

Hannah Arendt

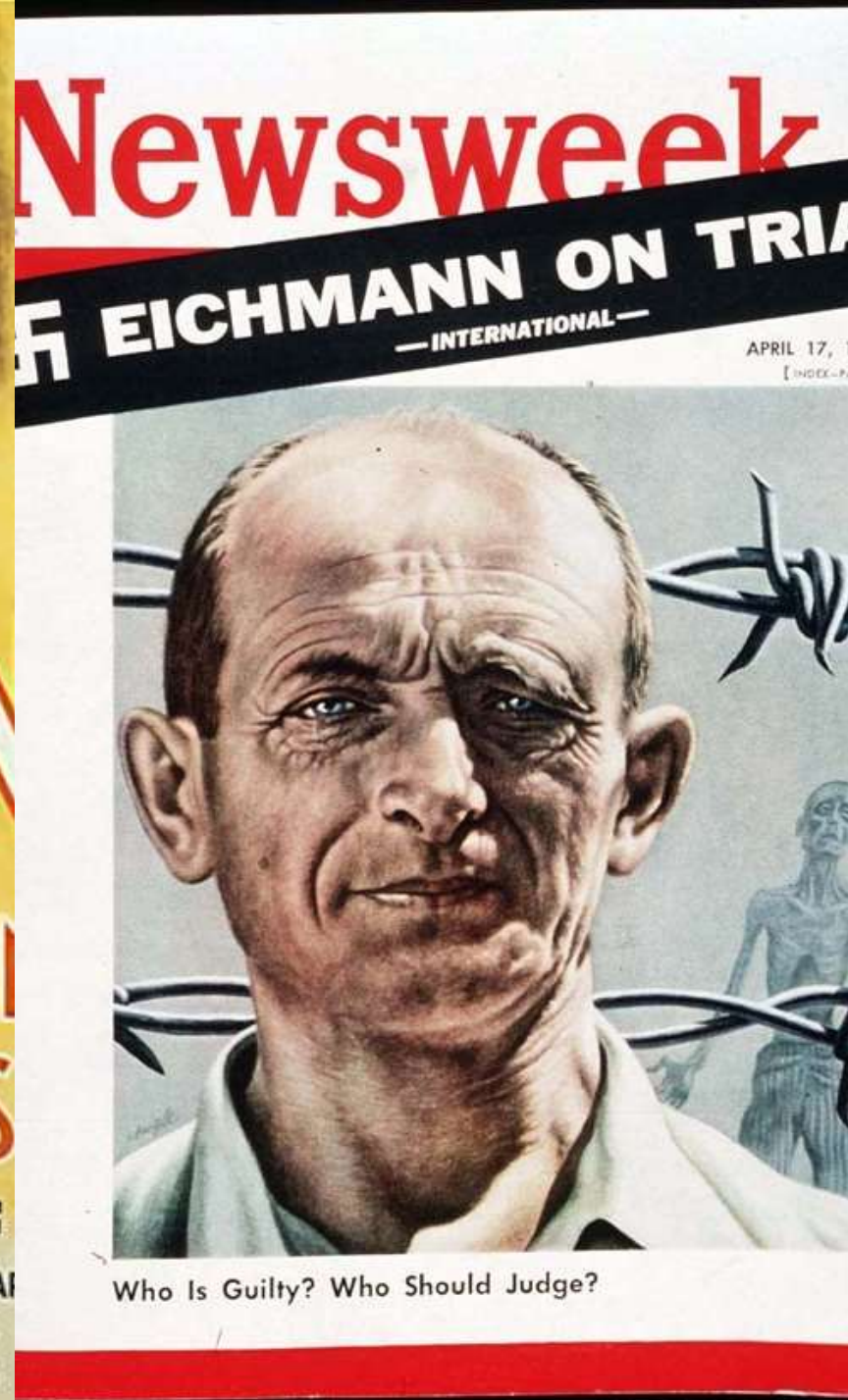
Thinking in Difficult Times

Week 1.
Introducing Arendt



‘the sad truth is that
most evil is done by
people who never
make up their minds
to be good or evil’





Thinking in Difficult Times

- In a world where totalitarian regimes blur the boundaries of true and false, modern life characterised by loneliness, alienation and misinformation...
- 'The very framework within which understanding and judging could arise is gone'
- A return to ethics and politics then, to ground our judgements
- Using conversation and our imagination to think 'from the standpoint of everyone else'
- 'To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's imagination to go visiting'



What do you know about Hannah Arendt, and what would you like to get from the course?

Talk to your neighbour, then introduce them to the class.



Introducing Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)

- German, Jewish, American philosopher
- Grew up in Koenigsberg in an intellectual, left-wing household, and raised by her mother from the age of 7
- Studies at Marburg with Martin Heidegger, a lasting influence
- Doctorate at Heidelberg in 1929 with Karl Jaspers, on love in St Augustine
- Arrested in Berlin in 1933 after undertaking research for the Zionist Federation of Germany
- Flees to Paris, via Switzerland, and continues work with Youth Aliyah



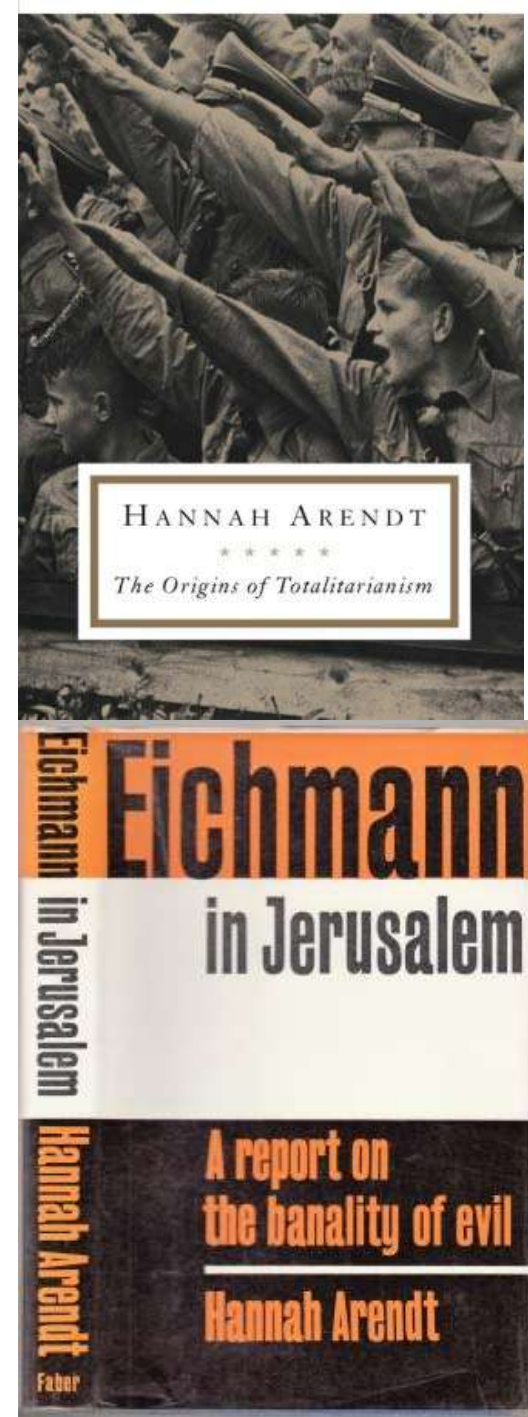
Introducing Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)

- Detained in France in 1940, but unlike her cousin Walter Benjamin, manages to escape to Spain, then New York in 1941
- Stateless from 1937-1950
- Works for Jewish cultural organisations and newspapers from 1941
- Over the 1950s-60s Arendt becomes known as one of the major political theorists of the era
- As well as a prominent journalist, essayist and lecturer
- First woman to be appointed to a full professorship at Princeton
- Dies in December 1975 from a heart attack



Key works

- *The Origins of Totalitarianism* – 1951
- *The Human Condition* – 1958
- *Between Past and Future* – 1961
- *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *On Revolution* – 1963
- *Men in Dark Times* – 1968
- *Crises of the Republic* – 1972
- *The Life of the Mind* – posthumous, 1975





- ‘Arendt’s life-long project was to understand, to comprehend, and to do this in a way that both honestly confront the darkness of our times and the sources of illumination. This is one of the many reasons why Arendt should be read and reread now.’ – Richard Bernstein
- ‘more than any other contemporary thinker, she never wrote the same book twice, nor any two books from the same point of view’
– Etienne Balibar



- ‘Hannah Arendt’s failure to grasp the importance of this ideal [of sacrifice] among Southern Negroes caused her to fly way off into the left field ... she has absolutely no conception of what goes on in the mind of Negro parents...’ – Ralph Ellison



- ‘In the Jewish tradition there is a concept, hard to define and yet concrete enough, which we know as *Ahabath Israel*: “Love of the Jewish people....” In you, dear Hannah... I find little trace of this’ – Gerhard Scholem

Wk2. The Banality of Evil

Eichmann in Jerusalem

Wk3. Refugees and to live without rights

Origins of Totalitarianism 1

Wk4. Racism and Imperialism

Origins of Totalitarianism 2

Wk5. Totalitarianism ('Truth isn't truth')

Origins of Totalitarianism 3

Wk6. Politics and Lying
Politics"

"Truth and Politics"; "Lying and

Wk7. Arendt and the Civil Rights movement

"Little Rock", *Jewish Writings*

Wk8. Violence, Power and Revolution

On Revolution

Wk9. Jefferson and the Revolutionary Spirit

On Revolution

Wk10. The *Vita Activa*

The Human Condition

Wk11. Equality, Plurality, Freedom

The Human Condition

Wk12. Thinking without a Banister

Life of the Mind



PENGUIN CLASSICS

The Portable Hannah Arendt

Edited with an Introduction by
PETER BAEHR

WHY READ HANNAH ARENDT NOW

RICHARD
J. BERNSTEIN

What you'll need

- Moodle login
- All readings available as photocopies, with further texts online
- *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (Penguin)
- Richard Bernstein, *Why Read Hannah Arendt Now* (2018)
- *Hannah Arendt*, directed by Margarethe von Trotta (2012)



Moodle login

Username: firstnamelastname

Password: FirstNameInitial (capitals)

E.g. Hannah Arendt

Username: hannaharendt

Password: HANNAHA



Course paperwork



Before going to break, take a moment to complete the course forms



Reflect to yourself, and perhaps discuss with your neighbour, what you'd like to get most out of the course



If there's any questions come and talk to me during the break or note my email down for later: Dan.Taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk

What Remains? Interview with Gunter Gaus

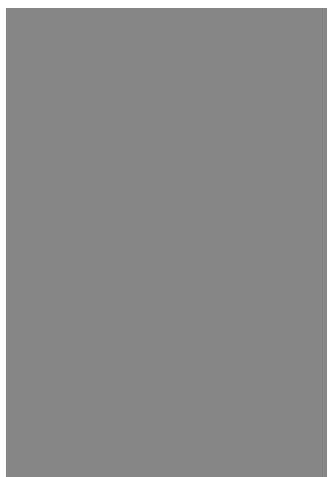
- “What Remains”, a West German TV interview of October 1964
- <https://youtu.be/dsolmQfVsO4?t=25s>

Questions:

- Why has Hannah Arendt left behind philosophy, and calls herself a political theorist?
- Can one ever be neutral with politics?
- Must philosophy and politics always be in conflict?

The expression “political philosophy”, which I avoid, is extremely burdened by tradition. When I talk about these things, academically or nonacademically, I always mention that there is a vital tension between philosophy and politics. That is, between man as a thinking being and man as an acting being

... the philosopher can be objective with regard to nature, and when he says what he thinks about it he speaks in the name of all mankind. But he cannot be objective or neutral with regard to politics.’





- Arendt's philosophy is often immediately associated with the phrase 'banality of evil'
- It follows from her 1961 report of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the SS officer largely responsible for organising Jewish deportations to the concentration camps
- Eichmann famously claimed that he was just following orders...
- Even 'terrifyingly normal'...



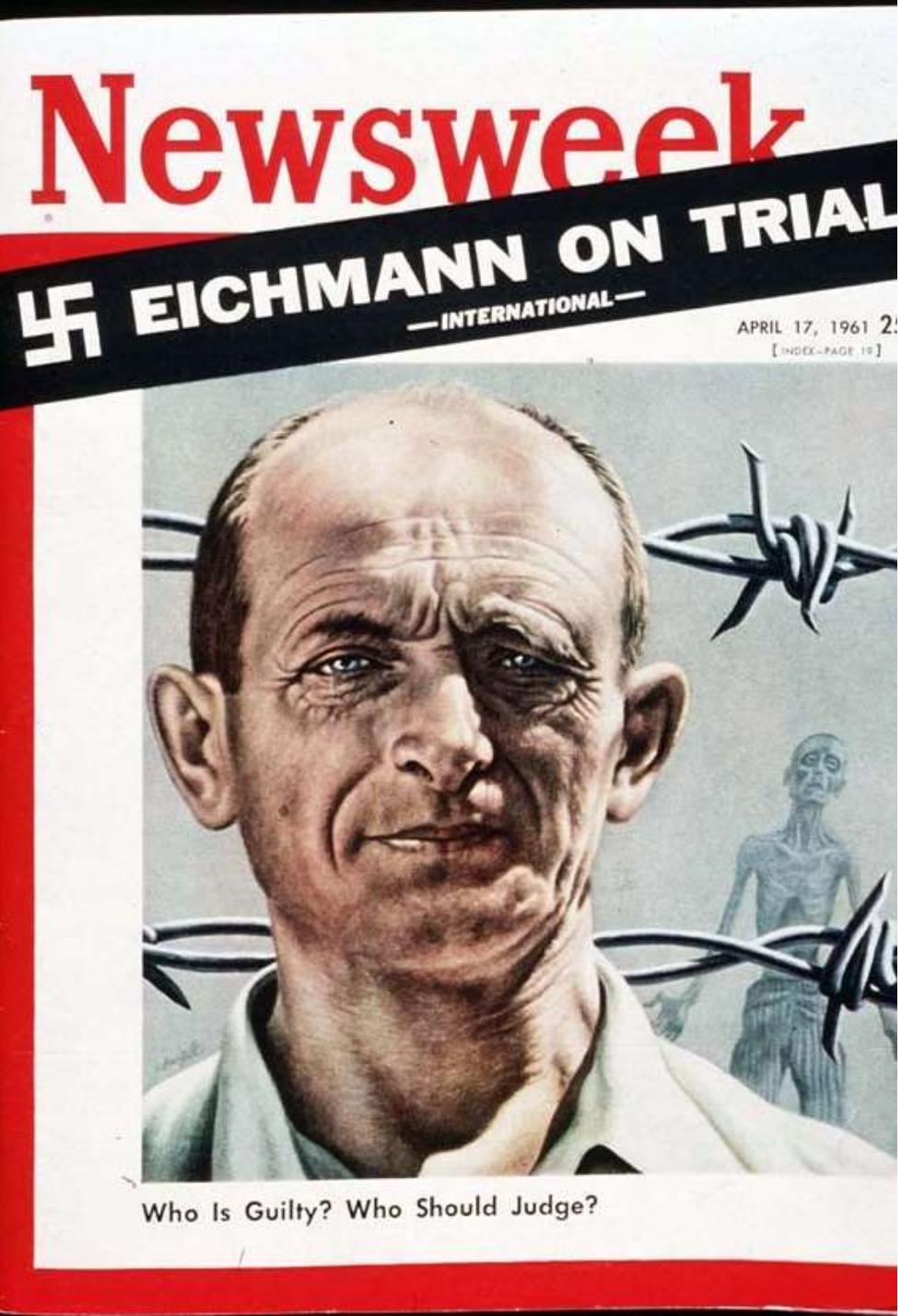
‘I cannot recognize the verdict of guilty. ... It was my misfortune to become entangled in these atrocities. But these misdeeds did not happen according to my wishes. It was not my wish to slay people.

... Once again I would stress that I am guilty of having been obedient, having subordinated myself to my official duties and the obligations of war service and my oath of allegiance and my oath of office, and in addition, once the war started, there was also martial law.

... I did not persecute Jews with avidity and passion. That is what the government did.

... At that time obedience was demanded, just as in the future it will also be demanded of the subordinate.’

- Eichmann’s defence, 1961



The banality of evil

Take a look at either excerpt 1 or 2, and discuss in small groups...

What does Arendt mean by the 'banality of evil'?

What was Eichmann guilty of?

Could crimes like Eichmann's be repeated?

The banality of evil

- Eichmann's actions did not follow from hatred, but a failure to think, and reflect on what he was doing
- Evil thus emerges in the *absence* of reflective moral judgement
- Eichmann was a 'new type' of criminal, 'terrifyingly normal', in that he could commit great crimes, aided by bureaucratic processes, without being aware that he was doing wrong
- Arendt was criticised for attacking Jewish leaders for their 'complicity' with the Shoah, and underestimating Eichmann's anti-Semitism
- We will explore Arendt's arguments and the powerful criticisms that emerged of her work next week...

Next week... *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

- We'll dig deeper into Arendt's depiction of Eichmann and criticism of the trial itself, as well as the controversy that followed
- Please read the end of the book – Execution, Postscript and Epilogue
- Or read further – all of the Eichmann work if you can, or the correspondence with Scholem is also interesting, though we'll focus less on the historical elements, more on the broader politics...
- If you have time, why not watch the Hannah Arendt movie, pick up the new Bernstein book, or spend a couple hours reading through the web articles and links on Moodle
- Questions and thoughts to Dan.Taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk