

Paris Lectures on Hannah Arendt's Revolutionary Constitutionalism

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(EHESS), Paris, march 2016;
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1. Thursday 10th march – 11h -13h

Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales, 96 blvd. Raspail, 75006 Paris, salle des artistes

Power, Plurality and Responsible Government in Hannah Arendt's On Revolution

We say: "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." But Hannah Arendt saw power as generative of civic engagement. This lecture will explore Arendt's argument that republican government must multiply and expand popular sources of constitutional power.

2. Thursday 10th march – 15h -17h

Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales, 105 blvd. Raspail, 75006 Paris, salle 5

Revenge and Justice: The Paris Trial of Sholom Schwartzbard

Sholom Schwartzbard killed Simon Petlura in an act of revenge. He admitted his crime and a French jury acquitted him in 1927. For Hannah Arendt, Schwartzbard's actions show that revenge can, in certain circumstances, be in the service of justice. This paper explores Hannah Arendt's distinction between reconciliation and revenge and argues that Hannah Arendt embraces revenge as one way in which politics and justice can happen in the world, but only under certain conditions. First, Arendt only endorses revenge when the crime calling forth vengeance is extraordinary, one that bursts the bounds of traditional legality. Second, the avenger must give himself up for judgment to the legal system, asking a jury to judge whether his extraordinary act was just even though it was illegal. These are strict conditions and will only rarely be met. When they are, revenge can be a profoundly political act in the service of justice, one that can restore a broken political order.

3. Monday 14th march – 16h -18h

University of Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, Building F, salle 352

Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question

Hannah Arendt's "Reflections on Little Rock" has been controversial since it was published. Discussion of Arendt's essay has taken place outside the context of her lifelong exploration of racism and race-thinking. In her explorations of antisemitism as racism, Arendt insists on asking the uncomfortable question, "why the Jews?" She in no way blames Jews; she does, however,

ask how Jewish practices helped make the evils that befell them possible. She argues that the Jew's apolitical history and the Jews' misplaced focus on social instead of political equality contributed to the rise of specifically modern, racist, and ideological forms of racial antisemitism. Later, Arendt transferred her understanding of antisemitism to the American problem of anti-Black racism. This talk begins an effort to think about the successes and failures of thinking about contemporary racism through Arendt's understanding of ideological racism.

4. Thursday 17th March – 11h -13h

Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales, 96 blvd. Raspail, 75006 Paris, salle Lombard

Authority and Responsible Government in Hannah Arendt's On Revolution.

The great problem of democratic constitutional governments is how to secure authority for the Constitution absent divine sanction or violent imposition. Arendt offers one answer, arguing that in the United States a uniquely modern authority emerged based on a common faith in the Supreme Court as a body that spoke with the continuously regenerated authority of the founding generation.

5. Thursday 24th March – 11h-13h

Écoles des hautes études en sciences sociales, 96 blvd. Raspail, 75006 Paris, salle des artistes

“Freedom from Revolution to Protest.”

In an age of bureaucratic and administrative governance, Hannah Arendt argues that revolutionary constitutionalism has become the exemplary space for the founding of political freedom. Today, protest has superseded revolution as the space of freedom. Thinkers like Jacques Rancière, Simon Critchley, and David Graeber question the possibility instituting freedom in a political system. For them, revolutions have failed to found freedom and inevitably devolve into hierarchical rule; which leaves protest as the modern space of political freedom. This talk asks what it means that freedom is increasingly separated from politics and located in protest?