

Modern European Philosophy | PIP77031

Year	MPHIL
ECTS Credits	10
Contact Hours	22 (11 x 2-hour seminars)
Pre-requisite	None
Semester	Michaelmas Term
Module Leader & Lecturer	Dr. Samantha Fazekas
Contact Email	sfazekas@tcd.ie

Module Outline:

This module will concern itself with one of the most influential political thinkers of the 20th Century – Hannah Arendt. Although a student of philosophy, Arendt rejected the title of “philosopher” or “theorist.” Her desire to distance herself from philosophy has to do with two inter-related factors. (1) An inescapable call to respond to the political events that marked her time: the rise of totalitarian regimes, the threat of the atomic bomb, the Holocaust, and the Eichmann trial. As such, Arendt’s task was to address and understand political events, which she saw as antithetical to the task of the philosopher. Whereas political actors courageously shape the political landscape, philosophers retreat from the world in order to ascertain “unworldly” truths.

(2) The second and related reason why Arendt cannot be called a “philosopher” or “theorist” is because her method to understand political events is merely “to think about what we are doing.” Arendt models her conception of thinking on Socratic *maieutic* (midwifery): it is windy, self-destructive, and resultless. Its purpose therefore is not to determine guidelines for moral or political conduct, but rather to purge us of any beliefs, opinions, and values. This ensures that we constantly question ourselves and the reigning standards and norms. As a result, Arendt neither establishes a systematic political philosophy nor belongs to a particular philosophical school or tradition. Instead, her political thought is best regarded as an embodiment of the activity of thinking.

This module will concern itself with **ONE** of the following topics central to Hannah Arendt’s thought. It will **EITHER** be on the analogy she draws between Immanuel Kant’s aesthetic reflective judgment and her conception of political judgment **OR** on her last and unfinished work, *The Life of the Mind* – her proper return to philosophy at the end of her life.

Assessment:

One essay due at end of module (100%)

Recommended Reading List:

The complete reading list, including primary and secondary literature, will be finalized at the beginning of the term.

Below are the recommended texts **if the module is on aesthetic and political judgment**. Our central texts will be **excerpts** from the following:

- Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987).

Below are the recommended texts **if the module is on *The Life of the Mind***. Our central texts will be **excerpts** from the following:

- Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1978).

Feel free to use whichever translations/editions you prefer.