On Revolution

Hannah Arendt

1958

Hannah Arendt's 'On Revolution' is a landmark philosophical work that challenges conventional wisdom on the nature of revolution, providing a critical analysis of the concept and its role in human history. Arendt argues that revolutions are not just political events but a form of thinking and acting that profoundly shape the human condition. She distinguishes between the concept of 'revolution' and the event of revolution, the latter being a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that involves both violent and non-violent forms of change.

Arendt identifies three fundamental types of revolution: war, war plus revolution, and revolution without revolutionaries. She contends that war is a destructive force that undermines social structures, while revolution is a constructive force that transforms them. The third type, revolution without revolutionaries, refers to the spontaneous and ongoing processes of change that occur in society.

Arendt's work has been influential in shaping contemporary discussions on politics, history, and philosophy. It continues to be a foundational text for students and scholars interested in understanding the complexities of human change and the ethical implications of revolutionary action.