

*Hannah
Arendt*

LECTURES ON
KANT'S

Political Philosophy



Edited and with an Interpretive Essay by

RONALD BEINER

*Hannah
Arendt*

L E C T U R E S O N

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Political Philosophy*

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Ronald Beiner



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Hannah Arendt's "Postscriptum" to *The Life of the Mind*, volume one,
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HANNAH ARENDT (1906-75) was educated at the universities of Marburg, Freiburg, and Heidelberg, where she received her Ph.D. in philosophy under Karl Jaspers. She was professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago from 1963 to 1967; she then returned to the New School for Social Research. Among her many honors were a fellowship in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Lessing Prize, and the Sigmund Freud Prize for prose. She was the author of over a dozen books, including *The Human Condition* (University of Chicago Press, 1958), and the unfinished, posthumously published two-volume work *The Life of the Mind* (1978).

RONALD BEINER received his D.Phil. at Oxford with a thesis on Hannah Arendt. He is currently a lecturer at the University of Southampton in England.

L E C T U R E S O N

KANT'S
Political Philosophy

JUDGING

Victrix causa diis placuit sed victa Catona

..
Konnt' ich Magie von meinem Pfad entfernen,
Die Zaubersprüche ganz und gar verlernen,
Stund' ich Natur vor Dir, ein Mann allein,
Da war's der Mühe wert ein Mensch zu sein.

Judging was to have been the third and final volume of Hannah Arendt's *The Life of the Mind*. All that she actually wrote was this title page, which, with its two epigraphs, was found in her typewriter shortly after her death.

Preface

HANNAH ARENDT never lived to write "Judging," which was to have been the third and concluding part of her work *The Life of the Mind*. Yet students of her thought would have ample justification for believing that, had it been written, it would have been her crowning achievement. The purpose of the present book is to draw together the main available texts by Arendt on this important topic. Obviously, these texts can be no substitute for the work that was not written, but I think they can offer clues to the likely direction Hannah Arendt's thinking would have taken in this area, especially when they are viewed in the context of her work as a whole. In my interpretive essay I have hoped to show that something coherent can indeed be gleaned from these texts and to help give the reader some sense of their importance. No more than this is claimed for my speculative reconstruction.

The first text is Arendt's *Postscriptum* to volume one of *The Life of the Mind*. This forms a prelude to "Judging," since it offers a brief plan of the projected work and indicates the basic themes and overall intention. (The *Postscriptum*, the last chapter of *Thinking*, forms a transition between the two volumes of *The Life of the Mind*, and announces the main topics intended for treatment in volume two.) The Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy, the core of the present volume, are an exposition of Kant's aesthetic and political writings, designed to show that the *Critique of Judgment* contains the outlines of a powerful and important political philosophy—one that Kant himself did not develop explicitly (and of which he was perhaps not fully conscious) but that may, nonetheless, constitute his greatest legacy to political philosophers. Hannah Arendt gave these Kant Lectures first at the New School for Social Research, during the Fall semester of 1970. She had presented an earlier version of them at the University of Chicago in 1964, and material on judging was also included in

lectures she gave on moral philosophy at Chicago and at the New School during 1965 and 1966. Arendt was scheduled to lecture again on the *Critique of Judgment* in the Spring semester of 1976 at the New School, but her death came in December, 1975. The notes on Imagination are from a seminar on the *Critique of Judgment* given at the New School during the same semester as the 1970 Kant Lectures. (Arendt commonly gave seminars concurrently with lectures on closely related topics in order to explore certain ideas in greater depth.) These seminar notes help to elaborate the Kant Lectures by showing that the notion of exemplary validity that emerges in the third *Critique* and the doctrine of the Schematism in the first *Critique* are linked by the role of imagination, which is fundamental to both, providing schemata for cognition as well as examples for judgment.

My aim has been to provide as full a selection of texts as the reader would need in order to glimpse Hannah Arendt's emerging reflections on judging. Other available lecture materials have been left out because to have included them would have produced either repetitiveness, where her views had not changed, or inconsistency, where her views had developed beyond those expressed in the earlier sketches. I have, however, made use of these other materials, where they are relevant, in my commentary.

The writings assembled in this volume are, in the main, lecture notes that were never intended for publication. Although changes have been made where the wording or punctuation seemed ungrammatical or insufficiently clear, the substance has not been altered, and they retain their original form as notes for lectures. Thus the contents of this volume should in no way be mistaken for finished compositions. The reason for their being made available is simply to give access to ideas of signal importance—ideas that the author herself did not live to develop in the way she had intended.

Arendt's citations of sources in the lecture and seminar notes were often rather sketchy, and some were simply inaccurate. The responsibility for the notes accompanying Arendt's texts is, therefore, entirely mine.

I am deeply indebted to Mary McCarthy for her constant help and unfailing kindness, without which this volume would not have been possible. I am obliged also to the staff of the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress for their helpful cooperation.

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PART ONE

Texts by Arendt

Postscriptum to Thinking

From *The Life of the Mind*, Volume One

IN THE SECOND VOLUME of this work [*The Life of the Mind*] I shall deal with willing and judging, the two other mental activities. Looked at from the perspective of these time speculations, they concern matters that are absent either because they are not yet or because they are no more; but in contradistinction to the thinking activity, which deals with the invisibles in all experience and always tends to generalize, they always deal with particulars and in this respect are much closer to the world of appearances. If we wish to placate our common sense, so decisively offended by the need of reason to pursue its purposeless quest for meaning, it is tempting to justify this need solely on the grounds that thinking is an indispensable preparation for deciding what shall be and for evaluating what is no more. Since the past, being past, becomes subject to our judgment, judgment, in turn, would be a mere preparation for willing. This is undeniably the perspective, and, within limits, the legitimate perspective, of man insofar as he is an acting being.

But this last attempt to defend the thinking activity against the reproach of being impractical and useless does not work. The decision the will arrives at can never be derived from the mechanics of desire or the deliberations of the intellect that may precede it. The will is either an organ of free spontaneity that interrupts all causal chains of motivation that would bind it or it is nothing but an illusion. In respect to desire, on one hand, and to reason, on the other, the will acts like “a kind of *coup d'état*,” as Bergson once said, and this implies, of course, that “free acts are exceptional”: “although we are free whenever we are willing to get back into ourselves, *it seldom happens that we are willing*.”¹ In other words, it is impossible to deal with the willing activity without touching on the problem of freedom.

[Three paragraphs of the original text, pertaining to the account of willing in volume two of *The Life of the Mind*, are omitted here.—R.B.]

I shall conclude the second volume with an analysis of the faculty of judgment, and here the chief difficulty will be the curious scarcity of sources providing authoritative testimony. Not till Kant's *Critique of Judgment* did this faculty become a major topic of a major thinker.

I shall show that my own main assumption in singling out judgment as a distinct capacity of our minds has been that judgments are not arrived at by either deduction or induction; in short, they have nothing in common with logical operations—as when we say: All men are mortal, Socrates is a man, hence, Socrates is mortal. We shall be in search of the “silent sense,” which—when it was dealt with at all—has always, even in Kant, been thought of as “taste” and therefore as belonging to the realm of aesthetics. In practical and moral matters it was called “conscience,” and conscience did not judge; it told you, as the divine voice of either God or reason, what to do, what not to do, and what to repent of. Whatever the voice of conscience may be, it cannot be said to be “silent,” and its validity depends entirely upon an authority that is above and beyond all merely human laws and rules.

In Kant judgment emerges as “a peculiar talent which can be practiced only and cannot be taught.” Judgment deals with particulars, and when the thinking ego moving among generalities emerges from its withdrawal and returns to the world of particular appearances, it turns out that the mind needs a new “gift” to deal with them. “An obtuse or narrow-minded person,” Kant believed, “. . . may indeed be trained through study, even to the extent of becoming learned. But as such people are commonly still lacking in judgment, it is not unusual to meet learned men who in the application of their scientific knowledge betray that original want, which can never be made good.”² In Kant, it is reason with its “regulative ideas” that comes to the help of judgment; but if the faculty is separate from other faculties of the mind, then we shall have to ascribe to it its own *modus operandi*, its own way of proceeding.

And this is of some relevance to a whole set of problems by which modern thought is haunted, especially to the problem of theory and practice and to all attempts to arrive at a halfway plausible theory of ethics. Since Hegel and Marx, these questions have been treated in the perspective of History and on the as-

sumption that there is such a thing as Progress of the human race. Finally we shall be left with the only alternative there is in these matters. Either we can say with Hegel: *Die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht*, leaving the ultimate judgment to Success, or we can maintain with Kant the autonomy of the minds of men and their possible independence of things as they are or as they have come into being.

Here we shall have to concern ourselves, not for the first time,³ with the concept of history, but we may be able to reflect on the oldest meaning of this word, which, like so many other terms in our political and philosophical language, is Greek in origin, derived from *historein*, "to inquire in order to tell how it was"—*legein ta eonta* in Herodotus. But the origin of this verb is in turn Homer (*Iliad* XVIII), where the noun *histōr* ("historian," as it were) occurs, and that Homeric historian is the *judge*. If judgment is our faculty for dealing with the past, the historian is the inquiring man who by relating it sits in judgment over it. If that is so, we may reclaim our human dignity, win it back, as it were, from the pseudo-divinity named History of the modern age, without denying history's importance but denying its right to be the ultimate judge. Old Cato, with whom I started these reflections—"Never am I less alone than when I am by myself, never am I more active than when I do nothing"—has left us a curious phrase, which aptly sums up the political principle implied in the enterprise of reclamation. He said: "*Victrix causa deis placuit, sed victa Catoni*" ("The victorious cause pleased the gods, but the defeated one pleases Cato").

Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy

Delivered at the
New School For Social Research,
Fall, 1970

First Session

TO TALK ABOUT and inquire into Kant's political philosophy has its difficulties. Unlike so many other philosophers—Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas, Spinoza, Hegel, and others—he never wrote a political philosophy. The literature on Kant is enormous, but there are very few books on his political philosophy, and, of these, there is only one that is worth studying—Hans Saner's *Kants Weg vom Krieg zum Frieden*.¹ In France there appeared, very recently, a collection of essays devoted to Kant's political philosophy,² some of which are interesting; but even there you will soon see that the question itself is treated as a marginal topic as far as Kant himself was concerned. Of all the books on Kant's philosophy as a whole, it is only Jaspers' treatment that devotes at least a quarter of the space to this particular subject. (Jaspers, the only disciple Kant ever had; Saner, the only one Jaspers ever had.) The essays that make up *On History*³ or the recent collection called *Kant's Political Writings*⁴ cannot compare in quality and depth with Kant's other writings; they certainly do not constitute a "Fourth Critique," as one author called them, eager to claim for them that stature since they happened to be his subject.⁵ Kant himself called some of them a mere "play with ideas" or a "mere pleasure trip."⁶ And the ironical tone of *Perpetual Peace*, by far the most important of them, shows clearly that Kant himself did not take them too seriously. In a letter to Kiesewetter (October 15, 1795), he calls the treatise "reveries" (as though he thought of his early fun with Swedenborg, his *Dreams of a Ghost-Seer, Elucidated by Dreams of Metaphysics* [1766]). As far as *The Doctrine of Right* (or of Law) is concerned—which you will find only in the book edited by Reiss and which, if you read it, you will probably find rather boring

and pedantic—it is difficult not to agree with Schopenhauer, who said about it: “It is as if it were not the work of this great man, but the product of an ordinary common man [*gewöhnlicher Erdensohn*].” The concept of law is of great importance in Kant’s practical philosophy, where man is understood as a legislative being; but if we want to study the philosophy of law in general, we certainly shall not turn to Kant but to Pufendorff or Grotius or Montesquieu.

Finally, if you look at the other essays—either in the Reiss book or in the other collection (*On History*), you will see that many of them are concerned with history, so that, at first, it looks almost as though Kant, like so many after him, had substituted a philosophy of history for a political philosophy; but then, Kant’s concept of history, though quite important in its own right, is not central to his philosophy, and we would turn to Vico or Hegel and Marx if we wanted to inquire into history. In Kant, history is part of nature; the historical subject is the human species understood as part of the creation, though as its final end and creation’s crown, so to speak. What matters in history, whose haphazard, contingent melancholy he never forgot, are not the stories, not the historical individuals, nothing that men did of good or evil, but the secret ruse of nature that caused the species to progress and develop all of its potentialities in the succession of generations. The lifespan of man as an individual is too short to develop all human qualities and possibilities; the history of the species is therefore the process in which “all the seeds planted in it by Nature can fully develop and in which the destiny of the race can be fulfilled here on earth.”⁷ This is “world history,” seen in analogy to the organic development of the individual—childhood, adolescence, maturity. Kant is never interested in the past; what interests him is the future of the species. Man is driven from Paradise not because of sin and not by an avenging God but by nature, which releases him from her womb and then drives him from the Garden, the “safe and harmless state of childhood.”⁸ That is the beginning of history; its process is progress, and the product of this process is sometimes called culture,⁹ sometimes freedom (“from the tutelage of nature to the state of freedom”);¹⁰ and only once, almost in passing, in a parenthesis, does Kant state that it is a question of bringing about “the highest end intended for man, namely, sociability [*Geselligkeit*].”¹¹ (We shall see later the importance of sociability.) Progress itself, the dominant concept of the eighteenth century, is for Kant a

rather melancholy notion; he repeatedly stresses its obviously sad implication for the life of the individual.

If we accept the moral-physical condition of man here in life even on the best terms, that is to say, of a perpetual progression and advance to the highest good which is marked out as his destination, he still cannot . . . unite contentment with the prospect of his condition . . . enduring in an eternal state of change. For the condition in which man now exists remains ever an evil, in comparison to the better condition into which he stands ready to proceed; and the notion of an infinite progression to the ultimate purpose is still simultaneously one prospect in an unending series of evils which . . . do not permit contentment to prevail.¹²

Another way of raising objections to my choice of topic, a somewhat indelicate but by no means entirely unjustified way, is to point out that all of the essays that are usually chosen—and that I too have chosen—date from Kant's last years and that the decrease of his mental faculties, which finally led into senile imbecility, is a matter of fact. To counteract this argument, I have asked you to read the very early *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*.¹³ To anticipate my own opinion on this matter, which I hope to justify to you in the course of this term: if one knows Kant's work and takes its biographical circumstances into account, it is rather tempting to turn the argument around and to say that Kant became aware of the political *as distinguished from the social*, as part and parcel of man's condition in the world, rather late in life, when he no longer had either the strength or the time to work out his own philosophy on this particular matter. By this I do not mean to say that Kant, because of the shortness of his life, failed to write the "fourth Critique" but rather that the third Critique, the *Critique of Judgment*—which in distinction from the *Critique of Practical Reason* was written spontaneously and not, like the *Critique of Practical Reason*, in answer to critical observations, questions, and provocations—actually should have become the book that otherwise is missing in Kant's great work.

After he had finished the critical business, there were, from his own viewpoint, two questions left, questions that had bothered him all his life and that he had interrupted work on in order first to clear up what he called the "scandal of reason": the fact that "reason contradicts itself"¹⁴ or that *thinking* transcends the limitations of what we can *know* and then gets caught in its