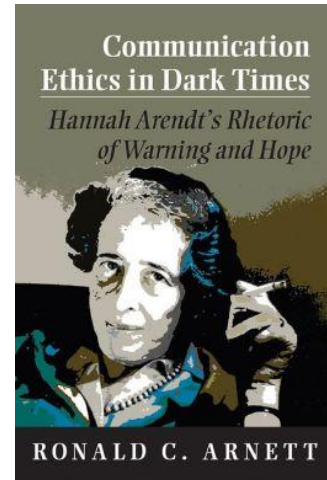


Ronald C. Arnett, **Communication Ethics in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Rhetoric of Warning and Hope**, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013, 320 pp., \$38.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by
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Ronald C. Arnett's (2013) most recent text, **Communication Ethics in Dark Times: Hannah Arendt's Rhetoric of Warning and Hope**, uses the work of Arendt to address the "failed social project" of modernity. Modernity's threefold emphasis on progress, efficiency, and individual autonomy directs one's attention away from the important act of contemplation. The love of doing is lost on an unending journey toward the unattainable. Through the lens of modernity, the shadows of distraction serve as blinders in one's relationship with self, other, and context. Despite the illusions of "artificial light" cast by modernity, Arnett attends to the overwhelming "darkness" of this historical moment through a communication ethics framework. Drawing on 15 of Arendt's major scholarly works, Arnett masterfully weaves Arendt's personal narrative and theoretical concepts to illuminate the misleading values represented by modernity. The work of Arendt portrays a picture of hope, interwoven with periodic warnings, intended for a society overwhelmed by darkness—not too dissimilar from the current historical moment in which we find ourselves.



As Arnett posits, "Arendt functioned as a communicative ethics prophet calling out the shortcomings of a modern world propelled by too much unearned confidence and optimism, defining modernity as an era of 'bad faith'" (p. 5). Each chapter of Arnett's book uses one of the works by Arendt as a point of entry into this critique of modernity. Arnett casts a wide, yet focused, net in this scholarly text. The chapters include an overview of Arendt's personal journey, a portrait of the larger historical context during the time of her writing, a summary of the guiding metaphors found in her work, and a concluding analysis of Arendt's lessons for navigating these periods of darkness. Responding directly to a significant weakness of modernity, the narratives from both Arnett and Arendt encourage contemplation and hope for the reader. Additionally, the philosophical claims found in this book provide a roadmap for discovering fulfillment and "authentic light" on one's journey, particularly during moments of darkness.

Arendt takes on the major issues of her time in her writings, beginning with her dissertation written during the late 1920s. Her work, as illustrated by Arnett, addresses many of the issues plaguing society, including, but not limited to: a misplaced emphasis on possessions, an unrestrained desire to belong, an obsession with totalitarian expansion that dehumanizes the Other, a loss of faith in tradition and authority, an absence of the contemplative due to "modernity's amnesia," a "false optimism" caused by the hope for continual progress, and a reliance on revolution rather than on public governing structures. By attempting to unmask modernity, Arendt foregrounds the Nazi rise to power as a seminal period of darkness for modernity.

The major contributions of Arnett's text lie in his synthesis of Arendt's ideas and the connections made to the work of communication ethics. Each chapter provides a useful list of strategies for meeting darkness with an orientation toward authentic light. Several of these recommendations include the pragmatic ability to meet existence on its own terms, the need for human discernment, reflection, and contemplation before, during, and after action, and the protection of interspaces between persons. For Arendt, "modernity fails as it attempts to escape burden, rejecting the very soil upon which a meaningful life is built—the meeting of toil and mud of everyday life" (p. 262). Arnett reclaims this burden and uses the rhetoric of Arendt as an opportunity for making sense of this unclear direction.

Communication Ethics in Dark Times may prove useful for advanced undergraduate or graduate communication ethics seminars, courses dedicated to the study of phenomenology and existentialism, and certainly courses centered on the life and work of Hannah Arendt. Additionally, this work may add a spark of philosophical complexity to courses in interpersonal, small group, and organizational communication. This unique interpretive project adds an important element to the ongoing conversation on modernity, values, and issues of light/darkness in communication ethics. In a society often plagued by periodic episodes of darkness, the writings, teachings, and prophetic insights of Arendt, as captured by Arnett, remain current and increasingly important. As Arnett concludes, "A reflective life is our only hope of freedom and our best shot at change as we meet an existence that calls forth responsibility in response to that which we would not expect or desire" (p. 263).