HannahArendt.net

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A Preface

By Elisabeth Young-Bruehl[1]

Dear Korean readers,

I write today, February 4, 2011, to welcome you to this Korean translation of *Why Arendt Matters*, which was first published in English in 2006, to mark the centenary of Hannah Arendt's birth. Her centenary was celebrated all over the world with conferences, collections of essays, radio and TV conversations, and even a Hebrew translation of my 1982 biography *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. It was very obvious that in the three decades since her death in 1975 Hannah Arendt has come to matter even more widely and more deeply than she did during her lifetime.

Why? Because her thinking is now recognized to be truly cosmopolitan as our world is becoming more and more interconnected, and because it is now recognized to touch upon people's most pressing existential and political hopes - their hopes to live well together and to find lives of political freedom together.

As I write to you, a revolution in Tunisia has recently ousted a repressive government and the streets of Egypt's cities, especially Cairo, are thronged with demonstrators who want the dictatorial government there to step aside, as non-violently as possible. The government is responding with violence - with hired thugs - and the army is standing by, uncommitted for the moment. No one knows what will happen, in Egypt, and across the Middle East with its great variety of repressive regimes. And across our interconnected world. It is an "Arendtian" moment, in the sense that it is her understanding, shared by many others, of revolution, of action, of the power that comes from people acting together, that is being demonstrated in the Egyptian demonstrations and the possibilities they contain.

The people in the streets of Egypt are "acting" - in her understanding of that word they are discovering themselves as political actors, as people with "power" - potestas in populo - as she analyzed that, and contrasted it to "violence," that resort of those who have no power but only armies and weapons. They are revolutionaries, according to her understanding of what a revolution is and can be, a step in the direction of a founding act, the making of a Constitution that guarantees the people their political life, their freedom of speech and assembly. Hers is an understanding grounded in a particular historical exemplary moment - the American Revolution of two hundred years ago - but it is not particular to that revolution, or that European-American context and its aftermath. Her

1 Editorial Note: Elisabeth Young-Bruehl wrote this Preface for the Korean edition of her book *Why Arendt Matters*, published in 2011, and posted it in the internet on February 4, 2011. Shortly before she died on December 1, 2011, she kindly gave *HannahArendt.net* permission to reproduce it in this issue. The views expressed in *Why Arendt Matters* and in this preface to Korean Readers set a pattern for contemporary debates on revolution; they represent the legacy of Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, cosmopolitan political thinker.

understanding is for any or all people who discover what it can mean to say, and keep saying, "We the People," who can experience the "public happiness" of saying and acting as political equals dedicated to political freedom. It is for any and all who can discover, as all revolutionaries have, how in a revolution people spontaneously come together in some form of "revolutionary council" to experience each other in a quintessentially human respect for each other's political judgment and courage.

We - I in America, you in South Korea - have the privilege to be spectators at these events in the Middle East, as we had the privilege to be spectators at the events in Europe as the Berlin Wall came down and the Soviet Union's regime - a regime with no power but many weapons of violence and repression - collapsed. With such consequences for you. The events now known as "the velvet revolutions." A scientific-technological revolution has given us the means to be spectators in "real time," immediately, close by. To be witnesses. Even, in a way, participants, as people all around the world are engaging in a cyberspace conversation about what is happening, a conversation which involves and involves us with, the actors. The possibilities of "action," too, are changing in our interconnected world. We the people are all Egyptians. What you think matters.

I feel a sadness that Hannah Arendt did not live to see - and to think about, for us and with us - the revolutions that have taken place since her death. I wish that she were with us, for example, to shake her head in amazement at the news commentators and pundits who are worrying that the Egyptians are engaging in a "leaderless revolution." No, no, I can almost hear her saying, a revolution is not led, certainly not ruled; the people do not follow a leader. A revolution is not a coup d'état in which one leader replaces another - a phenomenon with which you have much experience. In a revolution, the people discover in their acting together the ones among them who have good judgment and courage and willingness to make sacrifices and to represent the people, and they give those people their "vote" as they all struggle together to establish a polity in which there is "one person, one vote." A revolution is for the future, as parenting is for the children. It is a people being born, who wish for their children what they wish for themselves - freedom. In our world, in which such a large portion of the populations of the world are young and in which so many of the present revolutionaries are young, male and female - the future is more in the action, and this novelty must be understood by all, including the leaders who will emerge as needed.

Hannah Arendt emerged as a leading political analyst in 1951, with the publication of her monumental *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She was bringing that work to completion in the years just after the Second World War, when witnesses to and documentation about the pre-war and wartime development of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union was becoming available. Her argument that the Nazi regime and the Soviet regime were both totalitarian regimes, different in evolution but alike as forms of government - novel forms of government - was immediately tremendously influential in the West. She did not take up in her book the consequences of the Soviet regime for regions that had come under Soviet influence or Soviet rule, as did Korea above the 38th parallel in 1948, when the Japanese occupation of Korea ended and the United Nations engineered trusteeship of North Korea by the Soviet Union and of South Korea by the United States of America. These developments, so crucial for the Korean people, divided from without into two

peoples, were not analyzed then or afterwards by her, as she went on to produce *The Human Condition*. So she did not become for the world beyond Europe and America the major political thinker that she became in the continent of her birth and the country of her second citizenship, the United States. But, as the decades have passed, that situation has changed, and her understanding of totalitarianism and her understanding of revolution now have a world readership, in their many translations and in English.

The translation of her works into Korean - and of my biography of her and now of *Why Arendt Matters* - is part of this changing situation. And I hope that the growing appreciation of her thought in South Korea will be as meaningful for Koreans - all Koreans - as it has been for so many people in other parts of the world who were caught up in the Cold War and whose lives have been so profoundly effected by the aftermath of the mid-century totalitarianisms. For you as Koreans, who were colonials in the Japanese empire, and then subjects under either American or Soviet military rulers, and then citizens of states ruled by leaders under American or Soviet domination, Arendt's understandings of the forms of political unfreedom can be of enormous significance, as her - and my - translators and publishers know.

It is not at all surprising to me that the interest in Arendt's work in South Korea has come from university circles. Were she alive to comment on the history of South Korea since its founding as a state in 1948, one of the things that she would certainly have commented upon is the importance in that history of the fact that revolutionary opposition to tendencies in all of the six South Korean Republics to grow autocratic and adopt totalitarian tactics has continuously come from students. It has come from the young, from those whose families had been wrenched apart and turned into enemies, from those she liked to call "the new beginnings." She would have observed that Syngman Rhee's American-backed government, which had grown more and more authoritarian after the Korean War, was ended by a student revolt - long in the making - in 1960. Initially, the revolt was violently suppressed, but students from various universities - joined by their professors - rallied and launched the April Revolution. After that, the Second Republic operated on a parliamentary system in which the President did not have a critical role. Your country, as you know, was alive with "revolutionary councils" like formations of students, teachers, journalists, labor union activists, who mounted thousands of demonstrations during the eight months of the Second Republic. A military coup ended the moment of freedom, and immediately established a typical totalitarian institution-a central intelligence agency-to undermine the opposition. Later, after Korea had joined the Americans in the anti-Communist Vietnam War, the militarist regime used other typical totalitarian tactics, an emergency law and an extension of President Park Chung-hee's term of office and a declaration of martial law. Students continued their opposition. Ever since, new student protests, like the 1987 June Democracy Movement, have kept appearing, and it is no exaggeration to say that they have been the main force moving South Korea, with much back and forth, in a democratic direction. Their power is not unknown to or unappreciated by the Korean people who live above the 38th parallel.

You are aware that most people in America and Europe have little knowledge of your history, and of your revolutionary tradition. Hopefully, the slow emergence of a greater cosmopolitan consciousness-especially among the young-will change that parochialism.

Hopefully, people all over the world with democratic aspirations will become increasingly able to learn from one another. Key to that development will be conversations through printed texts and through the internet among peoples; through exchanges of their democratic visions and the visions of their theorists of democratic politics and political life. As I welcome you to my book about Hannah Arendt's contribution to democratic political understanding, I look forward to the translations that will come my way-and my country's way-from your country's contributors to the world-wide revolutionary tradition. We are all students.