

Chapter 5: BANALITY, JUSTICE, AND TRUTH

Hannah Arendt and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

Judging from her early life Hannah Arendt would seem to be the writer least likely to find herself at the center of controversy—except possibly in the small, sheltered world of academic philosophers. But the world she was born into collapsed into world war and Nazi anti-Semitism. She barely escaped with her life. But she never found peace. The controversy that surrounded her *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil* was so furious, so spiteful, and so vindictive toward her personally that it was like a continuation of the war—with her fellow-survivors and their relatives and friends now turning on her. Bitterness toward her continues to seethe a quarter century later among people who can hardly remember her book or have never even read it.

Arendt was born in 1906 in Königsberg, Germany to a well-to-do, secular Jewish family. Her grandfather had left a fortune after building the largest trading firm in the city. She was only seven when her father died, but she and her mother were financially secure even before her mother married again. Hannah taught herself to read and write before the age of five. She continued to develop into a precocious, high-achieving, strong-willed girl who excelled in most subjects while memorizing pages and pages of poetry. (She read and wrote poetry throughout her life.) Although the family was not religious, Arendt's mother taught her pride in her Jewishness, instructing her that if a teacher made any statement disparaging Jews, she was to get up at once and walk out of the class. (She would occasionally enjoy a day off, and her mother would go to the school to lodge a protest before she went back.) After the First World War, inflation seriously depleted the family fortune, and by the time Arendt was ready to enter the university as a philosophy student, she did so, like most other students, on a shoestring.

The two major influences of her university years were the great philosophers of the period between the world wars: Martin Heidegger at Marburg and Karl Jaspers at Heidelberg. At eighteen she had an affair with Heidegger (then in his mid-thirties) that left her devastated, then resigned and friendly, then estranged as he turned toward the Nazis. After World War Two she forgivingly renewed an uneasy contact with him, mostly by occasional letters. Karl Jaspers remained her mentor and friend throughout his life. As a young woman Arendt also admired an influential Zionist, Kurt Blumenfeld. He helped her to think about the downside of assimilation, which, in the Europe she was born into, meant conversion to Christianity. Arendt later said the reason she eventually chose to live in the United States was that "assimilation is not the price of citizenship."

Her friends were bright young scholars like herself. One of them, Gunther Stern, became her lover, then her husband in 1929. While he was struggling with rapidly closing doors against Jews in German academia (he later became a journalist and novelist), Arendt was completing her dissertation *Love and St. Augustine*.

Only recently (1996) published in English, *Love and St. Augustine* offers convincing proof of the erudition of a brilliant twenty-three-year-old, but is daunting to a reader unused to the locutions of academic philosophers and lacking extensive reading in and about the works of Augustine. Translators Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith Chelius Stark state that a key to appreciating Arendt's fascination with Augustine is "the

conflict within Augustine's Christianized Greco-Roman philosophy", or, as they quote from a 1930 essay by Arendt, "the ambiguity of his existence as both a Roman and a Christian." Scott and Stark write that Arendt returned to her thesis in later years, writing copious notes on it, and they believe that Arendt's interest in this ambiguity of Augustinian thought influenced her more than most other scholars of her work have acknowledged.

In 1930 Arendt started *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*. Varnhagen had hosted a famous literary salon in Germany in the early 1800s. She wrote thousands of letters to friends and lovers—the prominent poets, diplomats, and aristocrats who surrounded her. Yet, as a Jew, she faced insurmountable barriers to real acceptance. At forty she converted to Christianity and married a Christian, but never felt secure in the "assimilation" she had achieved. Arendt wrote most of the book from 1930 to 1933 while it was becoming clear to her (if not to most of her friends) that the Enlightenment assimilation of Jews begun in Rahel's time was giving way to the virulent anti-Semitism of Hitler. She portrays Rahel Varnhagen as a woman who eventually rejected being an assimilated "parvenu" and became a "conscious pariah"—a Jew who values her outsider status and the humane traditions of Judaism.

This book's passionate, careening style is the opposite of the abstract, intellectual style of *Love and St. Augustine*, but is just as hard going. It doesn't move chronologically; in fact, it doesn't move at all except to spin round and round in Arendt's suppositions about Rahel's thoughts and feelings. It is as if a vital part of Arendt, held back in her academic dissertation, comes gushing out in repetitive passages like, "Loving life is easy when you are abroad. Where no one knows you and you hold your life in your hands all alone, you are more master of yourself than at any other time. In the opacity of foreign places all specific references to yourself are blurred. It is easy to conquer unhappiness when the general knowledge that you are unhappy is not there to disgrace you, when your unhappiness is not reflected by innumerable mirrors, focused upon you so that it strikes you again and again. It is easy, as long as you are young . . ." and so on. We don't know how the critics would have appraised this book by the young Hannah Arendt, because it was not published until the late fifties when she was well established as the author of *Origins of Totalitarianism*. (A new translation of *Rahel Varnhagen* by Richard and Clara Winston was published in 1999.)

While Arendt was hanging out with Zionists, her husband Gunther was part of a circle that didn't mix with them, artists and writers, most of them communists. The couple drifted apart. When the burning of the Reichstag in 1933 was blamed on the communists, Gunther, fearful of the wave of arrests that began, fled to Paris. A friendly divorce followed. Arendt stayed in Berlin, her apartment becoming temporary housing for a parade of people fleeing Hitler. When she illegally collected some documents from the Prussian State Library to help her Zionist friends gather evidence of anti-Semitism, she was arrested. It should have been the end of her, but after eight days, a miracle happened. She was released by a friendly, apolitical policeman who had no idea what he was supposed to do with her. She immediately sneaked over the Czech border to Prague, then Geneva, then Paris. Her narrow escape, she later wrote, quite drastically changed her thinking, pointing her toward political writing and action. Intellectuals, she observed, had cooperated with the Nazis more than ordinary folks. "It was not what our enemies did but

what our friends did," that shocked her, made her distrustful of purely intellectual disciplines, and turned her toward years of activism.

The next eight years, until the fall of France, were ruled by anxiety, dread, and frantic attempts to survive. She begged Jewish friends to ignore orders to register—some who survived had her to thank for it. She worked for a time helping to send Jewish children to Palestine, did some writing and organizing. She struggled against disunity among Jews—like the prejudice among French Jews against eastern refugee Jews. There was one bright spot: she met (gentile, self-educated) Heinrich Blucher. They married in 1941 and escaped to America with the help of ex-husband Gunther, who had reached America in 1936. The Bluchers' marriage was to be a thirty-year working and loving relationship that deeply influenced her work.

In New York Arendt worked hard at learning English and was able to teach part-time at Brooklyn College. An article published in the *Menorah Journal*, January 1943, gives some idea of the hard adjustment she and so many others faced. "We Refugees" tells about the high suicide rate among refugees under pressure to keep a low profile and not bother "real" Americans (both Jews and non-Jews) by talking about the horrors they had escaped. (This unofficial prohibition was not peculiar to the U.S., but, according to Israeli journalist Tom Segev, also expressed the prevailing mood in Israel.) She also wrote articles and reviews for a German language paper, the *Aufbau*.

By 1942 rumors about the concentration camps were beginning to reach America, reports worse than anything the Bluchers had feared when they escaped. Arendt was furious because she couldn't convince most Americans that these reports were true. ("The Family" by Susan Tifft and Alex Jones [*New Yorker*, April 19, 1999] quotes the first admission by the Jewish-owned *New York Times* that accusations of "underplaying coverage of the Holocaust" were "valid.") Arendt worked unsuccessfully with various groups trying to organize a Jewish Army to fight Hitler. Meanwhile, she landed a job as an editor at Schocken Books. Her own essays and reviews began to be published in prestigious journals like *Partisan Review*, which was to become a receptive outlet for her work. She made friends there, including Irving Howe, Mary McCarthy, Randall Jarrell. But she fell out with American Zionists. They had all swung toward Ben-Gurion's vision of a Jewish state, which would make Palestinian Arabs second-class citizens. Arendt objected, and her column in the *Aufbau* was dropped. Her years of Zionist activism were over. The end of the war in 1945 brought more horrors, with the opening of the death camps. By 1948 the Cold War was well launched and—with bloodshed between Jews and Arabs—the State of Israel had been founded.

During her first years in America—1942 to 1949—these frustrations drove Arendt away from political action and toward concentrated writing. For seven years she and her husband worked on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She wrote the book in English, which was further "Englished" by editors who tried to fit her long Germanic sentences into idiomatic English. (This continued to be the approach of her publishers; whether they ever completely succeeded is another question.) The jacket copy of the first edition, published in 1951, calls the book a historical treatment of the themes of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*. This is an accurate description, though overly hopeful as promotion. Such a blurb was unlikely to catch and hold a crossover audience to Arendt's long, dense, and allusive treatment of the subject.

Origins of Totalitarianism is divided into three major sections: Anti-Semitism, Imperialism, and the convergence of these into Totalitarianism. The section on anti-Semitism follows the minority elite of Jewry evolving from medieval European "court Jews" into bankers and financiers serving heads of state in their adventures in war and imperialism. It details their final descent, through emancipation and assimilation, into a wealthy and apolitical bourgeoisie. The irony of their position, said Arendt, was that these Jews ended up further than ever from the power anti-Semites incorrectly assumed they had, yet were all the more furiously hated. This section ends with a discussion of the Dreyfuss Affair. Arendt describes the prosecution and incarceration of the falsely accused French-Jewish army officer, not as an isolated wrong attacked and corrected by liberals like Emile Zola, but as the first example of the new, twentieth century form of anti-Semitism.

The second section, Imperialism, explores the connection between imperialism and racism. It makes a distinction between two kinds of imperialism: "far-flung imperialism" and "continental imperialism." South Africa, where Europeans massacred and enslaved darker people whose differences were said to be signs of inferiority, was an example of "far-flung imperialism." By contrast, "continental imperialism" was the pushing outward of borders, as Hitler did in the name of an equally spurious myth of a superior "racial" or ethnic group with supposedly a more authentic claim to all the land of a given region.

The last section, Totalitarianism, describes the declassed society of "superfluous" people susceptible to totalitarian movements, and the central elements—propaganda, organization, secret police—that constitute totalitarian systems, on both the right (Germany) and on the left (Soviet Union).

Arendt's "Concluding Remarks," postulate that all these things come together to produce a system motivated by a mad ideological "consistency." They create a system capable of crimes of "unforgivable absolute evil which could no longer be understood and explained by the evil motives of self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, lust for power, and cowardice; and which therefore anger could not revenge, love could not endure, friendship could not forgive . . . this newest species of criminals is beyond the pale even of solidarity in human sinfulness . . . The manipulators of this system believe in their own superfluousness as much as in that of all others, and the totalitarian murderers are all the more dangerous because they do not care if they themselves are alive or dead . . ."

Following these 400 pages of text, a bibliography lists more than 300 books, in two dead languages and at least three living ones. The footnote-laden pages seem proof that Arendt did indeed read all of them and many more.

In this book Arendt arrived at the style of her later writings (except *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and some of her essays written for general magazines). It is an elliptical style that sometimes seems to describe her wanderings among her data, taking by-paths suggested by them. As she circles around a subject, a word, the antonym of that word, another subject it suggests, back to new facet of the first subject, the reader can balk—or can acquiesce and follow Arendt's by-paths into an unexpected and provocative interpretation (which she may not have backed it up with conventional evidence, despite all the footnotes).

A few representative examples:

She divides into three groups the remnants of class systems that have come unraveled: masses, mob, and elite. The masses are most of us, the varied workers and unemployed. The mob are the thugs from all three groups—the ones who show up at a gold rush in South Africa or on Hitler's staff. The mob, because they oppose the dull, selfish bourgeoisie, are often attractive to the small third group, the elite, which forms unlikely and often short-lived alliance with the mob. (Arendt must have had Heidegger in mind, trying to understand what had attracted him to the Nazis.)

She does fascinating short takes on men like Disraeli (and the anti-Semitic novels he wrote before becoming Victoria's conspicuously Jewish prime minister) and on the tragedy of T. E. Lawrence, whose disgust with his own culture led him into becoming its imperialist tool. She cites literary sources—Conrad, Kipling, Mann—with the same respect she gives to philosophers and historians.

Her picture of two centuries of Boer rule in South Africa adds a dimension to our understanding of the apartheid system, which was in the process of more rigidly codifying segregation even as she wrote this book. She adds, ironically, "The Jews [in South Africa] . . . adjusted to racism as well as everybody else and their behavior toward black people was beyond reproach." Irony is, for Hannah Arendt, the tone of outrage. It permeates this book, as it did later essays and books like *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

She offers a concrete image of the totalitarian system as an onion, each layer separate and secret from the others. The outer layer of the onion gives an illusion of displaying all the aims of the complete system, but it is superficial, lacking the fuller knowledge of the next layer, and that one to the next, inward to the "empty center" where the leadership rules, cynically indifferent to the propaganda spread in the outer layers. This image illustrates a structure of deceit and hypocrisy that made possible the murderous ignorance and delusion later detailed in histories and memoirs of the twentieth century. These detours into images and generalizations often forecast subjects that she took up in later books. For example, anticipating her later description of Eichmann, "Totalitarianism in power invariably replaces all first-rate talents, regardless of their sympathies, with those crackpots and fools whose lack of intelligence and creativity is still the best guarantee of their loyalty."

In her introduction to the 1958 edition of *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt wrote, "The years I spent writing [the 1951 edition] from 1945 onwards, appear like the first period of relative calm after decades of turmoil, confusion, and plain horror . . . With the defeat of Nazi Germany, part of the story had come to an end. This seemed . . . the first chance to try to tell and to understand what had happened . . . still in grief and sorrow and, hence, with a tendency to lament, but no longer in speechless outrage and impotent horror. It was, at any rate, the first possible moment to articulate and to elaborate the questions with which my generation had been forced to live for the better part of its adult life: *What happened? Why did it happen? How could it have happened?*" (Arendt's emphasis) In this slightly revised 1958 edition she absorbed her "Concluding Remarks" into earlier chapters, adding the term "radical evil" to denote a concept (of evil at the root) somewhat different from those found in traditional religious and philosophical traditions. In a letter to Karl Jaspers she admitted that she did not quite understand the concept she had phrased in this way. She added a final chapter "Ideology and Terror" that

spoke of the dominance of "loneliness" in our century but ended on a somewhat more optimistic note.

In 1951 reviews were mixed. Some critics, like Norman Podhoretz, felt she had done no less than to brilliantly explain the twentieth century. Others were less impressed, like Isaiah Berlin, who was impatient with what he called her "free associating." In any case, *Origins of Totalitarianism* established Arendt in the United States as an important historical philosopher. She was invited to lecture everywhere, from Princeton to UC Berkeley. Her book made itself felt in influential places, quoted, for instance, in a Supreme Court case dealing with the plight of displaced persons. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship to work on a projected book about Marxism and totalitarianism in Russia, which she felt she had shortchanged in *Totalitarianism*. Throughout the fifties she wrote and published essays that were intended to make up parts of the new book. She traveled back and forth from Europe, renewing contact with old friends—like Karl Jaspers and his Jewish wife—who had survived. After some hesitation, soul searching, and encouragement from her husband, she contacted Heidegger and re-established an uneasy correspondence. In America she worked with groups against McCarthyism when most American liberals were afraid to speak out.

She passed up invitations to write on the growing Arab-Israeli conflict. "I decided I do not want to have anything to do with Jewish politics any longer." She had had her say in articles like "Zionism Reconsidered" (*Menorah Journal*, October 1944), in which she protested the "revisionist" Zionism that left Arabs "the choice between voluntary emigration or second class citizenship . . . only folly could dictate a policy which trusts a distant imperial power for protection, while alienating the good will of its neighbors." Her opinion that the situation was "absolutely nauseating" was shared by her original inspiration to Zionism, Blumenfeld, who wrote to her from Israel, "The meaning of the Ten Commandments is everywhere, in Europe and in Israel, quite forgotten."

Her proposed book on Marxism and the Soviet Union never came together. It kept changing—after Stalin's death, after the Hungarian revolution. Finally she gave it up, feeding parts of it into articles that became *The Human Condition*. The rest of the material went into two other books, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (1961) and *On Revolution* (1965).

In *The Human Condition* (1958) "what I propose is nothing more than to think what we are doing," a deceptively simple description of a complex book which can only be distorted by attempts to summarize it. She divides her subject into three parts: Labor, Work, and Action. According to her, the Ancient Greeks defined Action as politics, public life engaged in by an elite group of males, including philosophers. Work was man's distortion of nature to craft things—including works of art. Labor included everything done to sustain and reproduce biological life and was done in the home by women and slaves.

Public life was rated highest because in speech and action a person was a unique individual who could initiate something new, original, free, and unpredictable in its eventual effects. New ideas born of Action depended on the Work of historians and poets in preserving and perpetuating them, and on Labor for the simple physical survival that made Action possible. Moving forward through history, she compares the shifting definitions of the terms, the different values placed on them, and the blurring of one into the others. (Here is where any attempt to summarize must give way to listing two or three

examples of the many points she touches in her exploration.) Christianity removed the contemplative life from the realm of Action, urging withdrawal from the political to the private. Labor to sustain life gradually became work performed outside the home, merging with Work and expanding to fill more and more hours. Objects created by mass Work/Labor were consumed or wasted faster and faster, becoming the perishables that once came under the category of Labor. Private life (related, she points out, to the negative word "privation") rose in esteem, but created "the mass phenomenon of loneliness." Public discussion—politics—became despised, necessary but unworthy of attention, as once the life-sustaining labor of the private home had been. And so on, through many variations of these changes and their implications.

Arendt's original title for this book had been *Amor Mundi*—love of the world, of talk, consensus, and action in the world by thinking human beings. She wanted to bring attention, respect, and rigorous philosophical thinking back to the realm of public life, now open to all people. She acknowledges the risks, the dangers of unpredictable forces set in motion by any Action. The only remedy for such runaway forces is more Action, not the withdrawal and passivity that invite tyranny. "The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable. And this again is possible only because each man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world."

The reception of *The Human Condition* ran the gamut. W. H. Auden could not speak highly enough of it; Isaiah Berlin called it empty generalizing on a faulty premise. Whatever the critics thought, the book spoke strongly to some students who drew from it inspiration for the revival of political action they would pursue during the sixties. Arendt became even more firmly established as a thinker worthy of invitations to comment on all aspects of society. Sometimes these invitations led to trouble.

When the efforts to integrate southern schools hit the newspapers with shocking photos of black girls being spat on and threatened as they entered school, Arendt was asked to write about the conflict for *Commentary*. Her "Reflections on Little Rock" was not what *Commentary* expected. She wrote that children should not be used to right the wrongs of society. It was not the battle she opposed, but the front that was chosen. Norman Podhoretz (then editor of *Commentary*) recently wrote (*Ex-Friends*, 1999) that he had wanted to publish her article, considering Arendt's ideas "brilliant and original," but that his colleagues opposed him. *Commentary* delayed and delayed publication while leaking gossip about her "racist" opinions. In 1959 the article was finally published in *Dissent*. Although it received a Longview Foundation Award, the reaction against it was as hostile as the staff at *Commentary* had feared, some of it so abusive that Arendt refused to answer it.

She did answer a comment that Ralph Ellison made three years later. During an interview Ellison mentioned her "failure to grasp" how the Negro child was "required to master the inner tensions created by his racial situation . . . if he fails this basic test, his life will be even harsher." She wrote to him acknowledging that he was right to say she had not understood, had drawn an incorrect analogy between her Jewish childhood and that of a black American child.

This incident shows not only her courage in giving an unpopular opinion, but her quick admission when convinced she has erred. It also gives a preview of what would happen to Arendt with her next book.

On May 24, 1960, Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped by Israeli agents and taken from Argentina to Israel to stand trial. Arendt contacted the *New Yorker*, offering to cover the trial. Editor William Shawn jumped at the chance to get a highly respected writer who was not only a Jew but one who had narrowly escaped Hitler's Final Solution. In a letter canceling a teaching commitment at Vassar, she wrote, "To attend this trial is somehow, I feel, an obligation I owe my past." In another rescheduling letter she wrote of her need to see Eichmann, to see "these people in the flesh."

The trial ran about six weeks, from June 29 to August 4, 1961. The judgment of death by hanging was given on December 11, 1961. Arendt not only witnessed the trial but read through thousands of pages of pre-trial depositions as well as many books already published on what was just beginning to be called the Holocaust. Her report was printed in installments in five issues of the *New Yorker* in February and March of 1963. Slightly extended, these articles were published as a book by Viking in May 1963, titled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*.

In the first chapter of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Arendt states the problem she sees in the Israeli "House of Justice," the conflict between the purpose of justice (to deal with one person accused of specific crimes) and the purposes of a show trial. The latter had been spelled out in articles written by the revered (but not by her) "architect of Israel," David Ben Gurion, before the trial started: to remind all nations of the Holocaust and their responsibility in it; to remind Jews, especially the young, of the persecution of Jews throughout history; to encourage the prosecution of other Nazis. There was no question of the outcome of the trial—of Eichmann's guilt—nor of the mountain of evidence against him.

What further complicated the work of the court was that "the court here was confronted with a crime it could not find in the law books and with a criminal whose like was unknown in any court, at least prior to the Nuremberg Trials."

From the start Arendt's tone is that of a well-informed, if discursive, reporter, frankly turned off by emotional rhetoric like that of the prosecutor, Gideon Hausner, a style she finds inadequate to the enormity of the crimes being examined. This style and the defense's passivity, she suspects, are driven by the complex politics of Israel's developing relationship with Germany and with Arab countries. She finds the Israeli legal system an uneasy mixture of ancient religious law and modern secular law. She goes back and forth between historical documents and those generated by the proceedings. And she offers the personal impressions that strike her the most strongly. These impressions and opinions include great respect for the three judges in their difficult role—and contempt for the prosecutor's repeatedly asking a "cruel and silly question," of Jewish witnesses, why didn't they protest, fight back, when they were taken off to the death camps?

(According to Israeli journalist Tom Segev, this question hung in the air in Israel at the time and had created a fifteen-year gap of silence between post-war immigrants from Europe and native Israelis, who saw the physically and emotionally broken survivors as inferior, even disgusting. This silence was finally broken when survivors testified at the Eichmann trial. In defense of Hausner, it might be argued that he was voicing this question in order air it, to invite witness testimony to remedy this cruel ignorance, forcing Israelis and the whole world to hear and better understand what survivors had suffered.)

In the next two chapters Arendt draws a portrait of Eichmann, using the historical record, pre-trial interviews, Eichmann's trial testimony, and selections from an autobiography he began writing in prison. (At Hausner's insistence Ben-Gurion then had the autobiography put into Israeli archives where it remained sealed for forty years, until its release was ordered in August 1999—provoking a new round of protest that it might evoke sympathy for Eichmann.) Arendt's portrait of Eichmann illustrates the subtitle, "the banality of evil," which became part of the book's central thesis and which definitively superseded her earlier concept of "Radical Evil. "

The picture she draws is not that of a vivid, fanatical monster, but of an empty, no-talent loser. He was the only one of five children in his family who was "unable to finish high school, or even to graduate from the vocational school for engineering into which he was then put." He finally got a sales job (ironically, through the influence of a Jewish relative by marriage). He read almost nothing but newspapers. Nevertheless, he always bragged about his knowledge of important issues, his limitless abilities, his great potential. "What eventually led to his capture was his compulsion to talk big . . ." Arendt points out that even his infamous boast to his men as the Nazi regime was dying, "I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction," was a braggart's exaggeration of his power.

His life was a boring dead end until 1932, when he joined the National Socialist Party. By 1935 he had become part of a unit specifically assigned to "Jewish Affairs," and by 1938 he was put in charge of "forced emigration." Finally he had, Arendt says, proved himself able to do something well—organize and negotiate mass transport, at first to Palestine. Arendt points out that Eichmann prided himself on working well with Zionists because, according to him, they were, like him, "idealists." This is only one of many examples she gives of Eichmann's "horrible and ludicrous" statements. He was "incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché." This failing fed into and intensified his most sinister disability. "The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else." His memory, Arendt points out, was accurate only for events of personal importance to him—his breathless meeting with an influential superior, for instance. He was not actually such "a calculating liar" as the prosecution portrayed. Instead, he seemed to show "utter ignorance of everything that was not directly, technically and bureaucratically, connected with his job." This lack of imagination, coupled with his "horrible gift for consoling himself with clichés" is "flabbergasting" to Arendt, as she tries to fathom the source of the overwhelming evil this narrow little man had accomplished.

In the next three chapters, the individual history of Eichmann merges into the history of the war and the Holocaust, as Nazi policy toward Jews moved from "forced emigration" (from which the Nazi regime could profit, in money and property of rich Jews) to "concentration" (from which there was profit in working Jews to death in factories) to (at the point where the Nazi defeat was inevitable, if still a couple of years off) the "final solution," extension of "euthanasia of the weak" to extermination of all Jews by shooting or gas. Eichmann testified, "I never thought of such a thing, such a solution through violence. I now lost everything, all joy in my work, all initiative, all interest." (Joy in his work? another of Eichmann's "flabbergasting" clichés.) Arendt

points out that at any time he could have chosen to transfer out of duties involved in the transportation and killing. Men sometimes did so without serious consequences. Instead, says Arendt, Eichmann resorted to the same doublethink as Himmler did, that of turning his natural pity for victims toward himself. Arendt explains, "So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!" According to Eichmann, at the Wannasee Conference of January 1942, he felt cleansed of any guilt "like Pontius Pilate" when he saw the enthusiasm with which all of Hitler's ministers discussed coordination of efforts toward the Final Solution.

At this point in Chapter VI and continuing in Chapter VII, Arendt widens her examination to consider how Eichmann fit into the general consciousness of the German people and their leaders. She gives credit to those comparatively few isolated and helpless people whose "ability to tell right from wrong remained intact," but offers many more widespread, horrendous examples at all levels of society to back up her statement that, "From the accumulated evidence one can only conclude that conscience as such had apparently got lost in Germany."

And not only among gentiles. The repeated question asked by the prosecutor, "Why did you not resist," writes Arendt, "actually served as a smoke screen for the question that was not asked." This question, she insisted, had a place in a show trial. It is the question of the "recognized Jewish leaders" who "almost without exception cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis . . . In Amsterdam as in Warsaw, in Berlin as in Budapest, Jewish officials could be trusted to compile the lists of persons and of their property, to secure money from the deportees to defray the expenses of their deportation and extermination, to keep track of vacated apartments, to supply police forces to help seize Jews and get them on trains . . ." Another, crucial lapse among Jews, Arendt says, was acceptance and implementation of the policy of dividing Jews into categories. There were special camps for Jews who had influential friends abroad. There was (as she had protested when she was in France) an accepted division between refugee—stateless Jews and Jews who were longtime citizens and residents of a country. This division by status signaled "the beginning of the moral collapse of respectable Jewish society."

In light of the later reaction against Arendt, it's important to remember that the role of European Jewish leadership is discussed in only about a dozen pages of a 300-page book. It's also important to remember that Arendt was not the first to mention this issue. Other writers had written about it in detail. It was mentioned even in Israeli schoolbooks. (According to Tom Segev, this was part of official educational policy before 1960, designed to indoctrinate children with a sense of the superiority of Israeli Jews over diaspora Jews.) Nor was Arendt the first to speculate that "if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people."

In the chapter "Duties of a Law-abiding Citizen," Arendt deals with Eichmann's stunning testimony insisting that he was a Kantian, correctly defining Kant's "categorical imperative" as a man's duty to behave in such a way that his acts could become a principle of general law. But Eichmann had twisted this philosophy to make Hitler's word the general law; therefore, it was the duty of an exemplary man of conscience to obey

Hitler. In 1944, Himmler—worried about his own skin now that defeat was near—had ordered the suspension of the "final solution" ("you will from now on, since I order it, take good care of Jews, act as their nursemaid!"). But Eichmann, convinced that Hitler wanted the killing to continue, clung to his "duty," ignored Himmler's orders, and hustled through as many transports and killings as he could. The judges of the Israeli court struggled to figure out if this man who "always obeyed orders" disobeyed Himmler out of hatred for the Jews. Arendt concludes—in one of the ironic paradoxes she loved to pose—that the judges "never did come to understand him . . . for the sad and very uncomfortable truth of the matter probably was that it was not his fanaticism but his very conscience that prompted Eichmann to adopt his uncompromising attitude during the last year of the war"

Then Arendt takes what seems to be a long detour from the trial she is observing. This seeming diversion actually becomes the heart of the book. She devotes her next eighty or so pages to comparing the ways in which the "final solution" was carried out in different countries. For, within the general horror, there were substantial differences, and not simply from West to East, where the ghettoizing and killing of Jews had been pursued for centuries so enthusiastically that the major death camps had logically been located in the East.

Not surprisingly, the deportations and exterminations in Germany were as complete as those in any East European country. At the opposite end, there were the splendid rescue work of Sweden and the shining example of Denmark, which saved most of its Jews, and whose king was said to have promised to wear the yellow star if any Jew were required to wear it. But how do we account for Bulgaria, in the midst of the lethal Balkan states, yet apparently keeping its Jews virtually untouched? How could it happen that Holland, whose students and workers went on strike at the first move against Jews, ended up with three quarters of the Jews living there annihilated? While Italy, Germany's only ally in Europe, committed relatively minor harassment of its 50,000 Jews until, when Italy surrendered to the allies, the German military took over and managed to rush 7,000 Italian Jews to Auschwitz before collapsing? What made Hungary, beginning active deportation only in the last months of the war, operate at such frenzied speed as to kill 800,000 Jews?

I call this the heart of the book because this is where Arendt searches for what she sees as the question beyond the individual guilt of Eichmann—could this crime have been prevented? How? What were the crucial acts that saved some people and (by implication) might do so in future eruptions of genocide? Arendt sees two major factors, one among Jews, the other among gentiles.

Those Jews who accepted a distinction between native born Jews and foreign refugees, or between "superior" Jews and common folks, usually cooperated in the deportation of the "lesser" and foreign Jews. What they were doing, according to Arendt, was helping to set up the machinery for their own eventual destruction. The crucial action is no action, non-cooperation from the start (as, twenty years before, she had advised her friends among French Jews when the order to register came).

More important, of course, was the behavior of the gentile majority. Arendt's research convinced her that those few gentiles—government authorities and ordinary people—who resisted early and consistently, often stymied the Germans. Resistance could take many forms: flat refusal as in Denmark; accepting all orders, as Bulgarians

did, and then simply ignoring them; compliance with all orders, yet somehow messing up implementation with willed inefficiency, as the Italians did. What happened in the face of this defiance of the fanatical Jew-killers? Evidently not much. Not only did the German authorities seem unprepared to cope with resistance, but in the cases of staunch refusal by some Scandinavians and French, some German officers became quite shaken and backed off, as if their dead consciences had been resurrected by the example of others.

Arendt goes on to cite examples of individual acts to protect or hide Jews by those who have since been honored as "righteous gentiles," stressing the importance of each and every one of these occasional high risk acts—from Danish fishermen transporting Jews to neutral Sweden, to a Polish housewife adopting a Jewish child as her own. Arendt challenges the position of a German military doctor who wrote in his own defense that individual acts of resistance were "practically useless," because the resister would be killed, would simply "disappear in silent anonymity." She counters, with a passion that belies her cool reportorial style, "One man will always be left alive to tell the story. Hence nothing can ever be 'practically useless,' at least not in the long run . . . For the lesson of such stories is simple and within everybody's grasp. Politically speaking, it is that under conditions of terror most people will comply but *some people will not*, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that 'it could happen' in most places but *it did not happen everywhere*. Humanly speaking, no more is required, and no more can reasonably be asked, for this planet to remain a place fit for human habitation" (her italics).

It is important to remember that in this long section, she is discussing resistance by the general population and their leaders, not resistance by the victims.

Arendt then returns to Eichmann himself, his conviction and hanging, and the legal complications of both. Arendt points out that Eichmann insisted he had never actually injured anyone with his own hands. She states that ordinary law is indeed more lenient toward the "accomplice," and again underlines the idea that runs through the whole book—the court was faced with the dilemma of using traditional rules of law to deal with an enormous crime against humanity.

This concept of a crime against humanity is central to her epilogue, where she regrets the opportunity lost by defining Eichmann's crime as a crime against the Jewish people. "At no point, however, either in the proceedings or in the judgment, did the Jerusalem trial ever mention even the possibility that extermination of whole ethnic groups—the Jews, or the Poles, or the Gypsies—might be more than a crime against the Jewish or the Polish or the Gypsy people, that the international order, and mankind in its entirety, might have been grievously hurt and endangered."

Eichmann in Jerusalem ends with the judgment Arendt wishes she could have put into the mouths of the Israeli judges (or into the mouths of the judges of the international court she wishes could have sentenced Eichmann). The final two sentences of her words to Eichmann are, "And just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations—as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world—we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. That is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang."

Her assumption that "no member of the human race" would be willing to share the earth with men like Eichmann sounds like wishful thinking. Nevertheless, in light of the trouble following publication, the statement is important as a sign of Arendt's total condemnation of Eichmann.

The storm that broke over the book had begun to build two months before, when the *New Yorker* articles came out. It rose to hurricane force, then died down, but it still rumbles today. It is mentioned in most studies of the Holocaust, and the Library of Congress has a roomful of files—letters, documents, articles—that Arendt turned over before she died.

As soon as the *New Yorker* articles appeared, *The Aufbau* (for which Arendt had written until she fell out of step with other Zionists) published statements of condemnation signed "The Council of Jews from Germany." The Anti-Defamation League sent a bulletin to all its offices and committees summarizing Arendt's book as a statement of "Jewish participation in the Nazi Holocaust," and suggesting phrases of attack to be used in book reviews. (They were used so often that Mary McCarthy referred to them as the "mimeograph" book reviews.) In other words, Jewish organizations and publications—like the communist media that attacked Orwell—sent out canned attacks on a book as yet unpublished.

The book was published in May 1963. The May 19, 1963, issue of the *New York Times Book Review* printed a review by Judge Michael A. Musmanno, an American who had been a prosecutor at the Nuremberg trials. Musmanno's attack on Arendt should make any reader grateful never to have appeared in his Pittsburgh court. Arendt's sarcasm in describing Eichmann's rationalizations became her "solemn" announcement "that Eichmann was not really a Nazi at heart, that he did not know Hitler's program when he joined the Nazi party, that the Gestapo were helpful to the Jews in Palestinian immigration, that Himmler (Himmler!) had a sense of pity . . . and that, all in all, Eichmann was really a modest man." To try to correct the multiple distortions and willed misunderstandings in that sentence is to understand why Arendt, early on, decided not to answer attacks—in publications or in letters—unless the writer was seriously questioning something she had actually written.

Two months later the B'nai B'rith journal *Facts* carried six pages of "errors" compiled by Jacob Robinson, an assistant to the prosecutor at Eichmann's trial. This list of "errors" was also reprinted and circulated widely, becoming "proof" discrediting Arendt, thereby, of course, removing any necessity for many people to even read her book. The list of errors was later expanded (and somewhat toned down from Robinson's original rant) into *And The Crooked Shall Be Made Straight*, published in 1966. This book is a line-by-line quotation of "hundreds of errors" allegedly made by Arendt. Some of these "errors" are downright distortions, for instance Robinson's picking up Arendt's ironic term "hard luck story" to describe Eichmann's early failures at school and work, then attaching to it various other events she related, as proof that she was sympathetic to him.

Other errors are exemplified by the following one: Arendt had written that because of a network of warnings given by the Danes, when Germans went to pick up Jews in Denmark, they "found exactly 477 people at home." Robinson pounces on this, giving the following correction: 202 were found at home, 83 were found elsewhere, and 200 were caught in flight (his total 482). This kind of "refutation" continues for 280

pages. It is hard to imagine any reader sitting with the two books in hand, comparing accounts, and concluding that any meaningful points had been made. Of course, no one did. People merely cited Robinson's book as "proof" that Arendt's book contained "hundreds" of errors and could be condemned without being read.

Meanwhile, the material that would eventually go into Robinson's book was printed in various Jewish journals and circulated for reviewers, one of them Lionel Abel, who reviewed *Eichmann* for the *Partisan Review*. Abel accused Arendt of making Eichmann look better than his victims. His attack was an especially low blow. Arendt had been an intellectual ornament of *PR* since her arrival in the United States, and had made some of her first friends there. Now the editors had assigned her book to a reviewer who had already written negatively on her work. It didn't really help that *PR* published a later issue containing defenses of Arendt by friends like Dwight McDonald and Mary McCarthy.

In *Ex-Friends* (1999) Norman Podhoretz admitted that in his 1963 review he reversed his position on Arendt's brilliance. The digression into broader questions that he saw as "brilliant" and "original" in Arendt's statements on school desegregation became "perverse" when applied to the Holocaust. According to Podhoretz, Arendt invited him to her apartment to discuss his objections. They talked politely for hours, but their friendship, never warm, went downhill from there. In *Ex-Friends* Podhoretz also faulted Arendt for what he called her German "arrogance." Ralph Ellison had mentioned her "magisterial tone," and other critics, frequently, when they could not refute what she had written, objected to her "tone."

One of the strangest and most persistent distortions repeatedly written and said was that Arendt faulted Jews for "not fighting back." What she had called the "cruel and silly" question asked of Jewish witnesses by the prosecutor was now attributed to her. It stuck.

In 1993—thirty years after *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was published—I mentioned the book to a non-Jewish friend, an intelligent and gifted writer. Upon hearing the name of Arendt he began a bitter diatribe about her "blaming the Jews for their own destruction." I protested that she did not. Did. Did not. "Did. She kept asking in that book, why didn't they fight back, resist."

No, she didn't. Did. I suggested that it had been years since the book came out. Perhaps my friend had forgotten—no, he insisted, he had reread it only a month before, while doing research for a novel to be set in World War II. I went to the shelf, took down the book, and turned to the page on which Arendt quoted the prosecutor's "cruel and silly" question. I handed him the book, and he silently read that page. Then he pushed the book aside and changed the subject. Was he embarrassed at realizing how thirty years of distortion had made it impossible for him to understand the actual words he had read only a month before? Was he unwilling to reconsider, even when faced with the actual text? A few weeks later I began to relate this incident to a young Jewish friend. Her reaction—against Arendt, against me—was only more tearfully furious. The false attribution of this statement to Arendt had been passed to the next generation intact. It has even made its way into the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, which states that she claimed "that the victims were partly responsible for the slaughter by their failure to resist . . ." Sources listed in the bibliography did not include distinguished Jewish writers like A. Alvarez, who had tried

to defend Arendt. Listed were only her principal antagonists, including Jacob Robinson. Apparently no one thought to check out their accusations against Arendt's book.

A comment written by Dwight MacDonald in 1964 gave an interesting perspective on the debate. "It is an interesting, and depressing, historical exercise to imagine what the reactions would have been to a book like this in the thirties, when all of us, from Miss McCarthy to Mr. Abel, despised national and racial feelings and were hot for truth, justice, and other universals. The suggestion that certain people and institutions should be exempt from criticism would have embarrassed everybody (except the Stalinists). But the death camps have cast their shadow." Today, few who can fully understand what MacDonald meant are still alive, what the world was becoming before that shadow fell across it. But, as he suggested, we can try to imagine it. (Please excuse me if I belabor the obvious.)

Trouble for the Jews goes back before written history. But for the past thousand years or so it has been fairly well documented as attributable mainly to the dominant European majority who professed to worship a Jewish Messiah, the Christ, the Prince of Peace—who was murdered by the Jews. (You can love Bach, but you have to wince at some of the words of his "Saint Matthew Passion.") This persecution had waxed and waned in various forms, from forced conversion to Christianity to confinement within ghetto walls, breached by mobs on Christian holidays like Easter for a fun night of killing Jews. In less violent forms of exclusion, a Jew might be prohibited from owning land in one place and time, kept out of schools in another, or out of high status clubs or housing.

In the twentieth century, as the power of churches waned, so did the extremes of persecution. Jews could leave the ghetto, go to university (albeit under quotas), own property, rise high in the world of finance, the intellectual professions, the arts, entertainment, government (though rarely in elective office). Exclusion was still practiced, but in more subtle forms, and mixed with envy of Jewish accomplishment.

Jews were becoming assimilated, not by conversion to Christianity, but rather by the secularization of all Westerners, including Jews. With the spread of education and the advancement of science came the loosening of old religious authority, then uprooting by industrialization, and the rise of nation states. Like Hannah Arendt, many educated middle-class Jews did not practice traditional Judaism, often knew little about it, and cared less. Like everyone else, Jews embraced their primary identity as national rather than religious. Einstein saw himself as German, Simone Weil as French, Primo Levi as Italian. Jewish identity was an added flavor, like a jolly Passover seder, like the Hebrew words Primo Levi's family sprinkled throughout their cozy piemontese dialect of Turin.

The possibility that the greatest pogrom in history—now industrialized into assembly-line killing—could be coming down on the Jews, was simply incredible. Many did read the early signs and got out, or were trapped without means, no money, no country to accept them. But many Jews with the means to flee died, as Arendt said, because they waited too long. They simply could not believe that their fellow countrymen would listen for long to the rantings of Hitler. A fatal error. Except for shining examples like the ones Arendt cites, their fellow countrymen proved indifferent or worse—greedy, active accomplices of the killers, encouraged by Hitler's new, monstrous form of anti-semitism. If World War I had wiped out the nineteenth century illusion of perpetual progress and peace, the Holocaust of World War II wiped out (among many other values)

the centuries of slowly growing hope that Jews could win a home in the country of their birth.

This is the "shadow" of the death camps that changed the free intellectual discourse of MacDonald's world. And not just that intellectual corner. It stained our whole landscape indelibly. We continue to live in that shadow today, most visibly in the middle-east, where many children born today are doomed to become tomorrow's casualties of that half-century-old shadow.

Those of us old enough to have seen the first newsreels of the opening of the death camps, not carefully introduced in a history class, but sandwiched between Humphrey Bogart and Loony Tunes in the pre-TV days of the neighborhood movie house, can never forget our sickened horror. What was it like for viewers who had barely escaped that hell, had lost distant or close family members in it? They were expected to be grateful they had escaped, and keep their nightmares to themselves.

No wonder that, for many Jews, Israel became a symbolic safe haven, a virtual homeland, even if they never set foot in it. And that Eichmann became both a symbolic and a real monster, destroyer of life and hope, and belief in humanity. For Jews, the Eichmann trial was supposed to expose, condemn, and curse that monster. For the rest of us, the trial was supposed to do even more, to show that Eichmann was different from us—that we could never plan and effect such horrors.

Arendt, then, was expected to report this trial in the tones of a prophet calling down judgment on the devil. Instead, she wrote as a committed but curious and cool reporter, analyzing ambiguities of law and court procedure. She even dared to criticize the method and manner of the Israeli prosecutor. Worst of all, her close and detailed description of Eichmann told us how boring, petty, obtuse he was. How ordinary. How familiar. Like that stupid supervisor we work under. Like us.

No wonder all the loose anguish, grief, fear, loss, and anger festering in Jews fell on Arendt. No wonder so many other non-Jews showed their sympathy for the victims by approving the attack on her.

In 1961, I followed the Eichmann trial avidly along with Jewish teaching colleagues and friends. When I read Arendt's book in 1964, I was unaware of the furor it was causing. Nor do I remember any of my Jewish friends (including Holocaust escapees) attacking her or the book. Either they were exceptions to the people who misunderstood the book, or there were topics they didn't discuss openly with gentile friends. Come to think of it, I had already learned to keep silent whenever the subject of Israel came up, lest I ignorantly stumble into a mine field where treasured friendships suddenly exploded.

Some of Arendt's friends wrote private letters of sympathy but avoided going public for fear of becoming targets themselves. Rejection or fear of association even carried over to her day-to-day teaching at the University of Chicago, where many of the once-friendly faculty avoided her. To make things worse, her husband's health began a steep decline, not helped by his fury over this treatment of her.

The assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963 took center stage in people's minds, decreasing the number of personal attacks, letters, meetings, and panel discussions (invitations declined by Arendt) that became screaming matches; but in a slightly less hysterical tone the attacks went on. For Arendt the worst effect was the reaction of friends. Her old Zionist friend Blumenthal was dying in Israel and had heard

frightful reports on her book. She went to see him on his deathbed and tried to convince him the reports were untrue. Other old friends, in the U.S. and in Europe, criticized her and broke with her. Her attempts to answer their emotional accusations with cool reason didn't help.

One of these was the scholar Gershom Scholem, who wrote her a letter that he later published. In a paternally condescending tone he chided her "sneering and malicious" tone of "flippancy," which convinced him that she had no "love of the Jewish people" and had engaged in "a mockery of Zionism." In her answer Arendt gave no ground. She wrote that she did not love any whole people. "I love 'only' my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons." She told him that he had misunderstood her irony, which was not meant to mock Zionism but perhaps did reflect her belief that "many people in Zionist circles have become incapable of listening to opinions or arguments which are . . . not consistent with their ideology." Obviously, such answers would not placate Scholem. Nor could she get him to admit that some of his assertions had nothing to do with her or her book.

One of Scholem's assertions was, "I cannot refute those who say that the Jews deserved their fate, because they did not take earlier steps to defend themselves, because they were cowardly, etc." Another was a reference to "the question thrown at us by the new youth of Israel: why did they allow themselves to be slaughtered?" Scholem is no longer writing about Arendt's book, but about the negative Israeli attitude toward immigrant survivors before the Eichmann trial aroused empathy and turned these attitudes around.

Quite apart from this Israeli attitude, among survivors throughout the world there were those who felt guilt and shame—the irrational guilt of the survivor, the shame of the victim. (Did we do or not do something to make this happen?) When Arendt wrote that "for Jews perhaps the darkest part of" the Holocaust was the part played by the *Judenrat* in cooperating with the Nazis in rounding up Jews for transport, she was expressing a part of this irrational guilt, the special pain felt by victims who wonder if some of their own contributed to the crime against all. Arendt had felt this pain earlier while fleeing the Nazis—"not what our enemies did, but what our friends did." She had come to terms with this enough to be able to state it—or stating it helped her come to terms with it. But clearly, many other Jews had not. To say she stumbled on a hornet's nest (as one reviewer did) was an understatement.

She was attacked especially for her perceived "mockery of Zionism." Arendt had supported Zionism; but she had criticized the state of Israel and dropped out of "Jewish politics" at the point when for many Americans—Jews and gentiles—Zionism and the state of Israel had become identical and sacred, "exempt from criticism," as Dwight MacDonal had pointed out.

Nevertheless, Arendt's actual message was getting through to both Jews and gentiles in early opposition to the Vietnam War. Protesters quoted from her book when they accused men in the Johnson administration of being the new Eichmanns, just following orders, efficiently and unquestioningly pressing forward with the war in Vietnam. And, in 1965, when *On Revolution* (her third spin-off from the Marx book that never came together) was published, it became the bible of student activists trying to learn and spread "participatory democracy."

Arendt broke her silence about her book once in 1966, when Jacob Robinson's *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight* was reviewed in the *New York Review of Books*. The reviewer was Walter Z. Laqueur, who wrote that although Arendt was "somewhat cavalier toward facts," Robinson's attack on petty shadings of facts was "not wholly effective . . . On balance it is regrettable that Dr. Robinson's great knowledge of the period has been employed in a book of comments on another book, rather than in preparation of the major work that is so badly needed."

Arendt lost her cool and poured out one of those long letters the *New York Review* is so fond of printing in dauntingly small type. She furiously recited details of Robinson's sloppy, nit-picking reading of her book. She gave a (slightly paranoid-sounding) list of Robinson's backers: Israeli government agencies, international Jewish agencies and research institutes. She was furious that the *New York Review* had played the same trick as *Partisan Review*, giving Robinson's non-book to a man who had earlier written that "the damage done by the half-truths of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is incalculable." She might also have felt contempt for Laqueur's obvious attempt to back off in rather mincing little steps from his previous judgment. Nothing like the refreshing, flat-out retraction by another of Arendt's critics, Arthur Herzberg, who wrote to Arendt saying that "on further reflection" his own review in the *Reporter* was "wrong," that Robinson's book was "silly," and that she had been "treated quite unfairly by almost everyone, and certainly by me in a few paragraphs." She answered Herzberg gratefully. "What you did is almost never done."

She regained her cool when she wrote the "Postscript" added to the 1967 Penguin paperback edition of *Eichmann*. There she states that this edition corrects "about a dozen" minor errors. She reviews the furor over "the 'image' of a book that was never written," and she answers some of the distortions and irrelevant criticisms. Then, typically, she goes on to new questions raised in her mind by the controversy, like her discovery of "a quite extraordinary confusion over elementary questions of morality," a strange belief that "no one has the right to judge somebody else." (Gersohm Sholem had stated that he could not judge the actions of the *judenrat* because he was not there.)

In 1967 she added an essay to the reprint of the collection called *Between Past and Future*. The new essay "Truth and Politics" had been written to help her "come to grips" with two issues that had arisen from the conflict: "whether it is always legitimate to tell the truth" and the "amazing amount of lies . . . about what I had written, on one hand, and about the facts I had reported, on the other."

In "Truth and Politics" she returns again and again to the fragility of factual truth under the pressures of opinion and politics. Then she reaffirms her commitment to the "coercive" power of facts and the obligation to search for truth, free of self-interest or political aims. The opposite of truth, she reminds us, is not "error, nor illusion, nor opinion . . . but the deliberate falsehood," the "rewriting of history." The liar, she goes on, is "the man of action," while the truth teller is not. She does not want to deny the validity of the life she had always prized highly, "political life . . . the joy and the gratification that arise out of being in company with our peers, out of acting together . . ." But she must conclude that "this sphere, its greatness notwithstanding, is limited . . ." by facts that must be respected and guarded. "The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is . . . that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world . . . is being destroyed."

Despite her statement that the truth teller is not the man of action, during the last decade of her life—the years of the Vietnam War, assassinations, student protests and takeovers—she was very much involved in these issues, especially with her students. The crisis over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* had, as she told Mary McCarthy, destroyed her ability to work for at least three years, yet it made her constantly in demand to serve on panels and commissions, speaking on radio (she avoided TV because she did not want to be recognized on the street), and lecturing. She even began to agree to speak on panels that discussed her book, provided the other panelists who spoke had actually read the book. (The need for this rule indicates that discussion had not risen much above its original low level.) Her role as truth teller sometimes made her students cheer her and at other times infuriated them. She tended to be hopeful and encouraging at the beginning of a political action with them, but then she annoyed impulsive young activists by detecting and decrying a false move or a what she considered to be a wrong turning.

Did these very public years have a bad effect or a good effect on her? Did she—and do we—suffer from the destruction of the peace and quiet she needed for writing?

She managed to do a little writing, a few of the 1945 to 1967 biographical essays (from Rosa Luxemburg to Pope John XXIII) and reviews collected under the title *Men in Dark Times*. (1968) These essays were not the kind of deep explorations into philosophy that she usually did and probably wanted to do, but they are her most accessible writing, a good introduction to the ideas that went into her denser work.

In 1970, about the time her husband died, she surprised everyone by going back to writing straight philosophy. She began a projected trilogy on "thinking," parts of which she presented orally in the prestigious Gifford Lectures. After the previous seven or eight years of all-too-public life, had she withdrawn into abstract thinking about thinking? Her letters to Mary McCarthy during this period—the time of the Watergate scandal and the final, drawn-out, bitter years of the Vietnam War—contradict that impression. They show her still very much concerned with what was happening in the world.

In 1975, apparently in good health, she died suddenly from a heart attack before she could complete the project. Arendt's memorial service was huge, with many tributes to her by distinguished leaders and thinkers. But among Jewish organizations and publications—silence.

This silence was occasionally broken by an eruption like this one in a memoir by Lionel Abel. "According to Miss Arendt, Jews themselves had much to answer for with respect to the Holocaust, for without the cooperation of the Jewish leaders, the organizations known as the Jewish Councils, the Holocaust could not even have taken place!" Abel describes going to the movies with his mother and seeing newsreels of the opening of the death camps. "We witnessed the discovery of the mounds of dead bodies, the emaciated, wasted, but still living prisoners who were now being liberated, and of the various means of extermination in the camp . . . it was an unforgettable sight on the screen, but as remarkable was what my mother said to me when we left the theatre: She said, 'I don't think the Jews can ever get over the disgrace of this.' She said nothing about the moral disgrace to the German nation or to the Nazi cause, only about the disgrace more serious than one incurred by moral culpability, a more than moral disgrace, and one incurred by the Jews. How did they ever get over it? *By succeeding in emigrating to Palestine and setting up the state of Israel.*" (Abel's emphasis). And a few paragraphs

later: "I thought they had gotten over the disgrace with the establishment of Israel, but here was Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* saying that they had not."

This was not a quotation from the damning review Abel wrote for *Partisan Review* in 1963. He wrote it in 1984—twenty years after the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Forty years after *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, animosity against Arendt is fading. In 1995 Mary McCarthy managed to bring together and edit the first two volumes of her unfinished work, which McCarthy published under the title *The Life of the Mind*. In 1997 a colloquium on her work was held in Israel. Most of her writing has been reprinted, her early work retranslated, and studied respectfully. Her early warnings about Israel's relation to its neighbors have been tragically validated by ongoing conflict. Her concept of the components of totalitarianism are still useful in thinking about our post-cold-war world, especially those elements of racism renamed "ethnic cleansing" in multiple instances of "continental imperialism." The ideas she expressed in *Eichmann* are taken for granted. The "banality of evil" has become a familiar truism, quoted widely. As Israeli writer Amos Elon puts it, "Her work has survived the demise of both doctrinaire Zionism and doctrinaire anti-Zionism, and the breakdown of leftist and rightist conceptions of history, precisely because she subscribed to no isms and mistrusted sweeping theories."

However, another personal anecdote will remind us that Arendt's work has not quite outlived her attackers. Once in 1999 and again in 2002, I happened to mention Arendt to two friends, one Jewish female, one gentile male. Neither had read anything by Arendt. Both were vaguely aware of some old controversy over *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, but held no opinion about it. The only thing both "knew" was that she had had a "lifelong affair with a Nazi." What they had read and retained was a review in the *New York Times Book Review* (one article among several in prominent journals) of *Hannah Arendt-Martin Heidegger* by Elzbieta Ettinger (1995). The dust-jacket on this booklet—130 pages with generous margins and leading—promises that it will "tell in detail the story of the passionate and secret love affair" between Arendt and Heidegger, "challenging our image . . . of Arendt as a consummately independent and self-assured personality" and containing "revelations here that are likely to cause a sensation." Like the tabloids on supermarket racks, the contents don't live up to the headlines. Mainly an indictment of Heidegger's Nazi sympathies, the book includes the handful of previously unpublished letters between Heidegger and Arendt and strains to portray Arendt as a brainless sex object with a lifelong crush on a Nazi. The reviews that had attracted my friends' attention were similar to the jacket blurb. They had seized upon and inflated this non-book as a tool to discredit Arendt, indicating that, twenty years after her death, she is still a target for cheap shots by people clinging to "the 'image' of a book that was never written."

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