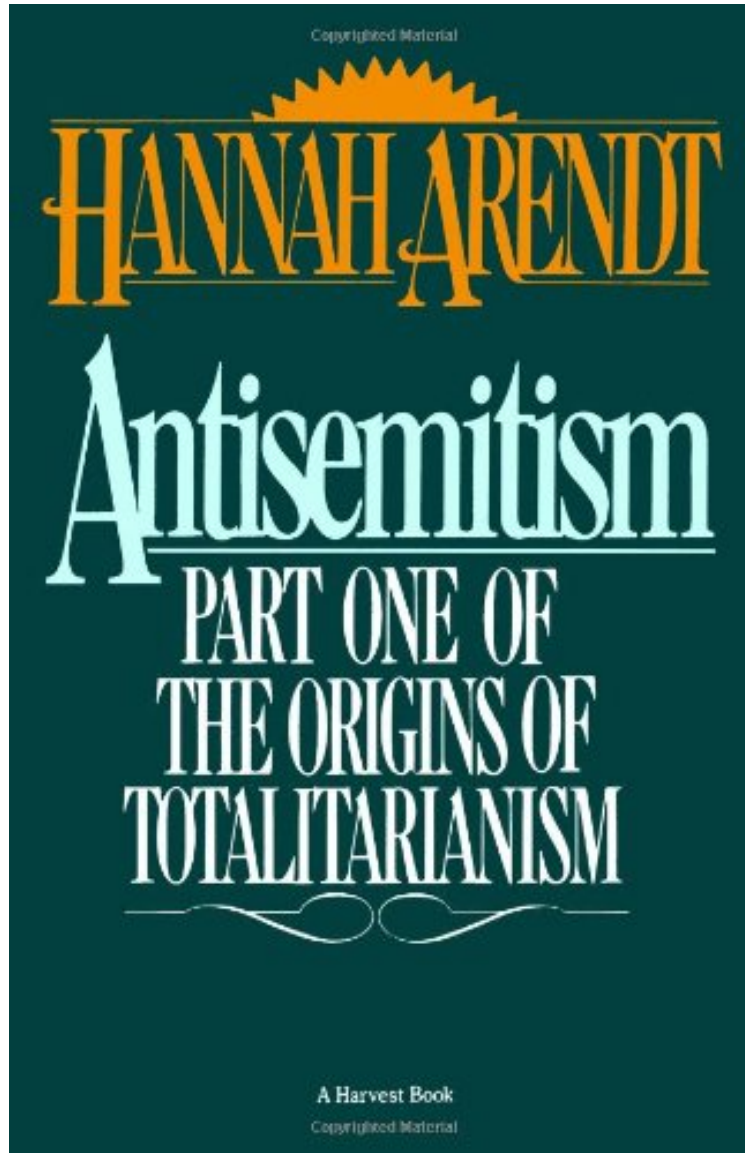


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## Antisemitism: Part One of The Origins of Totalitarianism

*Hannah Arendt*

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philosophical and analytic.<sup>3</sup> of 4 people found the following review helpful. THE FIRST VOLUME OF ARENDT'S "THE ORIGINS OF TOTALITARIANISM" By Steven H Propp

Johanna "Hannah" Arendt (1906-1975) was a German-born political theorist, who wrote many books such as *Imperialism: Part Two Of The Origins Of Totalitarianism*, *Totalitarianism: Part Three of The Origins of Totalitarianism*, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, *The Life of the Mind*, *On Violence*, *The Human Condition*, etc. She wrote in the 1967 Preface to this book [that was originally published in 1951], "This book then is limited in time and place as well as in subject matter. Its analyses concern Jewish history in Central and Western Europe from the time of the court Jews to the Dreyfus affair as it was relevant to the birth of anti-Semitism and influenced by it. It deals with anti-Semitic movements that were still pretty solidly grounded in factual realities characteristic of Jewish-Gentile relations... in the era of imperialism, followed by the period of totalitarian movements and governments, it is no longer to isolate the Jewish question or the anti-Semitic ideology from issues that are actually almost completely unrelated to the realities of modern Jewish history." (Pg. xii) She states, "The theory that the Jews are always the scapegoat implies that the scapegoat might have been anyone else as well. It upholds the perfect innocence of the victim, an innocence which insinuates not only that no evil was done but that nothing at all was done which might possibly have a connection with the issue at stake. It is true that the scapegoat theory in its purely arbitrary form never appears in print. Whenever, however, its adherents painstakingly try to explain why a specific scapegoat was so well suited to his role, they show that they have left the theory behind them and have got themselves involved in the usual historical research---when nothing is ever discovered except that history is made by many groups and that for certain reasons one group was singled out. The so-called scapegoat necessarily ceases to be the innocent victim whom the world blames for all its sins and through whom it wishes to escape punishment; it becomes one people among other groups, all of which are involved in the business of this world. And it does not simply cease to be coresponsible because it became the victim of the world's injustice and cruelty." (Pg. 5-6) She points out, "Nietzsche... made... his correct estimate of the significant role of the Jews in European history, and saved him from falling into the pitfalls of cheap philosemitism or patronizing 'progressive' attitudes. This evaluation, though quite correct in the description of a surface phenomenon, overlooks the most serious paradox embodied in the curious political history of the Jews. Of all European peoples, the Jews had been the only one without a state of their own and had been, precisely for this reason, so eager and so suitable for alliances with governments and states as such, no matter what these governments or states might represent." (Pg. 23) She observes, "The popular notion that the Jews---in contrast to other peoples---were held together by the supposedly closer bonds of blood and family ties, was to a large extent stimulated by the reality of this one family, which virtually represented the whole economic and political significance of the Jewish people. The fateful consequence was that when, for reasons which had nothing to do with the Jewish question, race problems came to the foreground of the political scene, the Jews at once fitted all ideologies and doctrines which defined a people by blood ties and family characteristics." (Pg. 27-28) She asserts, "Jews became the symbols of Society as such and the objects of hatred for all those society did not accept. Antisemitism, having lost its ground in the special conditions that had influenced its development during the nineteenth century, could be freely elaborated by charlatans and crackpots into that weird mixture of half-truths and wild superstitions which emerged in Europe after 1914, the ideology of all frustrated and resentful elements." (Pg. 53) She states, "It is important to bear in mind that assimilation as a group phenomenon really existed only among Jewish intellectuals. It is not accident that the first educated Jew, Moses Mendelssohn, was also the first who, despite his low civic status, was admitted to non-Jewish society. The court Jews and their successors, the Jewish bankers and businessmen in the West, were never socially acceptable, nor did they care to leave the very narrow limits of their invisible ghetto." (Pg. 62) She notes, "It is well known that the belief in a Jewish conspiracy that was kept together by a secret society had the greatest propaganda value for antisemitic publicity, and by far outran traditional European superstitions about ritual murder and well-poisoning. It is of great significance that Disraeli, for exactly opposite purposes and at a time when nobody thought seriously of secret societies, came to identical conclusions, for it shows clearly to what extent such fabrications were due to social motives and resentments and how much more plausibly they explained events or political and economic activities than the more trivial truth did. In Disraeli's eyes... the whole game of politics was played between secret societies." (Pg. 76) She suggests, "We have already observed how the dissolution of the state machinery facilitated the entry of the Rothschilds into the circles of the antisemitic aristocracy... The admission of the Jews into high society had been relatively peaceful. The upper classes, despite their dreams of a restored monarchy, were a politically spineless lot and did not bother unduly one way or the other. But when the Jews began seeking equality in the army, then came face to face with the determined opposition of the Jesuits who were not prepared to tolerate the existence of officers immune to the influence of the confessional." (Pg. 103) This is an excellent, very thought-provoking analysis of this form of hatred, that will be "must reading" for anyone seriously studying the subject.

The first volume of Arendt's celebrated three-part study of the philosophical origins of the totalitarian mind. This volume focuses on the rise of antisemitism in Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Index.

About the Author Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) taught political science and philosophy at The New School for Social Research in New York and the University of Chicago. Widely acclaimed as a brilliant and original thinker, her works include *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Human Condition*.