

**'When the chips are down':  
Hannah Arendt's thinking of crises and the escapism of social theory**

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**Abstract**

With the outbreak of the global capitalist crisis, sociologists have lamented the absence of crisis theorems as much as celebrated the opportunity for new theoretical adventures. Though the quest for its causes and therapies seems a welcomed critical response, it also hides an uncritical normalization of the crisis itself. In this paper I contend that Hannah Arendt warned against this attitude decades ago. 'No theories, forget all theories' was her contentious call. In her view, 'when the chips are down' the very idea of a theory of crisis becomes self-contradictory and packed with perplexities, for it prevents us from dealing with crises as worldly 'events.'

I reclaim the importance of Arendt as a "thinker of crises", rather than as a "theorist of crisis", and discuss the extent to which her work challenges conventional views of crisis in social theory. Firstly, I argue that Arendt grounds her understanding of crisis in a thorough critique of the reification of rupture. Secondly, I examine the scope of her pluralist phenomenology of crises as an assembling of events (epistemological, historical and political). I conclude reflecting on her demand for reconsidering our 'attitude toward the world' in times of crisis through the 'modesty' of critical thinking instead of the 'arrogance' of knowledge.

Key words: Hannah Arendt, crisis, social theory, critique, thinking.

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