



Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility (Studies in Continental Thought)

By Peg Birmingham

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Hannah Arendt's most important contribution to political thought may be her well-known and often-cited notion of the "right to have rights." In this incisive and wide-ranging book, Peg Birmingham explores the theoretical and social foundations of Arendt's philosophy on human rights. Devoting special consideration to questions and issues surrounding Arendt's ideas of common humanity, human responsibility, and natality, Birmingham formulates a more complex view of how these basic concepts support Arendt's theory of human rights. Birmingham considers Arendt's key philosophical works along with her literary writings, especially those on Walter Benjamin and Franz Kafka, to reveal the extent of Arendt's commitment to humanity even as violence, horror, and pessimism overtook Europe during World War II and its aftermath. This current and lively book makes a significant contribution to philosophy, political science, and European intellectual history.

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Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility (Studies in Continental Thought) By Peg Birmingham Bibliography

- Rank: #2323119 in Books
- Brand: Peg Birmingham
- Published on: 2006-09-29
- Released on: 2006-09-29
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .56" w x 6.12" l, .66 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 184 pages

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Review

"A new reading of Hannah Arendt's philosophy of human rights Hannah Arendt and Human Rights is to demonstrate how closely Arendt's account of the human condition... can figure into demonstrating that the discourse on human rights is not wholly negative, not wholly an empirical upshot of the disasters of the twentieth century. The idea of human rights we now possess articulates what, plausibly, might be thought to be involved in recognizing all others as members of the human community, thereby underwriting the political structures necessary to hold the fragile framework of the conditions of humanity in place. Birmingham can thus be thought to have demonstrated, at the very least, that pursuing the goal of realizing human rights is one direct way of pursuing an Arendtian politics." ?J.M. Bernstein, New School for Social Research, Research in Phenomenology, 38 2008

"The achievement of Birmingham's book is that it situates Arendt's much cited discussion of the right to have rights within the broader context of her later work. She persuasively shows that the political predicament of stateless people exemplified the problematic of modern politics with which she was implicitly preoccupied in her later work on freedom and praxis..." ?ANDREW SCHAAP, University of Exeter, UK, Social & Legal Studies, Vol. 18.2 2009

Peg Birmingham explores the theoretical and social foundations of Arendt's philosophy on human rights. Devoting special consideration to questions and issues surrounding Arendt's ideas of common humanity, human responsibility, and natality, Birmingham explains how these basic concepts support Arendt's theory of human rights. Joseph Haberer, Book Review Editor, SHOFAR, Spring 2008, Volume 26, No 3

From the Publisher

A new reading of Hannah Arendt's philosophy of human rights.

About the Author

Peg Birmingham is Professor of Philosophy at DePaul University. She is co-editor of Dissensus Communis: Between Ethics and Politics and co-translator of Dominique Janicaud's Powers of the Rational (IUP, 1994).

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