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The Jewish Judgement of Hannah Arendt¹

Abstract

In June 2017, The Vienna Wiesenthal Institute (VWI) organised a joint workshop in Vienna with the International Research Centre for Cultural Sciences (IFK) on Hannah Arendt. This workshop aimed to look more closely at Arendt's understanding of judgement and the constant tension in her thought between universalism and particularism. This also serves as the point of departure for this essay. I would like to start with a couple of questions which were not only of interest for Hannah Arendt but for all scholars dealing with issues of genocide and mass death and how to judge it: Are Nazi murderers just a bunch of criminals? Can a legal system be the appropriate tool or its courts the venue for dealing with the traumas of past atrocities, the legacy of the Holocaust, or the unprecedented suffering of millions of victims? What does that do to our faculty of judgement which, of course, is not only the formal decision given by a court of law, but also our capacity to give an informed opinion and our capacity to cross the bridge from the particular to the universal and back?

Hannah Arendt wrote more often than not in the tradition of the great eighteenth-century cosmopolitan thinker, Immanuel Kant. Both asked their readers to expand the boundaries of their knowledge. In Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, he demanded *enlarged thought*, which means nothing more than broader and wider thinking as the condition for cosmopolitanism. It means most of all disregard for the subjective private conditions of our own judgement without giving up judgement entirely. Quite the opposite is true, however. The cosmopolitan condition requires us to take on one another's viewpoint without giving up our own. Judging involves our horizons of knowledge. Without these we cannot judge. Our thinking encompasses a plurality of meanings. People absorb within themselves the viewpoints of others alongside their own and thereby create a common world out of difference. This is the problem of cosmopolitanism: one does not become the 'other', one remains who one is, but one has the imagination to understand what that feeling of 'being' might constitute for others through their words and thoughts. These were the frames of reference for the Vienna workshop.

Thus, we have to leave Kant's world of 'eternal peace' and universalism and move beyond it to Arendt's particular world of being a Jewish woman who had to leave Nazi Germany, had to escape from the Nazis from France to the United States, and was for a large part of her life engaged in Jewish politics and thinking. I will argue that Arendt should be grasped as a Jewish thinker not only because she was intimately involved in the political debate and activity that defined Jewish life in the years before and after the Holocaust. Arendt defined her Jewishness first and foremost as a politi-

¹ This essay was written during my stay as Senior Fellow at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies in the summer of 2017. I would like to thank Greta Anderl, Éva Kovács, and Béla Rásky for their generous hospitality at the institute.

cal position and a political space. Participation in Jewish matters is the key here. She participated in Zionist mobilisation when she was still living in Germany and in the founding of the World Jewish Congress during her time in Paris. She retrieved Jewish books, manuscripts, and other artefacts from Europe in her work for the American Jewish organisation Jewish Cultural Reconstruction.² She spoke and wrote as a Jew when she discussed the nature of guilt, responsibility, and memory after the destruction of European Jewry. Arendt's politics, moulded in the heat of twentieth-century Jewish activism, left a deep imprint on her political theory. Without grasping her specific engagements as a Jew we cannot comprehend her more general pronouncements on rights, totalitarianism, and a host of other topics.³

What we tried to accomplish in the workshop was to reconstruct the intellectual origins of a human and social vision rooted, as exemplified by Arendt, in the belief that even in a secular age we are apparently blessed with the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong and good and evil through exercising our power of judgement. We may stress the sanctity of this world and speak of the autonomy of the individual as one of the fundamental principles of modern society. Thus, Jewish intellectuals were looking for universal guidelines, both within and outside the state. This trend was exemplified by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), who came from a religious Jewish family and described the birth of civil religion at the end of the nineteenth century. Durkheim was a firm believer in the religion of humanity, the worldly belief in salvation through the action of human beings. It is this religion of humanity that also allows Jews to be incorporated into the universality of the rational state. A similar point can be made today about the 'secular' religion of cosmopolitan morality: it, too, has transcendental features and places the human being in the foreground. Clearly, not only Jewish intellectuals were concerned with moral individualism, which is both transcendental and of this world, but also it had a special urgency for them. The particular world of devout Jewry was no longer sufficient to cope with the challenges of modernity. This was very much Arendt's concern, but of course not only hers. Behind this lies the crucial question of whether a Jew can assimilate, meaning to become like everybody else. Or is the idea oxymoronic by definition, because the more one assimilates, the less one is a Jew? And if one still feels very much like a Jew, despite adopting the clothes and manners and way of life of one's respective mainstream culture, then this proves that one has not yet fully assimilated. This is a constant move between particularism to universalism and back.

The main point here is that the universal and particular exist in a dialectical relation. They do not oppose each other; they define and influence each other. This is a crucial point in Arendt's enterprise. The universal means what it does because the particulars are its background, and the particulars mean what they do because the universal is their background. As a result, when one changes, the other changes – but importantly neither disappears. This works in the same way with the notion of the 'assimilated Jew'. Universalism and particularism need to be thought together. Arendt

2 On Arendt's work with Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, see: Elisabeth Gallas, *Das Leichenhaus der Bücher*, Göttingen 2016; Natan Sznajder, *Jewish Memory and the Cosmopolitan Order*, Cambridge (MA), 2011.

3 A groundbreaking work on Arendt and Jewish identity is Richard Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, Cambridge (MA) 1996. See also: Pierre Birnbaum, *Hannah Arendt: Hannah and Rahel, Fugitives from Palestine*, in: *Geography of Hope. Exile, the Enlightenment, Disassimilation*, Stanford 2008, 203–241. Arendt's writings on Jewish matters were bundled and published in: Jerome Kohn/Ron Feldman (ed.), *Hannah Arendt. The Jewish Writings*, New York 2007. Many of the essays published there – especially those of the 1940s – were scattered throughout small Jewish journals and magazines, and some (like her columns in the German émigré magazine *Aufbau*) were available only in German. With the publication of this volume, her writings on Jewish matters can now be incorporated in her political canon.

expressed this sentiment in an early essay in 1945 on guilt and responsibility asking what 'universal' responsibility means? The essay concludes with her comments about universal responsibility and its relation to the concept of humanity, which she sees as part of the Jewish tradition: "Perhaps those Jews, to whose forefathers we owe the conception of the idea of humanity, knew something about that burden when each year they used to say: 'Our Father and King, we have sinned before you,' taking not only the sins of their own community but all human offenses upon themselves".⁴

Arendt debated the question of the criminal nature of Nazism immediately after the war and defeat. The context was the Nuremberg Trials. The beginning of this thinking comes to light in a 1946 exchange of letters with her former dissertation supervisor, Karl Jaspers. Arendt, who later became famous and notorious among Jewish circles for her own published account of another Nazi trial, the one against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961, did not really believe in the capacity of legal language to deal with crimes which can be called 'crimes against humanity'. Such crimes, in her opinion, ruptured the limits of the law. She inquired whether we are really equipped to deal with a type of guilt that is beyond any crime – while at the same time she saw the Jewish victims as endowed with innocence beyond goodness.⁵ Karl Jaspers was well equipped to answer her. His 1946 book *On the Question of German Guilt* remains not only a contemporary product of Germany's dealing with the past, but has recently turned into a paradigmatic reference point for a political and philosophical analysis of guilt, especially Jaspers' distinction between criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical guilt.⁶ Regarding the first two types, Jaspers defined criminal guilt as those acts for which one may be held liable in a court of law, while political guilt refers to the responsibility one bears for the political system in which one lives by virtue of being a citizen. Jaspers distinguished between criminal and political guilt, which are public and external, and moral and metaphysical guilt, which are private and internal. In the case of moral guilt, the individual must come to terms with the breakdown of his or her conscience after the fact; it refers to whatever personal failings one has exhibited, where only one's conscience can be the judge. This is a type of guilt that grew out of having decided to make one's conscience subservient to the state. Metaphysical guilt is even further removed from the human realm. It is a cherishing of one's guilt as a quasi-religious experience through which one can rise to greater spiritual heights. In metaphysical guilt, one is only answerable to God. Thus, Jaspers answered Arendt that he did not wish to bestow any form of "satanic greatness" on the Nazis. Rather, they should be treated for exactly what they were: criminals, in all their banality and triviality. Thus the concept of banality already appeared in this exchange in 1946.⁷

Arendt stirred controversy in American, German, and Israeli circles for her portrayal of Eichmann and her sharp criticisms of Europe's Jewish leadership.⁸ She clear-

4 Hannah Arendt, *Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility*, in: *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, New York 1999, 121–132, here 131–132.

5 Lotte Kohler/Hans Saner (ed.), *Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers. Correspondence 1926–1969*, New York 1985 (see the letters from August and October 1946).

6 Karl Jaspers, *Über die Schuldfrage*, Munich 1946. The book was translated a year later as: *The Question of German Guilt*, New York 1947.

7 Thus Jaspers to Arendt on 5 October 1946: "You say that what the Nazis did cannot be comprehended as a 'crime' – I am not altogether comfortable with your view, because a guilt that goes beyond all criminal guilt inevitably takes on a streak of 'greatness' – of satanic greatness – which is, for me, as inappropriate for the Nazis as all the talk about the 'demonic' element in Hitler and so forth. It seems to me that we have to see these things in their total banality": *Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers: Kohler/Saner (ed.), Correspondence*, 62. This is the beginning of *banality* sixteen years before the Eichmann trial.

8 For early accounts of the controversy, see a collection of essays in: Friedrich Krummacher, *Die Kontroverse. Hannah Arendt, Eichmann und die Juden*, Munich 1964.

ly did not shy away from judging. Just the opposite is the case. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) became one of the most controversial books of its time and probably the one she is best known for today in the Jewish world. It can also be considered perhaps the most Jewish book she ever wrote. What made this book so famous was not only the phrase *banality of evil*, which nurtured an interpretative literature of its own in regard to perpetrators of mass crimes.⁹ Arendt's interpretation gave rise to interpretations of the Holocaust as bureaucratic and mechanical, even though this was apparently not her intention at all. What made the book electrifyingly famous was the enormously heated debate that it set off, among both Jews and non-Jews, about how the Holocaust should be understood and how it should be talked and written about. And it is a report about a trial, which to this very day provides us with a language to think about the atrocities of the Holocaust. But *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was not only a book about the Holocaust. Nor was it only a continuation of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that dealt among other things with the legacy of the Holocaust for human rights. It was a book about the moral evaluation of Nazi crimes as an example of the ever-present possibility of mass murder in modern times. And it was a book about Jewish responsibility and politics during dark times. Finally, it was a book about Israel and the meaning of Israel for Jews. And that is why the book stirs so much controversy to this day in Israel.¹⁰ Arendt was not willing to recognise the foundational moment the trial had for the young state of Israel. And if she did recognise it, she was not willing to accept it.¹¹ Clearly, this is an astonishingly apolitical perception of the trial, coming from somebody who first of all defined herself as a political theorist. It was indeed as though Arendt was not willing to think politically in that very most political moment in Israel's history. This is even more surprising considering Arendt's extremely political readings of the American and French revolutions which she worked on around the same time she travelled to Jerusalem.¹² It is as if Athens could be political, whereas Jerusalem was supposed to remain theological.¹³ This point becomes quite clear in the by now famous exchange of letters between her and Gershom Scholem from 1963 discussing her views of the trial. The exchange has become notorious due to Scholem's claim that Arendt lacked "love of the Jewish People". However, in her reply, Arendt relayed a rather interesting discussion she had had with Golda Meir in Jerusalem at the time of the trial. Meir, who was foreign minister at the time, met Arendt for tea and apparently told her that as a Socialist she did not believe in God, but in the Jewish people. Arendt wrote to Scholem that she was rather shocked by Meir's statement and told Scholem that she should have answered: "The greatness

9 Amongst many others, see: Richard Bernstein, *Radical Evil*, Cambridge (MA) 2002; Susan Neiman, *Das Böse Denken*, Frankfurt 2004; Bettina Stangneth, *Böses Denken*, Hamburg 2016; Michel Wieviorka, *Evil*, Cambridge (MA) 2012.

10 For a good example for strong criticism and rejection of Arendt's work in Israel, see: Elhanan Yakira, *Hannah Arendt, the Holocaust, and Zionism: A Story of a Failure*, in: *Israel Studies* 11 (2006) 3, 31-61. One of the strongest criticisms of the book was put forth by the legal advisor to the trial, Jacob Robinson, a former Jewish Lithuanian minority rights activist who worked for the Israeli government and its UN delegation in New York: Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight. The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative*, New York 1965. Robinson's book is indeed the Jewish answer to Arendt's Jewish political judgement.

11 See also an essay by Hans Blumenberg which was not published until 2015. Blumenberg accused Arendt of being "truthful" without any consideration of context and people: Hans Blumenberg, *Rigorismus der Wahrheit*, Berlin 2015.

12 Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, Chicago 1963.

13 For a contextualisation of Arendt's thought within Weimar Jewish theological debates, see: Peter Eli Gordon, *The Concept of the Apolitical: German Jewish Thought and Weimar Political Theology*, in: *Social Research* 74 (2007) 3, 855-878. It seems that when it came to Israel, Arendt did not really reject Weimar political theology, as Gordon claimed in this essay.

of the people was once that it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love toward him was greater than its fear”, she wrote. “And now this people believes only in itself? What good can come of that?”¹⁴

In Israel, the trial was first of all conceived as an act of sovereignty. More than that, it was an act of incorporation of Holocaust victims into the Israeli collective. Both these political aspects of the trial were unacceptable for Arendt, even though she had no misgivings at all about Israel conducting the trial. The Israeli perception of the trial was presented and represented by the Attorney General of Israel and prosecutor of the trial, Gideon Hausner, a lawyer and politician born in then Galician Lemberg in 1915, son of a rabbi and a Zionist who emigrated to Palestine together with his family in 1927. Hausner and Arendt represented two different poles not only regarding how to judge Eichmann, but also how to judge Jewish history and the Holocaust. The fact alone that Hausner conducted the trial in Hebrew was a sign of Israeli sovereignty. Eichmann was prosecuted in Hebrew, the renewed language of Israelis in their own land. It was Israel’s Declaration of Independence put into practice.¹⁵ Hausner summarised this in his opening remarks:

“When I stand before you here, Judges of Israel, to lead the Prosecution of Adolf Eichmann, I am not standing alone. With me are six million accusers. But they cannot rise to their feet and point an accusing finger towards him who sits in the dock and cry: *I accuse*. For their ashes are piled up on the hills of Auschwitz and the fields of Treblinka, and are strewn in the forests of Poland. Their graves are scattered throughout the length and breadth of Europe. Their blood cries out, but their voice is not heard. Therefore I will be their spokesman and in their name I will unfold the awesome indictment.”¹⁶

Resonating with biblical tone while also referring to Emile Zola’s famous indictment against those who condemned Dreyfus more than sixty years earlier, Hausner set the frame for Israel’s understanding of the Holocaust and the prosecution of Eichmann. Arendt’s views were, of course, more Jewish than Israeli, and her stern criticism of the trial more than anything else a Jewish critique of territorial Zionism and its claims to exclusivity. Arendt and Hausner clashed on the question of what Jewish political agency meant and whether the Jews were in need of their own nation state.¹⁷

Her thoughts on the trial were read by many of her Jewish detractors as an attack on a Jewish nation still in its infancy. In many ways, it was. It was almost like a prophetic attack on the *reasons of state* recalling the prophet Amos with his iconic words: *Woe to those who are at ease in Zion*. Arendt did not want the Jews to feel at ease in

14 Arendt’s letter to Scholem is reproduced in Hannah Arendt, *The Eichmann Controversy: A Letter to Gershom Scholem*, in: *The Jewish Writings*, 465-471, here 467.

15 This is the excerpt of the Israeli Declaration of Independence of May 1948 relating to what would be called The Holocaust: The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people – the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe – was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Eretz-Israel the Jewish State, which would open the gates of the homeland wide to every Jew and confer upon the Jewish people the status of a fully privileged member of the comity of nations. See: https://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm (1 November 2017).

16 See: The Nizkor project. The General Attorney’s Opening Speech; <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-006-007-008-01.html> (2 August 2017).

17 There exists a furious debate about Israel and Zionism, with many critics of Israel and Zionism mobilising Arendt’s thinking in order to write a defence of either a two-state solution in Israel/Palestine or to underwrite a strong criticism of the state of Israel. See especially: Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*, New York 2012, especially 11-180 and Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge (MA) 2005. These are books which assume that Arendt took an anti-Zionist stance and which identify with this position. It seems that these debates are not about Arendt but rather take her as an intellectual shield for their own agenda. And these critics confuse Arendt’s position with their own. For an American Jewish perspective on the Eichmann trial which also influenced Arendt’s account, see: Yosal Rogat, *The Eichmann Trial and the Rule of Law*, Santa Barbara, 1961.

Zion even sixteen years after the Holocaust. Her prophetic zeal was another form of a Jewish coming to terms with the catastrophe. For her, sovereignty was not the solution, but an ethical Judaism as she saw it. It was a kind of prophetic impulse trying to bridge the solidarity with the Jewish people and its newly founded state and a divine and irreproachable logic located beyond matter and statehood. It was one of the ways to move from particularism to universalism and back again. These were German Jewish sensibilities and fantasies of assimilation translated into American Jewish ethnicity, without taking a stop at the state of Israel.¹⁸ For many (like Scholem), this was unforgivable, as unforgivable as her reproaches of some of the Jewish leadership who in her eyes collaborated with the Nazis. And she did not want or was not able to consider the perspective of the Jewish victims of the time who were not able to adopt a remote analytical position on the Holocaust. For them, the perpetrators were nothing but antisemitic monsters.¹⁹

However, I think that Arendt's *New Yorker* articles and the book that resulted from them were the source of endless misunderstanding, both at the time and still today. For many, *the banality of evil* formula is a way of normalising the crimes of the Holocaust: Anyone could have committed them, there is an Eichmann in every one of us. Eichmann is no antisemite. Banality is thus the deepest insight, the final dismissal of charges. One of the consequences of the trial was, of course, the changing status of victimhood, its transformation from something to be ashamed of to a sign of grace and moral righteousness.²⁰ But how can the concept of banality be handled legally? How can the law retain meaning to the world of humanity when all we see are clichés? It is certainly true that if anyone has interpreted *the banality of evil* to mean that Arendt thinks that Nazi crimes are trivial, they are profoundly wrong. However – and this makes it a little more difficult to handle – it is true that *banality* in the phrase *banality of evil* does mean *everyday* or *commonplace*, but it also means unbelievably trivial and boring. It also refers to thoughts that are so commonplace – everyday – that they are not worth mentioning, meaning clichés. That's why it stands out. No one knows exactly what it means, the interpretations are just too various, but everybody remembers it today. One can even argue that it is the most remembered cliché of Arendt's work. And the reason for both of these phenomena is that in its own way, this phrase is like poetry, and I mean that quite literally. It combines two words that seemingly no-one has ever combined before (*banality* and *evil*), which results in this sudden tingle of something new. So talking about what the word normally means only gets one half-way, because this is not its normal use, thus it is not its normal meaning. What Arendt was mainly referring to with this phrase was Eichmann's reasons and rationalisations: the reasons he did what he did, and the reasons why consciously committing one of the greatest mass murders in history did not bother him. She came to two conclusions when listening to him, and they both stunned her precisely because of the enormous distance between the tininess of this man's concerns and the enormity of the crimes. It did not seem possible that the greatest criminal in history could be a stupid little

18 It is no coincidence that this struck Gershom Scholem as presumptuous. Scholem's writings were also a clear cut way against the fantasy of German Jewish assimilation. See especially: "Wider dem Mythos des Deutsch-Jüdischen Gesprächs" from December 1962, published half a year prior to his correspondence with Arendt on the Eichmann trial. He was not willing to interpret what he perceived as Arendt's lack of *Ahavat Israel* (Love of Israel) as another entry into the German Jewish assimilation debate. This debate came to an end for him with the Nazis. Scholem's essay was published in: *Judaica* 2, Frankfurt 1970, 7-11.

19 Dan Diner, Hannah Arendt Reconsidered: On the Banal and the Evil in her Holocaust Narrative, in: *New German Critique* 71 (1997), 177-190.

20 For this angle of the trial, see: Shoshana Felman, Theaters of Justice: Arendt in Jerusalem, the Eichmann Trial, and the Redefinition of Legal Meaning in the Wake of the Holocaust, in: *Critical Inquiry* 27 (2001) 2, 201-238.

man that you could not even wreak a satisfying revenge on. She was clearly on some level expecting, and hoping for, a devil, for the villain like one finds in an action film, someone enormously obviously dramatically evil that one could get some satisfaction out of blowing to hell and who would explain it all simply by their presence: an enormously evil person does an enormously evil thing for enormously evil reasons which perhaps he rationalises with enormously evil rationalisations.²¹

What really struck her with Eichmann were his “magic phrases”. I think this was the referent that was foremost in her mind when she coined that phrase. The way she described it, they would be questioning him, and he would be answering questions in a slack and meandering way as though he had not really been paying much attention during a normal boring workday to ideas like this, until suddenly they asked a question about why he made some key decision and he would light up and remember an incredibly banal phrase that was clearly like a mantra to him. He would repeat exactly the same phrase in exactly the same words that he had used in his head twenty years earlier. And the phrase would be so trivial – the bureaucratic equivalent of a sports cliché – that she just could not believe that that is what the turning points turned on. But she came to believe that this was what the soul of the man was made of. His motivational centre, the place he reached down when shoring up certainties, was a storehouse of platitudes that he was very proud of having himself created. And just as in sports, if these clichés allowed him to focus and work harder and have more faith in himself, the real motivation that made him want to focus was ambition. The thoughts were simply mantras to make him work harder, or slogans to convince others. What he really wanted was to advance within the system. He wanted to solve the problem his superiors gave him in a way that impressed them. He took initiative in foreseeing problems – or in modern jargon, he was proactive. But the amazing thing was how these mantras, which fit into this organisation, completely cut him off from any other considerations than instrumental ones and career ones. Clearly, he was a clown and a buffoon in the courtroom, the way Arendt described him. He was like a child who lived in a video game and is taken back to his bedroom. He was completely out of context in the courtroom and the only way he had back to his old life was via the clichés and the banalities, which he put on like he put on his uniform. That was, at least, the Adolf Eichmann she saw in her mind. And so those mantras are literally the banalities of evil. And then, once she wrote it, that phrase got extended too much of the rest of his reasoning at key turning points, which time and time again were focussed on how it would affect his career rather than how it would affect the world. And placing the two things side by side, his career and the Holocaust, means that he focussed on the incredibly trivial rather than the enormous: the banalities rather than the enormities. And then Arendt named an essence. With a poetic ring that seemed like it made perfect sense while hovering just beyond our grasp: *The banality of evil*. The rest is literally *history*.

By the time it was over, however, the Eichmann trial had paradoxically initiated a massive universalisation of Nazi evil, best captured by Hannah Arendt’s enormously controversial insistence that the trial compelled recognition of the *banality of evil*. Eichmann could be *everyman*. The trial and its aftermath eventually became framed in a manner that narrowed the once great distance between post-war democratic audiences and evil Nazis, connecting them rather than isolating them from one

21 As she explained in a German interview with Gunter Gaus in 1965: “But I was really of the opinion that he was a buffoon [*Hanswurst* in the original]. I’ll tell you this: I read the transcripts of his police investigation, thirty-six hundred pages, read it, read it very carefully, and I do not know how many times I laughed – laughed out loud! People took this reaction in a bad way. I cannot do anything about it.” See: Hannah Arendt, “What remains, the language remains”, in: *Essays in Understanding*, 1-23, here 16.

another. This connection between audience and antagonist intensified the trauma's tragic dramaturgy. Yet Arendt's point was much more radical even though her critics were right when they claimed that she misconceived Adolf Eichmann: it is not the intention which counts but the outcome. Motives are less important than many people believe. Even modern genocide is the outcome of a very sophisticated division of labour where everybody chips in. For Arendt, intentions (like antisemitism) play a lesser role than the outcome. More generally, Arendt's commentary spoke to a generation for whom the Second World War would serve as a touchstone of moral experience as such. What Arendt called "the haunting specter of universal cooperation"²² with evil – whether as a foot soldier, collaborator, or bystander – found post-war expression in anxious texts of self-scrutiny, from existentialist manifestos in Paris to Stanley Milgram's famous shock experiments in New Haven.²³ However, Arendt categorically rejected the notion that there is an 'Eichmann in every one of us', but her insistence that the success or failure of mass murder depended in part on the choices of discrete individuals in discrete situations naturally led readers to ask: What would I have done had I been in their shoes? As Arendt wrote in her essay *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*: "[A]ll that matters is the insight that no man, however strong, can ever accomplish anything, good or bad, without the help of others." This is the point she made about the modern perpetrator. This is what modern evil looks like. It is a joint effort.²⁴ This collaborative dimension of mass murder was another reason Arendt took the emphasis off motive. When evil is sufficiently large-scale, not everyone involved will share the same intentions; people will act for a variety of reasons, many of them having nothing to do with the criminal nature of the enterprise itself. This was her judgement. She might have discovered the typical modern perpetrator, but she might have been wrong about Adolf Eichmann being such a type.

We know more about Eichmann now, particularly because Arendt's thoughts initiated research on Eichmann. We know today that he was a fanatical fighter for his cause. As he put it himself:

"I must honestly tell you that had we killed 10.3 million Jews I would be satisfied and would say, good, we've exterminated the enemy [...] We would have completed the task for our Blut and our Volk and the freedom of nations had we exterminated the most cunning people in the world [...] I'm also to blame that...the idea of a real, total elimination could not be fulfilled [...] I was an inadequate man put in a position where, really, I could have and should have done more."²⁵

22 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, New York 1963, 126.

23 Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, New York 1974. One only has to look at the work of Albert Camus in the context of French collaboration with the Nazis to see these sensibilities.

24 This essay was first published in 1964 as a direct response to the controversy. It was reproduced in Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgement*, New York 2003, 17-43, here 47. She ended the essay with a clear indication that her thoughts should not be confused with a socio-psychological account of obedience: "Much would be gained if we could eliminate this pernicious word 'obedience' from our vocabulary of moral and political thought. If we thought these matters through, we might regain some measure of self-confidence and even pride, that is regain what in former times was called the dignity or honour of man, not perhaps of mankind, but of the status of being human"; *Ibid.*, 48.

25 This Eichmann quotation is from the now famous Sassen interviews Eichmann gave in Argentina prior to his abduction to Israel. These interviews were analysed and contextualised by Bettina Stangneth, *Eichmann vor Jerusalem. Das unbehelligte Leben eines Massenmörders*, Zurich 2011. The book was published in English as *idem.*, *Eichmann before Jerusalem. The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer*, New York 2015. The above quotation is from 302-303. The English publication of the book was used by many Arendt critics to prove her wrong. Thus, the quotation was used by Mark Lilla in a long essay he published in the *New York Review of Books* in November 2013 titled: *Arendt & Eichmann: The New Truth*: I am not entirely sure whether this quotation really dismisses Arendt's ideas about Eichmann and the modern perpetrator.

I am not saying she was wrong about Eichmann. She may have been right about him, but not right about *him*. She could not know back then, since research on Eichmann was basically initiated by her. He was more 'responsible' than people knew in 1961, more in charge, more ideologically inclined to do what he did. But that does not take anything away from her willingness to judge him as a Jew. Before Eichmann, however, and between her book on totalitarianism and the Eichmann book, Arendt wrote these beautiful sentences in *The Human Condition*. They remind us what is at stake when we think of mass death and evil:

"The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things – works and deeds and words – which would deserve to be and, at least, to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals can find their place where everything is immortal except themselves. By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave non-perishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a 'divine nature'."²⁶

To sit in judgement was for her one way of staying alive under the constant presence of mass death. This could very well be the meaning of Jewish judgement.

26 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, Chicago 1958, 19.

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Natan Sznajder, The Jewish Judgement of Hannah Arendt, in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention.
Methods. Documentation. 4 (2017) 2, 88-97.
<http://doi.org/cfzf>

Context: Hannah Arendt

Copy Editor: Tim Corbett

S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON.
ISSN 2408-9192

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4 (2017) 2
<http://doi.org/cf7m>

Editor: Éva Kovács/Béla Rásky
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S:I.M.O.N. is the semi-annual e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies
(VWI) in English and German.