

# **Reconsidering *The Human Condition***

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## Abstract

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This thesis is a reconsideration of Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*. It suggests that the complex narrative structure of the book presents problems for our ability to understand its meaning, as Arendt presents us with a story rather than a systematic political theory. In response, this thesis thinks *with* Arendt, appropriating her techniques to offer a re-reading of *The Human Condition* that attempts to provide a genuinely Arendtian approach to her thought. This thesis begins by approaching *The Human Condition* via the concept general human capacities, the activities that grow out of the human condition and give depth to human life. It does this by way of a comparison of Arendt's view of these capacities, with that of three key political thinkers that share similar political concerns: Aristotle, Machiavelli and Rousseau. The juxtaposition of these thinkers allows us to pinpoint just what it is that makes Arendt's consideration of the human condition so unique, namely, that the distinctiveness of *The Human Condition* lies in Arendt's particular manner of thinking. The second half of the thesis thus explores Arendt's conceptions of both thinking and thoughtlessness, and argues that her understanding of thinking precludes her from developing a systematic conceptual framework, or a set of generally applicable 'truths'. By reflecting directly on the modern world and its effect on the constellation of general human capacities, Arendt instead provides a *demonstration* of the very process of thinking. By presenting us with an open-ended and narrative account of general human capacities, Arendt calls on us to think *for ourselves*.

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*What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears...What I propose, therefore, is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.*

HANNAH ARENDT  
*The Human Condition*  
(1998:5)