

Summary

The book is a comprehensive analysis of Hannah Arendt's scholarship, carried out from the perspective of philosophy of history and ongoing contemporary debates within it. The philosophy of history is understood threefold: (1) as a speculative philosophy of history. In Arendt's case it takes the form of a political theory that investigates the conditions of possibility of actual history, a theory critical of any substantial systems claiming to know the mechanism and purpose of history. However, such a political theory still remains a theory of historical process (2) as a critical philosophy of history. In Arendt's case it takes the form of an analysis of practice of storytelling as both historical and political activity (3) as a practice of writing history. In Arendt's case it takes the form of fragmented historiography.

The book's departure point is the recognition of the problem of Arendt's original historical method, applied most effectively in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, published in 1951. This work constitutes an axis around which other philosophical and theoretical threads being reflected upon revolve. In addition to Arendt's reflections, works of philosophers belonging to, on the one hand, the so-called continental tradition (Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, Immanuel Kant, Reinhart Koselleck, Paul Ricoeur, among others), and, on the other, the so-called analytic tradition (Frank Ankersmit, Arthur Danto, Carl Gustav Hempel, Karl Raimund Popper, Jerzy Topolski, Hayden White, among others) are being disused and applied in interpretation.

The main thesis of the book – consequently defended in all of its chapters – is that, as we can learn from Arendt, every story, being an instrument of dealing with contingency of the world and of the self, is potentially disastrous. The most extreme expression of this disaster on a macro scale is the phenomenon of totalitarianism – a total interpretation of history. Because of that, while creating and preserving narrative continuity necessary for the constitution of the subject as well as for undertaking political action, one must be careful not to confuse – as scientific, explanatory historiography often does – the interpretation of the past with retrospective prophecy that represent the past as preparation and promise

of the future. Because Arendt believes that there is no essence to the past and that it must be superimposed upon it, as well as due to her narrative constructions creating the chaotic collage of micro stories, she is claimed to be the forerunner of historiographical postmodernism. Her fragmented historiography is ultimately closer to the ideals of political action, which means in this case participating in the public space consisting of reading and understanding audience, then to academic values of truth and intersubjective verifiability.

Chapter 1, entitled *Totalitarianism and the End of History*, introduces Arendt's most important historical book. It starts with the debates and controversies surrounding its publication and contains the discussion of its content, which is very much surprising to a traditionally oriented historian. The concept of the totalitarian rule and its main institution of a concentration camp is being presented. A thesis is being defended that totalitarianism converges historically with the success of society of jobholders and degradation of human being to a role of a consumer. Both phenomena represent the crisis of modernity and the break in continuity of Western history. The category of labor is discussed in greater detail as well as the concept of break in continuity and the related concept of gap in time, both being central to the whole of Arendt's oeuvre.

Chapter 2, entitled *Philosophy of History and Historical Thinking*, presents a fundamental aporia of Arendt's thought, which is also a leading theme of the book. It is the aporia between political and historical meaning of events. The concept of philosophy of history is being introduced. By taking advantage of arguments from contemporary analytical philosophy of history, the author defends the thesis of inalienability of speculative dimension of philosophy of history in every thinking, speaking and writing about the past. Carried out in this context is a closer examination of the activity of thinking as well as its temporal dimension, being, at the same time, constitutive of primordial temporality. This examination is relevant for two complementary reasons. First, it is an analysis of temporality as the condition of possibility of ontologically understood history – that is temporality as common to History in the singular and lived stories in the plural. Second, it is an analysis of temporality as the condition of possibility of reclamation of the past after historical continuity has been broken, which is for Arendt the proper task of historiography.

Chapter 3, entitled *Science and Ideology*, contains an analysis of similarities and relationships that exist between totalitarian ideology and classic ideals of scientific explanation. It also introduces the category of work, which is related to science and ideology, and emphasizes the problem

of fabrication of truth in science and in the historical process. The author draws the readers' attention to the relationship that exists between mass culture and logical thinking characteristic of totalitarian regimes. At the end, he presents the critique of utilitarianism in social sciences as well as Arendt's fragmentary method, which is supposed to overcome it, together with controversies surrounding it.

Chapter 4, entitled *The Political Nature of History*, concerns the most important (due to its implications) category of action i.e. man understood as *zoon politikon*. The author is interested in the relationship between, on the one hand, action, and, on the other, language, identity, freedom of the will and public space. By showing the remarkable compatibility of Arendt's concept of action with Kant's concept of genius as presented in his *Critique of Judgment*, he defends the thesis of Arendt's immense aestheticization of action. Afterwards he focuses on the consequences of political nature of history, which is Arendt's major thesis, in particular upon their contingency and unpredictability. At the same time, he highlights the tension between this thesis and Arendt's presentation of the whole of Western history as history of regress.

In addition, in chapters 1, 3 and 4, the author consecutively claims that there are three interrelated levels of theoretical and practical activities, which are hierarchically arranged according to three evaluative concepts of time. These are the levels of (1) labor, logical reasoning and time as eternal recurrence (2) work, cognition and linear time (3) action, thinking and proper hermeneutic time. As such, the hierarchical order of the categories of *vita activa* is claimed to have metaphysical foundations. It is on the basis of this hierarchy that history of the West as presented by Arendt in *The Human Condition* may appear as history of regress – one consisting in gradual transition from authentic, finite temporality, through the continuous and infinite time, towards neutral time of cyclical change.

Chapter 5, entitled *Historian as Judge*, is devoted to the role of the faculty of judgment in historical interpretation. The author begins by discussing the structure of the life of the mind as a whole, together with its peculiar conflicts, particularly the conflict between willing and thinking. He continues by analyzing the faculty of judgment, which is – according to Arendt – our mental faculty for dealing with the past. Afterwards, he raises the issue of the perennial antagonism between the actor and the spectator and shows it what sense it is reasonable to claim that only the latter is able to comprehend meaning. The role being played by imagination and *sensus communis* in judgment is being underlined. The author looks at the hierarchy between genius and taste – mirroring the one between the

actor and the spectator – as well at the issue of purposiveness without a purpose and the aestheticization of the past implied in it. At the end he draws attention to the problem of teleological implication of judgments about the past.

Chapter 6, entitled *Fragmented Story*, is a detailed reconstruction of Arendt's theory of narrative as a medium of historical knowledge. Arendt's reflections are being presented in the context of contemporary debates led in the field of philosophy of history. The author argues that the narrative form is for Arendt a transcendental condition of possibility of historical understanding, and therefore that she should be regarded as a representative of anti-realistic narrativism. It means that though life and narrative have a lot in common they are ultimately not one and the same. Therefore, while discussing the seemingly contradictory functions of storytelling, the author points at the role being played by fiction in the process of historical cognition as well as at the political dimension of every story about the past. At the end he re-considers the issue of narrative identity by using the example of wandering Ulysses who is seeking for his own self. The hero of *The Odyssey* becomes the paradigmatic representation of a man searching for meaning, at the same time being aware of and not knowing who he really is.