

Arendt on antisemitism

I suppose it's not really coincidence that when the recent synagogue shooting in Poway happened, and the consequent attention to antisemitism in the press, I was about halfway into Arendt's majestic survey of the historic roots of Western antisemitism in her *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951).

Origins is, of course, now widely recognized as the standard text on the topic of its title, but it isn't as well-known that the Part One of the book (nearly a third of its total length of 700p in the Penguin edition), is on Antisemitism (followed by even longer sections Imperialism and Totalitarianism).

I've been repulsed and puzzled by and read and thought much on antisemitism (and the related issue of racism) over the years, especially in the past 10 years or so of my inquiry into Pound, but I confess I've learned more about its history and psychology from Arendt's treatise than from anything else I've read.

I won't attempt anything like a synopsis, but wanted to share a remarkably succinct statement from the book I just across, that capsulizes a great deal of the history she covers (roughly from ancient Greece to WW II, but more specifically starting in the 16thC), as well as referring to the post-Dreyfusard situation in France.

In a passage on Proust and the French fin de siècle in relation to the French Revolution (following up on her immediately preceding discussion of Disraeli and 19thC England), in a detailed discussion about one of her main themes — the distinction between political and societal acceptance/rejection of Jews — she mentions almost offhandedly, "The victory of bourgeois values over the citizen's sense of responsibility."

This struck me as a revealing insight not only about 19thC France and Europe, but as highly relevant to American history and a great deal of our contemporary experience in the US.

And I will send your email on to Aurora, Dylan and JC. We've all wondered about and worried for you. They'll be glad to hear.

Love,

Michael (hard for me not to sign as "Dad", but)

Onward!