

**DIS/EMPOWERING FACTORS:  
EXPLORING THE SOURCES OF POLITICAL AGENCY**

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**Abstract:** In this talk, I theorise the factors that enhance or diminish the political agency of individuals. Drawing on the political thought of Hannah Arendt, I understand political agency to refer to the individual's capacity to act in concert with other people to shape or respond to public issues. Arendt notably set out only two necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for political action: plurality and speech. Given that activists have proved time and again that political action may arise in the most inhospitable of places, we are well-advised to follow Arendt in eschewing more comprehensive lists of necessary conditions political agency, which tend to lead us to over-predict powerlessness. We can, however, speak productively about and explore phenomena that generally enhance or diminish political agency. To this end, I propose five categories of dis/empowering factors: affiliations; spaces; things and tools; basic laws and institutions; and, hermeneutical resources. These factors affect the political agency of individuals both externally and internally. A lack of practical resources for effective political action tends to engender a sense that political action is futile or the prerogative of a select few. If this sense is widespread, fewer people will engage in political action; consequently, the empowering factors deteriorate, and become fewer and farther between. Conversely, more and better resources for action tend to engender more political action, greater faith in its effectiveness – or at least meaningfulness – and so on.