centre d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine des Juifs and was called *The Revival of Religion: A Device against Totalitarianism?* Denamy began by presenting Arendt's rejection of Eric Voegelin's idea that because of the secularization of the modern world, the masses needed to find a substitute in order to guide their lives, „political religions.“ She notes that Arendt believed that nothing was acting in place of God, rather that the position remain-

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ned empty. Denamy's thesis was that today we face another type of totalitarianism in the form of religious fundamentalism.

The next day of the conference began with a session entitled „Politics, Realism, and Dissent in Hannah Arendt's Thought.“ The first paper of the day, *Acting from a Principle or Principles of Action: Hannah Arendt's Political Thought Today*, was presented by Rocio Zambrana of The New School for Social Research. Zambrana began by explaining the notion of the principle of action as it appears in Arendt's „What is Freedom?“ that is, acting from a principle. He then examined the origins of the notion in Arendt's reading of Montesquieu and suggested that awareness of her adoption of that notion provides a more informed understanding of Arendt's work. He then moved to a brief discussion of modern, specifically American, political experiences in order to show how the notion is operative in and crucial for her account of action as founding activity and the question of authority to which founding leads. He ended his discussion of the topic by suggesting that the roles played by principles in politics as well as action provide us with new ways of understanding Arendt's political thought, which doesn't need to be considered as static as her critics have often claimed in the past.

The paper that followed was presented by Sante Maletta of University of Calabria. The *Care of the Soul in the Dark Times: Hannah Arendt and the Czech Dissidents* began with a discussion of the way Arendt's political theory was influential for the anti-totalitarian movement in Czechoslovakia. Maletta laid out Arendt's idea that the public sphere was vanishing, giving way to what she referred to as „Dark Times,“ during which people were unable to express opinions, compare beliefs, or judge. This idea appealed to Czech dissidents because of its usefulness not only in reference to totalitarian regimes but also to western democracies. Hannah Arendt believed that the revolutions of the 50s and 60s (Hungarian Revolution and Student riots) provided a new happiness found in acting, moving, thinking, and discussing, but believed that it was limited if it was unable to found a new political regime with institutions to protect the distinction between the truth and lies. It was

this experience of fighting against institutional lies that brought the dissidents to rely upon Arendt's thought and one we too have experience with in modern times.

The final paper presented in the session was called *Hannah Arendt's Critical Realism: Power, Justice and Responsibility in International Politics* by Douglas Klusmeyer of American University. Klusmeyer began by contrasting Arendt's approach to international politics, termed critical realism with that of realists of her generation Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan by focusing on their different responses to the holocaust. He went on making the point that while realists focused on the high politics of statecraft within the international realm, Arendt's perspective was marked by identification with the victims of state authority and the modern nation-state system. He then related the debate to recent times when the debate between realism and idealism has again come to the forefront of international politics and suggests that Arendt's example can help clarify the limitations of the realist perspective and points to a more moderate approach that can be used to step forward.

The afternoon session was entitled „Hannah Arendt, Judaism, and Eichmann: A Continuing Controversy.“ Avner Dinur of Ben Gurion University of the Negev presented the first paper of the session entitled *Judaism in the Thought of Hannah Arendt and Hans Jonas*. Dinur's paper compared and contrasted the biographies of Jonas and Arendt, neither of which specialized in examining Judaism, but both of which were Jewish German thinkers, and both of whose philosophies held a place for Judaism as a way of thinking. Dinur also specifically discussed the way that the philosophies of both were a common reaction to the centrality of ontology in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, a man who impacted both thinkers' philosophies. He concluded his paper with the thought that although Jonas and Arendt held completely different philosophical views, each was marked by a common concern for the present and the future of human society.

Joanna Bankier of The Baltic Sea Foundation presented a paper entitled *The Wound, the Voice, and the Narrative*, which laid out

Hannah Arendt's self-identification as a Jew from early adulthood as a pariah in the late 20s and 30s through her experiences writing Eichmann in Jerusalem. Bankier paid special attention to Arendt's shock at her pariah status, her time working with a Zionist organization in Paris during her exile, and finally the comfort she rediscovered in her pariah-role as she wrote her most controversial work. She asserted that it was the return to this role that allowed Arendt to finally unload the burden history had placed on her shoulders.

The final paper of the session was presented by Cecilia Miller of Wesleyan University. Her paper, *The German Novel Simplicissimus* (1668) and Hannah Arendt on the Banality of Evil, explained the plot of Johann Grimmelshausen's work, *Simplicissimus*, which took place during the Thirty Years' War and followed a soldier completely devoid of the remorse that should follow killing another human being. Miller continued by posing the central question of whether this character can be considered an everyman as well as what light Arendt's concept of the banality of evil, as developed during her report on the Eichmann trial, can shed on our understanding of not only this work but also life in general.

The next day's proceedings began with a session entitled „Hannah Arendt in the Global Discourse, Part I.“ The first paper was presented by Jose M. Faraldo of the Centre for Research on Contemporary History in Potsdam. Faraldo's paper, entitled *Hannah Arendt's Reception in Western Europe (post) Dictatorships: The Spanish Case*, began by explaining the alternate path that Spain took to modernity during and after it had rid itself of the yoke of dictatorship. He then analyzed how the perception of Hannah Arendt's works changed not only due to political and social changes in Spain specifically, but also within a greater European context.

The next paper was presented by Katarzyna Stoklosa of the Hannah Arendt Institute Dresden. Her paper, entitled *Democratizing Poland with Hannah Arendt* analyzed and evaluated the literary reception that Hannah Arendt's works *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *The Life of the Mind*, and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* received in the country that acted as the „focus of revolution“ within the Eastern

Bloc. Her paper then moved to a discussion of how much influence Hannah Arendt's ideas had on the consolidation of democracy in Poland.

The final paper of the session, entitled *Hannah Arendt in the Czech Republic* was presented by Martin Teplý, who is also from the Hannah Arendt Institute. Teplý's paper described the ongoing discussions of „democracy and dictatorship“ that took place in communist and democratic Czechoslovakia. He then went on to describe the ways that Czech and Czechoslovakian historians', philosophers', and political scientists' views were similar to and different from Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism. He concluded by highlighting the aspects of the discussion that were unique to Czech academic circles.

The next session, which continued the theme of global discourse, began with a paper by Emanoil Ancuta of The Institute for International Studies in Bucharest, Romania. Ancuta's paper, entitled *Hannah Arendt in Romania*, began by attributing the introduction of Hannah Arendt's ideas in Romania to writers like Paul Goma at radio stations such as „Radio Free Europe.“ Ancuta went on to contend that since the introduction of Arendt's ideas in the 1980s, they became an important foundation of Romanian political theory up through the present day. In the second part of his paper he addressed the reception of the Romanian translations of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Crises of the Republic*, *Between Past and Future* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Ancuta also explains how several leading Romanian Arendt scholars have applied her ideas to Romania's past.

The final paper of the session was entitled *The Application of Hannah Arendt's Political Thought to North Korea: Is There Hope Through Natality or the Revolution?*, and was written and presented by Keeho Kim of Baylor University. Kim's paper begins by applying three features of Arendt's political thought (evil, thoughtlessness, storytelling) to the North Korean situation. Kim then discusses Arendt's ideas about natality, one-man rule and stateless persons. Kim ultimately concludes through an analysis of hope in Arendt that neither form would yield any results in

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the Korean case.

The session entitled „Narration and Universality in the Work of Hannah Arendt“ began with the lecture of Kimberly Maslin-Wicks of Hendricks College entitled *Isolation and Loneliness in the Work of Hannah Arendt*. In her lecture, Dr. Maslin-Wicks draws attention to the ideas of isolation and loneliness in Arendt's work. From the readings, Maslin-Wicks makes the assertion that isolation was used by Arendt to mean that a person had been cast out by society because their inner dialogue had led them to act in ways that were incommensurate with the beliefs of society in general. She also suggested a possible definition for the idea of loneliness in Arendt's works as the most troubling phenomenon, in which a person becomes alienated from themselves because they no longer conduct an inner dialogue. Dr. Maslin-Wicks also asserted that these ideas remain pertinent to understanding the implications of Arendt's political theories and their applications to modern life.

The next paper was presented by Fanny Soederbaeck of The New School for Social Research and was entitled *Agorart: Action and Narration in the Public Space*. In Soederbaeck's paper, she suggests that certain forms of contemporary art create and maintain the public space Arendt mentioned so often and gave a special place to in her work. The main thrust of her paper was that this public realm has not disappeared, that therefore there is still room for politics and hope for a future where stories continue to be born, narrated and remembered.

The final paper of the session was presented by Seon-Wook Kim of Soongsil University and was entitled *Hannah Arendt's Unintended Quest for the Practical Dimension of Universality*. Kim's paper provided an explanation of Hannah Arendt's thought on the practical dimension of universality, which Arendt alluded to in her works quite often. Throughout the course of the paper, Kim discusses Arendt's view of Universality based on her analysis of the thought of Plato and Socrates, as well as the Gershom Scholem and Habermas-Henrich debates. The paper ends with a comparison of Arendt with other scholars who have written about Universality in-

cluding Sandel and Taylor.

The next session was entitled „Translating Culture in the Work of Hannah Arendt“ and began with the paper of Katherine Arens of the University of Texas, entitled *Hannah Arendt Translates Culture: Men in Dark Times*. Arens approaches the collection of Arendt's works with two different viewpoints, including one that draws attention to Existenzphilosophie inherent in the text and another that draws attention to the German literary and intellectual history included in the text. Arens suggested that Arendt wrote German intellectual histories that promote the idea of an international human marked by a commitment to a humanistic vision.

The next paper was given by Andrew Wisely of Baylor University and was entitled *The Biographical Essay as Transfiguration: Hermann Broch, Walter Benjamin, and Bertolt Brecht in Hannah Arendt's Men in Dark Times*. Wisely focused on three of Arendt's essays, drawing from them the common themes *Bildung* and dissimulation, mother tongue and statelessness, elements which are part of an overall theme of what it means to be Jewish in the literary world. He also points out the ways in which Arendt's depiction of each of the authors can be viewed as an act of maternal redemption of the flaws in each of the figures.

The final paper of the session was given by Imke Brust of Pennsylvania State University and is entitled *Parody and the Banality of Evil in the Exercise of Law*. In her essay, Brust uses Jean Baudrillard's perception of evil in modern media images and links this to Arendt's concept of the banality of evil. She then argues that the images used by the modern media are evil when they lack critical potential, fail to evoke empathy, or use empathy to manipulate and persuade.

The final session was entitled „Hannah Arendt on Freedom, Liberty, and Revolution.“ The first paper of the session was given by Celine Roynier and is entitled *Hannah Arendt and Revolution*. In her paper, Roynier explains Arendt's views on the American Revolution as found in her first two chapters of *On Revolution* in which Arendt argues that this was the only revolution that established freedom. She pointed out that Arendt also be-

lieved in European construction but thought that it should not be done in the spirit of combating „American imperialism.“ Roynier also points out that Arendt's work creates a thread of humanistic tradition between the Old World and the New.

The next paper was delivered by Uwe Backes of the Hannah Arendt Institute and is entitled Hannah Arendt's Concept of Totalitarianism. Backes begins by discussing the context of the creation of Arendt's classic work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, including the ways in which Arendt was influenced by Tocqueville and her teacher Karl Jaspers. He then talks about the connections between characteristics of totalitarian ideologies and the system of extermination as revealed in Arendt's work. The final section of the paper critiques Arendt's model with an emphasis on the body of research she utilized.

Jane Anna Gordon of Temple University presented the next essay entitled Conceptualizing Freedom and Sovereign Power Polytheistically. Her paper explained Hannah Arendt's suggestion in the *Human Condition* that we conceive of freedom and sovereign power not monotheistically, as has been the tradition in the past, but polytheistically in order to better account for the pluralist condition of the human world. She argues that a polytheistic metaphysical model is the most useful for making provisions for the requirements of the contemporary world, where politics are increasingly religious and religion increasingly political.

Lee Cooper of Colorado State University then presented his paper entitled Hannah Arendt on the Degradation of Politics: How Plato's Anti-Political Paradigm Shaped Western Political Thought. Cooper's essay explains Arendt's claims against Plato and his adoption of an essentially anti-political way of construing politics, a conceptual framework that became the dominant mode of political thinking and practice in the western tradition. He points out that the most essential part of Arendt's critique of Plato is that Plato's approach to politics diminishes human experience because it does not account for human plurality.

The final paper of the session and of the conference was delivered by Gerhard Besier

of the Hannah Arendt Institute, entitled Hannah Arendt and the Recovery of Freedom. Besier's paper explained the idea of a „myth of freedom“ as well as pointed out that it is not supported anymore. He then poses the question of whether it is possible to give new life to the „myth of freedom“ by utilizing Arendt's ideas. He also poses the question: what narrative could be used as a foundation of the myth?

Keynote speeches by world-renowned experts Agnes Heller, Ron Feldman, and Richard Rubenstein enriched the program. The Jewish aspect of Hannah Arendt's life and work was expressed in all three lectures. The volume, in which the problems addressed at the conference will be analysed, is currently being prepared.

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