

Hannah Arendt

Introduction

Most difficult to understand.

Reasons

- She has not written for readers but for herself.
Hence in her works she makes no attempt to make her thoughts understandable.
- It is easier if we can categorise a thinker under a particular school of thought. This can't be done in case of her. She describes her thinking as "Thinking without barriers".
- She gives her own meanings to established terms like politics, power, love, violence.
- She has also invented new terms & concepts. One such concept is 'Banality of Evil'.
- Methodology is also complicated. Methodology is Phenomenology. (experience).

She was German Jew, who suffered at hands of Hitler, took asylum in USA.

Her major political work is "On Totalitarianism", where she has criticised the totalitarian regimes of 20th century. Her works became controversial.

She was criticised as cold war intellectual.

Major works of Hannah Arendt

- Human Condition
A philosophical work.
- On Totalitarianism
Political work.
- On Revolution

- Erichmann in Jerusalem

Here she has discussed the concept of 'Banality of Evil'.

Though she cannot be classified into any particular school of thought in conventional sense yet she can be associated with the tradition of "Civic Republicanism", because she has strongly advocated for active participation of people in civil & political sphere.

3/9/14

Her Philosophical views from her book

'On Human Conditions'

- Her philosophy of action

Human actions

Vita Activa
(Action)

Vita Contemplativa
(Contemplation/Thinking)

- Out of these action is more important than contemplation

- She is critical of Plato who suggested that contemplation is superior than action. She appreciates Marx for establishing primacy of action over thinking.

Hierarchy of actions

1. Labour

2. Work

3. Action

Labour

- Labour is the action which is performed out of necessity. It is not possible to live without performance of these actions. Man does not have freedom w.r.t. these actions.

- This is not distinctively a human action because animals also perform this action.

- She is critical of Marx for establishing this action as most imp. & superior over other actions.

Work

Work belongs to the social sphere. These actions are not as necessary as labour. Here man does have some scope of freedom. This is the action man performs as a member of society.

Action

It is highest in the hierarchy. It is action in true sense. It deals with participation in political affairs. This is truly human condition. This is the action which only humans perform. If we are not playing an active role in political sphere we are leading a life which can not be called as life of humans in proper sense of the term.

→ Her

Her ideas w.r.t. importance of political sphere in human lives is very much near to that of Aristotle. For Aristotle, man is by nature a political animal. For Hannah Arendt, the condition of being human is participation in political affairs.

Context of her thinking

- Her experiences as the member of Jewish community which suffered at the hands of Hitler have impact on her understanding of human condition. Use Jews have overemphasised on economic sphere, neglected the political sphere. This has resulted into a condⁿ where state assumed too much powers. This situation was responsible for their exploitation.
- This is common threat running throughout her thought.

Social capital : civic participation

Hannah Arendt's Views on Modernity

- She is critical of modernity & believes that modernity is responsible for many problems of contemporary life. Metaphorically she suggests that modernity begins with explosion of atomic bombs in Hiroshima & Nagasaki. It implies that modernity has destroyed the human condition.
- Modernity has made economic sphere as the most imp. sphere in our lives resulting into the neglect of other spheres. Modernity resulted into emergence of complex societies, centralised states and beureaucratic system of governance. The institutions of modernity has alienated man from political sphere. Man is overabsorbed in economic sphere. Neglect of political sphere is responsible for rise of Totalitarianism.

Hannah Arendt's Views on Totalitarianism

- She has analysed the causes for rise of totalitarianism, conditions supporting rise of totalitarianism, the nature of totalitarian states.
- According to her totalitarian state means the state which is extremely exploitative, which does not give freedom to its people. It results into the loss of "human condition". Once totalitarian state is established, It is maintained by use of violence & ideology. According to her violence is not only the means to come to power but it becomes an end in itself. Totalitarian state is maintained on violence.

- Totalitarianism also sustains itself by the use of ideology. She is critical of ideology as it is linked with totalitarianism. There is contradiction in her thinking. In her views on human action she undermines the importance of thinking. However later on she also talks about the necessity for "critical reasoning & moral judgement"

Factors giving rise to totalitarianism include

- modernity & capitalism
- search for markets resulted into imperialism as well as rise of racialism. This resulted into emergence of ideologies like racial superiority, etc.
- Expansionist nature of capitalism is also responsible for wars among nations.

She holds economic crisis & destruction of stable context of social lives during inter-war period as creating conditions giving rise to totalitarianism. In such situations, order & security become prime concern. People look for strong leader, who can assure them in such situation. These situations are manipulated by such leaders.

Hannah Arendt's conception of POWER

o Power is acting in concert.

Introduction

Hannah Arendt's conception of political power is very different from the conventional views

about power. Concept of power has always been central to political analysis. Conventional theories view power as domination. Conventional theories suggest that there are sources of power. For liberals political power is authority. The base of authority is law. For them power belongs to the state. For Marxists ownership of means of production gives economic power. Economic power is a source of political power. Gramsci make modifications in Marx, talks about ideological & cultural sources also, but continue to view power as domination.

Hannah Arendt's views on power.

- She is dealing with political power.
- She has compared the concept of power with other related concepts.
Force, Strength & violence.

What is force? → physical power.

Force belong to nature. Power belongs to the world of human beings.

Strength

Strength is a characteristic of an individual. A person may be strong or weak, but it is not power.

Violence

Violence is represented by state whereas power by civil society.

Power is neither force, nor strength or violence.

Power belongs to the people, acting in concert.

Edmund
Berg

When people come together they experience power. Power belongs to public sphere. There is no source of power. Power is sui generis & power emerges on its own & vanishes on its own.

When people come to public sphere they share power with each other. When they go back to their personal sphere, they lose power.

Hannah Arendt's views on Revolution

She has compared French Revolution & American Revolution. She is critical of French Revolution & appreciates American Revolution.

Why critical of French Revolution?

It gave primacy to economic question. It resulted into establishment of dictatorial regime in France.

- American revolution gave primacy to political freedom & democracy & left economic question in private sphere. She calls American Revolution as Clean Revolution & French Revolution as tail of necessity. However

However she was not completely satisfied with functioning of American Democracy as state was controlled by economically dominant sections.

Hannah Arendt's Concept of Banality of Evil

This concept emerged in her work 'Eichmann in Jerusalem'. Eichmann was officer in Hitler's

army. He was responsible for executing Hitler's idea of ending Jewish community. She wanted to explore reasons because of which persons commit such inhuman & evil acts. People may commit such acts as they may gain pleasure but it is not normal. In most of the situation banality is the major cause. Banality implies blind obedience.

It is the culture of blind obedience that is responsible for such acts. Such actions take place when people do not apply reason & moral judgement.

Eichmann blindly obeyed the orders. If he had applied critical reasoning, he would have reached a moral judgement for not committing such acts.

- It may appear that her thoughts are contradictory because, in her theory of action she has undermined the importance of reasoning.

- The concept of banality of evil is used to explain the reasons behind acts like terrorism. In this context it is suggested that societies should promote culture of reasoning.