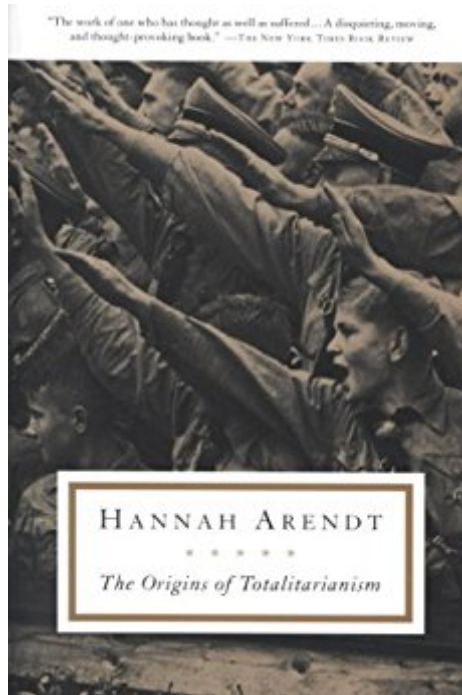




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The Origins Of Totalitarianism (Harvest Book, Hb244)



Synopsis

How could such a book speak so powerfully to our present moment? The short answer is that we, too, live in dark times, even if they are different and perhaps less dark, and *Origins* raises a set of fundamental questions about how tyranny can arise and the dangerous forms of inhumanity to which it can lead. — Jeffrey C. Isaac, *The Washington Post*

Hannah Arendt's definitive work on totalitarianism and an essential component of any study of twentieth-century political history. *The Origins of Totalitarianism* begins with the rise of anti-Semitism in central and western Europe in the 1800s and continues with an examination of European colonial imperialism from 1884 to the outbreak of World War I. Arendt explores the institutions and operations of totalitarian movements, focusing on the two genuine forms of totalitarian government in our time—Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia—which she adroitly recognizes were two sides of the same coin, rather than opposing philosophies of Right and Left. From this vantage point, she discusses the evolution of classes into masses, the role of propaganda in dealing with the nontotalitarian world, the use of terror, and the nature of isolation and loneliness as preconditions for total domination.

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Customer Reviews

Nothing worthwhile in life is ever easy and this read was time-consuming, intensive, and often difficult---but it's culmination in the last section on Totalitarianism was the "coup de grÃ¢ce." Amazing in it's depth of examination of the elements and characteristics of totalitarian movements including, but not limited to: scientificity, constant motion, the myth of the inevitable law/course of history, isolation of the masses, terrorism as a system of governance, propaganda, indoctrination, the destruction of free will and all moral absolutes, and the circumscribing of the masses into one giant inevitable historical movement from which, for it's adherents, there is no physical---and more terrifyingly---no psychological escape. This is one of the best examinations of totalitarian movements ever written. After reading several great authors who made reference to "The Origins of Totalitarianism," I knew I had to read it. It didn't disappoint. However, be forewarned, unless you are an intellectual giant or have a passion for 18th-19th century European History, the first two sections on Antisemitism, Imperialism, the rise of the nation-state, and the Pan-Movements can be difficult to absorb and will test your attention span. But, Arendt's exploration and vivid descriptions of the characteristics of Bolshevism and Nazism as the two forms the same totalitarian movement was emotionally gripping and psychologically terrifying.

Sorry to have to put in a negative review simply for the Kindle format, but no provision is made to critique formats individually. I have the hardbound Schocken edition of this work and it is fine. I checked the sample Kindle version for this title and found significant typographical issues. For example, the word "Hitler" is rendered "HiÃ er". This is clearly an OCR (optical character recognition) issue that was not caught in proofing. Doesn't anyone _read_ the results of OCR and correct the errors? As a result, I cannot recommend the Kindle version of this title.

Though at times difficult to read, this is an important book. Hannah Arendt, a major twentieth-century political thinker, shows an astounding grasp of both the historical and the literary material--not only does she understand better than anyone else the history of Jews in Europe from the Middle Ages through the establishment of the State of Israel, but she also understands the debates surrounding the creation of the European empires in the late nineteenth century and the economic implications of this new stage of world history. She is also very well versed in political theory, bringing to bear on her discussion as appropriate Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, Hegel, and

Nietzsche. In the main she argues that the totalitarianism of the twentieth century has its roots--though these roots often ramify in surprising ways--antisemitic racial theories and the pursuit of empire by the European powers. The latter point is certainly a breakthrough. One other fact worth mentioning: in her account, antisemitism is a complex, multi-layered thing, by no means attributable primarily to Christian prejudice, a matter that the shallow atheist epigoni of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens should take note of. Finally, I should say that this book is a testament to scholarship at its best. Arendt brings enormous learning and preparation to bear on an argument that genuinely broadens the mind and enhances the understanding of the central political events of the past century.

Asked what the founders had created, Franklin replied, "A republic, if you can keep it." Arendt's brilliant discussion of totalitarianism (not just its history, but its psychology and methods) stands with Mill's "On Liberty" as essential reading for citizens who treasure freedom.

Lessons for contemporary dangers to democratic processes.

Very important book. This edition is printed in teeny tiny type with very little space between lines. Unless you are good at reading microtype, better look for a different edition.

Every page held my interest. This book is much more than a history of totalitarianism. It tells how it happened and puts Hitler and Stalin where they belong, in a culture made for their ruthlessness and inhumanity.

If you're political, this explains how things started to get the way they are today. It's a great book and I highly recommend it. It certainly isn't boring.

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