

Report on the 15th Annual Meeting of the Hannah Arendt Circle

Lucy Benjamin & Katherine Brickacek

The 15th Annual Meeting of the Hannah Arendt Circle was hosted by Loyola University Chicago on March 16-18, 2022. After a two-year pandemic-imposed postponement of the 14th Circle, we happily convened this year in a hybrid setting. The meeting was organised by Lucy Benjamin (University of Melbourne), Katherine Brichacek (Northwestern University), and Jennifer Gaffney (Loyola University Chicago). We are especially grateful to Loyola's Philosophy Department for their enthusiastic support.

The Arendt Circle has the distinct privilege of claiming to be *the* Arendt conference (though of course, many Arendt conferences convene annually, and each offers continual illumination of Arendt's thinking and its application). We encourage the submission of papers written from any angle—critical or otherwise—from established Arendtians and newcomers alike. While early iterations of the Arendt Circle often fielded inquiries concerning which particular element, theme, or period in Arendt's life and work participants should focus on, such is rarely any longer the case. As the website now notes, 'The Arendt Circle meets annually to share research on any aspect of Hannah Arendt's work.' The variety of papers, both submitted and presented, represent the richness of Arendt's thought. We proudly continue the conversation Richard Bernstein (1932-2022) started by answering, 'why read Hannah Arendt now?'

The 2022 Arendt Circle responded to this question with calls for action, empathy, responsibility, and unending understanding. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, which has generated and exposed an increasingly weaponized account of individualistic freedoms (*my* right to go mask-free, *my* right to not be vaccinated, *my* right to go outside) the particular force of Arendt's writings has appeared with renewed force. In these times we feel again that for freedom to be realised, it is precisely this iteration of sovereignty that must be renounced. In this vein, we were offered papers on political compassion (Rebecca Leiby) and community care (Katy Fulfer and Rita Gardiner). Indeed, for Arendt, "The question is never whether an individual *is* good but whether his conduct is good for the world he lives in" ("Collective Responsibility" in *Responsibility in Judgment*, 151).

Concern for responsibly existing in plurality with others pervaded our two-day conference. As calls for 'land back' grow louder and the injunction to decolonise grows stronger, the fraught history of the country whose revolutionary 'origin' Arendt so cherished (and whose history she viewed with such limited partiality) were brought under review (Tal Correm and Dana F Miranda). Offering a path towards a critical conception of

land-based rights (Benjamin P Davis), this year's Circle also heard papers on the ethics of responsibility (Adi Burton) and the guilt of trespassing (Thomas Wittendorff).

Against the violence of history, notions of hope and Arendtian beginning were also central to this year's meeting. From the recognitive structure of political action (Micah Trautman) to the spontaneity of collective action (Maria Robazkiewicz and Marieke Borren), and the wonder and horror of emotion (Magnus Ferguson), this year boasted a rich array of papers which moved beyond the limits of Arendt's writing to create space for disruptive political imaginaries.

At the same time, and assuming an Arendtian position of acting in concert, the question of material life and the organic earth-world remained an organising concern. James Barry Jr offered a paper on the waste economy and Taylor Kloha explored the form of political ecology in Arendt's writings. Pursuing this line, Hans Teerds spoke to the intersection of political action and care as informative for Arendtian architectural design.

Locating Arendt in dialogue with Hobbes and Aristotle, two figures whose writing is central to her understanding of sovereignty and action respectively, were papers from Eli B. Lichtenstein and Lydia Winn. Finally, Hanno Berger and Christian Pischel's archival work reread and reconstructed Arendt's conceptualisation of totalitarianism.

The three day conference began with two special roundtables, each made possible by virtue of the hybrid format. Joining us from Texas, Joy Harris and Julia Wallace discussed their arts-based project in Arendtian friendship while Professor Miguel Vatter (Deakin University) lead a discussion on political theology from Australia. As always, the familiar intimacy of the Arendt community stimulated debate, dialogue, and community-building, even across continents.

The regular appearance of established scholars alongside up-and-coming graduate students and early career faculty annually produces a generative intellectual arena. Additionally, the cyclical development of the organizing committee (the abstract reviewer, after a year of learning about the Arendt Circle and its annual conference, becomes the next year's director) make the Arendt Circle a singularly inviting space for young scholars to find, and grow in, community. It is common for participants to become involved in the Circle and annual conference. For instance, Lucy first attended the Arendt Circle in 2017 as a quiet master's student, presented her first paper the following year, co-authored one the following, and was proud to serve as Director in 2022. Katherine similarly became involved after submitting to the Circle in 2020, and went on to serve as a graduate assistant for the 2021 conference and abstract reviewer for 2022. It goes without saying that we owe much to the Circle for the development of our thinking.

Next year, as the Arendt Circle returns to Europe for the first time in 10 years, and the organising baton is passed from Lucy Benjamin over to Katherine Brichacek, Magnus

Ferguson, Valentina Moro, and Olivia Guaraldo, we look forward to hearing new interpretations and applications of Arendt's writings in Verona, Italy.

List of Contributors

Tal Correm
Thomas Wittendorf
Katy Fulfer and Rita A. Gardiner
Rebeccah Leiby
Benjamin P Davis
Adi Burton
Lydia Winn
Taylor Kloha
Micah Trautman
Maria Robaszkiewicz & Marieke Borren
Hanno Berger & Christian Pischel
Eli B. Lichtenstein
James Barry
Hans Teerds
Dana F Miranda
Magnus Ferguson