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**CERES Brown Bag Talk  
NON-SOVEREIGNTY  
AND NON-INSTRUMENTALITY  
AS PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL ACTION.  
HANNAH ARENDT READS ROSA LUXEMBURG**

**Christian Lotz, Ph.D.  
Professor, Department of Philosophy**



In a 1956 letter to Kurt Blumenfeld, Hannah Arendt mentions, with pride, that after a talk at Berkeley and during a “boozed-up party,” students told her that they thought of her as “Rosa’s second coming,” even though Arendt had not made any mention of Luxemburg during her talk. Not incidentally, 1956 is also the year of the Hungarian revolution, about which Arendt wrote an essay that she dedicated to the memory of Luxemburg. Although Luxemburg does not have as prominent a place in Arendt’s thinking as other political philosophers, she comes up in her work at decisive points.

It seems to me that the real connection between Luxemburg and Arendt is their non-sovereign understanding of political action as something that occurs as a “miracle” in our world, which is increasingly determined by social necessities, behaviorist concepts of action, capitalist dispossessions, media spectacles, public relations strategies, and technocratic visions of politics. Moreover, their concepts of freedom stand opposed to a certain modern tradition, running from Hobbes to Schmitt, that claims that the political realm and political freedom are founded upon sovereignty. Due to the pluralist “spontaneity of the others” that we encounter in public, we have to accept that we are unable to directly rule over others, unless we confuse politics with the implementation of violent means. As Arendt puts it, “where men, whether as individuals or in organized



groups, wish to be sovereign, they must abolish freedom. But if they wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce.” Against this background, I will talk about what I take to be the most important aspect of the Arendt-Luxemburg connection.