Hard Times: Public Philosophy or Political Philosophy?

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*Abstract***:** The article investigates the notion of hard times with a view to enlighten the specific challenge they pose to political theory. Hannah Arendt's understanding of dark times and John Rawls's characterization of political crises constitute the starting point to specify the character of hard times. Further distinguishing features of hard times are explored by contrasting them to normal times and by comparing them with emergency situations. On similar bases, the article emphasizes the cognitive and normative disorientation experienced during hard times, characterized as periods of rupture in which ordinary principles prove inappropriate or unserviceable. Moreover, the article distinguishes two approaches to political theory – public philosophy and political philosophy – and it assesses their relative merits and limits in tackling and coping with hard times.

*Keywords***:** Hard times, Political philosophy, Public philosophy, Emergency.