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Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics (Contradictions of Modernity)

Craig Calhoun

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Is politics really nothing more than power relations, competing interests and claims for recognition, conflicting assertions of "simple" truths? No thinker has argued more passionately against this narrow view than Hannah Arendt, and no one has more to say to those who bring questions of meaning, identity, value, and transcendence to our impoverished public life. This volume brings leading figures in philosophy, political theory, intellectual history, and literary theory into a dialogue about Arendt's work and its significance for today's fractious identity politics, public ethics, and civic life.

For each essay -- on the fate of politics in a postmodern, post-Marxist era; on the connection of nonfoundationalist ethics and epistemology to democracy; on the conditions conducive to a vital public sphere; on the recalcitrant problems of violence and evil -- the volume includes extended responses, and a concluding essay by Martin Jay responding to all the others. Ranging from feminism to aesthetics to the discourse of democracy, the essays explore how an encounter with Arendt reconfigures, disrupts, and revitalizes what passes for public debate in our day. Together they forcefully demonstrate the power of Arendt's work as a splendid provocation and a living resource.

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