In the annals of twentieth-century political thought, Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) carved out a unique and enduring niche. Today, some 40 years after her death, her political philosophy seems more relevant than ever. In 1951, she wrote the first important book on totalitarianism, perhaps the central political problem of the twentieth century. Seven years later, Arendt published her landmark contribution to European political thought, the *Human Condition*, in which she sought to probe and to delineate the existential bases of human freedom. Avoiding the liberal political idiom of "rights," Arendt broached this theme via the ontological values of "plurality" and "action" – constituents of human distinctiveness that Arendt traced back to the glories of Periclean Athens. Nevertheless, she also found important modern political corollaries to "action" in the fleeting experience of direct (that is, non-representative) democracy: in the notion of "local democracy" that flourished in pre-revolutionary America and in the emergence of "workers consuls" in the course of the European revolutions of 1905, 1918, and 1956.

Our main thematic focus will concern Arendt’s central contributions to twentieth century political thought: *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), *The Human Condition* (1958), and *On Revolution* (1962). However, as preparation for this encounter, attention to Arendt’s formative philosophical and political influences is indispensable. Therefore, in conjunction with these works, we will also selectively read a number of background texts that will assist us in clarifying the conceptual framework that Arendt develops in her mature political works. Essential in this regard are key texts by Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*) and by Arendt’s legendary German mentor, Martin Heidegger (*Being and Time*). At specific junctures, Arendt’s voluminous correspondence with another celebrated mentor, Karl Jaspers, will also guide us.

Finally, the “Arendt renaissance” of recent years has been punctuated by important cinematic representations of her life and thought – a dimension of the international Hannah Arendt reception story that we will analyze and reflect upon in conclusion.

**Course Goals**: a working familiarity with and ability to teach the central works of Hannah Arendt’s political thought
Required Texts:

- Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Macquarrie and Robinson translation)
- Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*
- Arendt, *The Human Condition*
- Arendt, *Essays in Understanding*
- Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*
- Arendt, *On Revolution*
- Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, *Correspondence*
- Benhabib, *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*
- Canovan, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation*
- King, *Hannah Arendt and America*

Weekly Assignments:
Asterisk denotes readings available on Blackboard; “EU” = *Essays in Understanding*

Jan. 27: Introduction

Feb. 3: Hannah Arendt and the Dilemmas of 20th C. German Jewry
Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a German Jewess*
Arendt, “Only the Language Remains” (Günter Gaus Interview)
Ettinger, *Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger*
Recommended: Arendt, *Love and St. Augustine*

Feb. 10: Arendt and Heidegger I
Heidegger, *Being and Time*: #’s 12, 14, 16, 18, 22, 24 27, 34 – 38, 52 – 53, 62*
Arendt, “What is Existenz Philosophy?” (EU) *
Arendt, “Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought” (EU) *
Benhabib, *Reluctant Modernism*, 47-61

Feb. 17: President’s Day

Feb. 24: Totalitarianism as “Radical Evil”
Arendt, Preface, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*
Arendt, “The Eggs Speak Up” (EU) *
Arendt/Jaspers, *Correspondence* (selection)
Arendt, “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” (EU) *
A. Gleason, *Totalitarianism: the Inner History of the Cold War*, 3-50 *
Recommended: King, *Arendt and America*, 25-68

* Macquarrie & Robinson translation
March 2: The Origins of Totalitarianism: Anti-Semitism & Imperialism
Origins of Totalitarianism, Part I & II (selections)
Nirenberg, Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition (selection) *
Wasserstein, “Hannah Arendt’s Analysis of Anti-Semitism in Origins” *
King and Stone, Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History, 1-20, 250-261*

March 9: “Totalitarianism,” Part III
Arendt, Origins of Totalitarianism, Part III, “Totalitarianism,” Afterward
Canovan, Hannah Arendt, 17-62*

March 16: Arendt and Aristotle
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book I & VI (Ostwald translation) Aristotle, Politics,
Book I *

March 23: Arendt on the Human Condition I (HC)
Arendt, Human Condition, 1-78; 248-326
Canovan, Hannah Arendt, 99-154*

March 30: Arendt on the Human Condition II: “Action” as Freedom
Arendt, Human Condition, 175-247
Benhabib, Reluctant Modernism, 102-122*

April 6: “The Banality of Evil”
Eichmann in Jerusalem (selections)
Wolin, “The Banality of Evil: the Death of a Legend” *
King, Arendt and America, 189-218, 297-317

April 13: Spring Break

April 20: On Revolution
Arendt, On Revolution (selections)
King, Arendt and America, 245-270

April 27: “Crises of the Republic”

May 4: work on papers

May 11: Conclusion

May 18: Papers Due
**Written Assignment:** Final papers are due on **May 18.** You are to choose a syllabus-related topic (*in consultation with yours truly*) and write a 12-15 page essay. The assignment is meant to be an “interpretive essay” rather than a full-blown “research paper.” By the same token, the essay should demonstrate *extensive familiarity with the relevant secondary literature* as well as the relevant conflict of interpretations. What matters is your capacity to discern and reconstruct the major interpretive standpoints, to evaluate the stronger and weaker arguments and positions, and to arrive at fresh conclusions that, ideally, will advance our understanding of the material. *•

* Incompletes will not be granted w/o proof of extenuating circumstances