

## Politics Aestheticized: An Interpretation of Hannah Arendt's Theory of Political Action

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The essay tries to provide a new interpretation of Hannah Arendt's political theory from the view point of aesthetic politics. First I explore how Arendt perceives political action as a kind of performing art. Political action, distinct from labor and work, is for Arendt the human capacity to initiate something unexpected and extraordinary. It is invaluable because it can make the world more beautiful with magnificent deeds and words, regardless of considerations of the good and the true. Arendt's aesthetic politics is not only illustrated in her interpreting political action as a performing art, but also in her discussion of the criterion with which we judge human affairs. In the second section, I point out with various evidences that beauty is the supreme value of Arendt's politics. Without beauty, all human enterprise would be futile and no political engagement could become part of our eternal memory. Arendt's attempt to elevate beauty and greatness to be the highest criterion of political action, needless to say, raises the suspicion of moral indifference or nihilism. I examine this problem in section three, arguing that Arendt does try to replace conventional morality with "principles" as the inspiring force of free action. The only two apparent moralities in Arendt's political theory, promise and forgiveness, prove nothing more than the control mechanism inside action itself. Political action is eventually bounded by nothing external. In the final part of the essay I assess the positive and negative sides of Arendt's aesthetic politics. I think Arendt's project is unique in that she tries to aestheticize politics so that a new way of political thinking can appear and respond to the general trend our society is moving along with. Yet I also think her attempt is infeasible because, first, socio-economic problems are excluded from its coverage; and second, its moral ground is too weak to assume the result of boundless action. To resolve these problems, I suggest that, first, social welfare should be juxtaposed with personality revelation as the essential function of politics; and second, morality of ordinary people should be taken into account in the assessment of political action. The modification, to be sure, will weaken the strength and attraction of Arendt's aesthetic politics. But it is the only way to preserve some of her political insights without damaging her originality.

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## 政治的美學化： 試析漢娜·鄂蘭的行動理論

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### 摘要

本文試圖從「政治學美學化」的角度來詮釋漢娜·鄂蘭的政治行動理論。首先我注意到鄂蘭一再地把政治行動比擬為一種表演藝術。對她來講，政治行動之所以能被當成一種表演藝術，主要是因為兩者同樣以表述技藝之美善為該行為終極意義所在。相形之下，世俗的道德要求或哲學真理就不是政治行動所必須考慮的事。其次，我發現鄂蘭不只視政治行動為表演藝術，並且還認為惟有美才足以使人間事務臻於永恆。偉大的政治行動所體現的對不朽的追求，是人類有異於其他動物汲汲於維持生命或改善生存環境的最大特色所在。當然，由於鄂蘭主張政治行動不應受制於道德考量，所以在行動的原動力上她必須另有一套說法。在第三節中我指出她的說法就是以「原則」取代「動機」，以「承諾」與「寬恕」做為調節行動後果的機制。但是，不論是原則、承諾或寬恕，都不是傳統道德意義下的概念。在最後一部分，我針對鄂蘭美學化政治學的企圖給予某些評價。一方面我認為鄂蘭面對後現代的來臨，嘗試以美的觀點來界定政治，自然與近代德國哲學傳統的演變有關，同時也充分體現她做為一個政治哲學家的原創力。但是由於她對美的過度堅持，以及因此而導致的對社經問題道德考量的輕視，卻又使其理論失之偏頗，非經修改，不足以回應現實政治的種種挑戰。