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 seeks to probe and to delineate the existential bases of human freedom. Avoiding the liberal political idiom of "rights," Arendt broaches this theme in terms of the ontological values of "plurality" and "action" – constituents of human distinctiveness that Arendt traces 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.

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

September 5: Labor Day, class will not meet

September 12: Introduction

September 19: 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)
Arendt, Love and St. Augustine (selections)

September 26: Arendt and Heidegger II
Arendt, Preface, The Origins of Totalitarianism
Arendt, “The Eggs Speak Up” (EU)
Arendt/Jaspers, Correspondence (selections)
Arendt, “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility” (EU)
King, Arendt and America,

October 3: Arendt on Anti-Semitism
Origins of Totalitarianism, Part I & II
Nirenberg, Antijudaism*
Marrus,

October 6 (Classes follow a Monday Schedule): Arendt on Imperialism
Origins of Totalitarianism, III, Afterward

October 10: Columbus Day

October 17: Arendt and Aristotle
Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Book I & VI
Aristotle, Politics, Book I

October 24: Arendt on the Human Condition I (HC)
HC, 1-78; 248-326

October 31: Arendt on the Human Condition II: Action as Freedom
HC, 175-247

November 7: Special Film Showing

* Macquarrie & Robinson translation
Margareta von Trotta, “Hannah Arendt”

November 14: “The Banality of Evil”
*Eichmann in Jerusalem* (selections)
King, *Arendt and America*

November 21: *On Revolution*
King, *Arendt and America*

November 28: “Crises of the Republic”

December 5: Conclusion

December 12: Papers Due

**Written Assignment:** Final papers are due on December 12. 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.