

## 5. ARENDT'S IRONIES AND POLITICAL JUDGEMENT

Throughout this book I have argued that one of the most important reasons for the controversy over Arendt's book was the refusal particularly by Jewish readers to understand or accept her ironies. Strangely enough, however, as far as I am aware, no one has analysed the book from the viewpoint of its rhetoric. This is what I am going to do in this chapter. This does not, of course, mean that the misunderstanding of Arendt's ironies was the only reason behind the controversy. Clearly, it was also about the contents of Arendt's arguments. However, it is extremely important to recognise that the misunderstanding of Arendt's ironies did indeed shape the way her arguments were understood. This means that people found ideas and statements in the book that do not exist at all if her ironies are understood as she intended them.

Nevertheless, it is also true that some people did get the point of her use of irony. In their view, Arendt's style was simply outrageous and out of place. In other words, they believed that it was outrageous to use irony when referring to a phenomenon such as the Holocaust and Nazi-killers. Furthermore, some factions of the Jewish establishment saw the book as a political attack against them and their wartime policies. In my view, they were right. Although Arendt's main intention when writing the book was not to attack the Jewish establishment, she did consciously use irony to inscribe an implicit – and often also quite explicit – critique of the Jewish establishment in it. The sad part of the story is that most of her friends failed to grasp this, seeing it instead as full of accusations against ordinary Jews.

### 5.1. IRONY AS TROPE

Generally speaking, Arendt's way of approaching and understanding reality and its events might be described as what Kenneth Burke refers to as "poetic realism", in terms of which "characters possess degrees of being in proportion to the variety of perspectives from which they can with justice be perceived" (Burke 1945/1969, 504). Burke points out that "human relationships must be substantial, related by the copulative, the 'is' of 'being.'" Poetic realism seeks to place the motives of action, as is the case with the relation between the potential and the actualised (Burke 1945/1969, 505). Poetic realism, in contrast with "scientific realism", cannot confine itself to representation in a metonymic or any other reductionist one-direction sense (Burke 1945/1969, 509). Similarly to the way in which the artist proceeds from "mind" to "body", the poetic realist must take on the role of "handmaiden". This, in Burke's view, leads to the following point:

A terminology of conceptual analysis, if it is not to lead to misrepresentation, must be constructed in conformity with a representative anecdote – whereas anecdotes 'scientifically' selected for reductive purposes are not representative. (Burke 1945/1969, 510)

What, then, is a "representative anecdote"? It is a conceptual construction built in terms of tropes, particularly in terms of synecdoche but also in terms of irony. In my view, Arendt's argumentation is very much built precisely upon representative anecdotes in the Burkean sense. As we will see in the following, Arendt constructs representative anecdotes as *representative examples* of certain types of political action of individual persons. In other words, representative anecdotes constructed by Arendt almost always refer to individual persons and their political actions. More often than not Arendt includes an explicit or implicit political judgement in her accounts of these individuals. Their political conduct is not always exemplary in a positive sense. As we will see in this

chapter, Arendt often gives representative examples of politically questionable political actions.

Burke distinguishes between four “master tropes”: metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony. What is important and interesting in our context is the way in which Burke connects them to the discovery and description of “the truth”. As we know, Arendt attempted to report on the Eichmann trial as truthfully as she could, and it was precisely in this endeavour that she chose to use synecdoches and ironies. Nevertheless, more often than not, the four tropes overlap one another. Consequently, it is not always easy to distinguish which trope is in question at any given time. Or rather, the tropes do not always exist in their purest forms in actual texts: “Give a man but one of them, tell him to exploit its possibilities, and if he is thorough in doing so, he will come upon the other three.” (Burke 1945/1969, 503) In our context here this means that it does not matter whether we are able to distinguish different tropes from each other in Arendt’s texts but rather understand how and in what purpose she applies them. In addition, every literal trope corresponds to a specific “realistic” application and these applications overlap one another. Thus, perspective can be substituted for metaphor, reduction for metonymy, representation for synecdoche, and dialectic for irony (Burke 1945/1969, 503).

Burke defines metaphor as a means of seeing something in terms of something else. It tells us something about one character or quality as considered from the point of view of another character or quality. These points of view are not predetermined or limited, and it is by approaching things through a variety of perspectives that we establish their reality. What is particularly important in our context is that “the seeing of something in terms of something else involves the ‘carrying-over’ of a term from one realm into another, a process that necessarily involves varying degrees of incongruity in that the two realms are never identical” (Burke 1945/1969, 504). In this chapter, I will show that this carrying over of a term from

one realm into another is one of Arendt's most important textual strategies in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

While the metaphor is somewhat "totalising" in its way of seeing something in terms of something else, metonymy might be characterised as reductive. In Burkean terms, the basic "strategy" of the metonymy is to convey some incorporeal or intangible state or matter in terms of the corporeal or the tangible. Poets alternate between metaphor and metonymy: "[P]oets regain the original relation, in reverse, by a 'metaphorical extension' back from the intangible into a tangible equivalent (the first 'carrying-over' from the material to the spiritual being compensated by a second 'carrying-over' from the spiritual back into the material); and this 'archaicizing' device we call 'metonymy.'" (Burke 1945/1969, 506) In my view, this definition might be extended to apply also to Arendt's political theorisation: her theorising of the political phenomena of the world is very Burkean or "metonymic" in the way described above.

For Burke, it is important to note that as metonymy (reduction) overlaps metaphor (perspective), it also overlaps synecdoche (representation) (Burke 1945/1969, 507). Synecdoche is characterised by the relationship of convertibility between two terms so that conversions imply an integral relationship between part and whole, whole and part, container and contained, and the sign and whatever is signified (Burke 1945/1969, 507–508). Burke treats metonymy as a special application of synecdoche. While synecdoche works in both directions, stressing the relationship or connectedness between two sides of an equation, metonymy follows this path in only one direction, from quality to quantity (Burke 1945/1969, 509).

But what does Burke mean by stating that the realistic application of irony is dialectic? Does it have something to do with the Hegelian-Marxian *Aufhebung*? As far as I can see, the answer is both yes and no. Burke points out that it is much easier to follow the use of the irony-dialectic pair if one takes into account that the dialectic is in some sense equal to the dramatic. That is to say, we have to approach

human action as drama. The role of an actor in drama involves properties both intrinsic to the agent and developed in relation to the scene and other agents. Similarly, the summarisations, the ideas, also possess properties derived both from the agent and the various factors with which the agent is in a relationship: "Where the ideas are in action, we have drama; where the agents are in ideation, we have dialectic." (Burke 1945/1969, 512)

Irony arises when one attempts to use the interaction of terms with one another to produce something which uses all of them. In this context, irony arises because none of the participating sub-perspectives can be treated as either precisely right or precisely wrong. The sub-perspectives in question are not the "truths" of the matter but rather voices, personalities, or positions, which integrally affect one another. When the dialectic (ironic) is properly formed, these voices represent the number of characters needed to produce the total development, i.e. they produce an irony (Burke 1945/1969, 512).

More often than not, irony is built upon synecdochic reversible pairs such as disease-cure, hero-villain, and active-passive. We see irony if we understand the function of the disease in "perfecting" the cure, or the function of the cure in "perpetuating" the influences of the disease (Burke 1945/1969, 512). The dialectic/dramatic/ironic explicitly attempts to establish a distinct set of characters, all of which are on the bias with each other. The sub-certainties of an irony are neither true nor false, but rather contributory (Burke 1945/1969, 512–513).

For Burke, true irony is not "superior" to the enemy. True *humble* irony is based on the sense of fundamental kinship with one's enemy, as one needs him, is indebted to him, does not merely exist outside of him as an observer but contains him within and is consubstantial with him (Burke 1945/1969, 514). Thus, there is no Jewish victim without a Nazi-perpetrator, no Holocaust without a mechanism of destruction. The active pairs involved in the Holocaust, indeed, dialectically (ironically) require or presuppose each other in order

to exist. However, what Arendt's readers failed to understand was that her intent in pointing out these ironies was not to say that they ought to be seen as particularly acceptable or funny. On the contrary, the paradox of the irony/dialectic is that it makes us laugh without being funny in any harmless or innocent sense of the word. Ironic laugh is cold and does not make us relax. The use of irony may also be hurtful to the reader if he or she is somehow involved in it. Arendt's readers did not understand that the humility of irony does not mean that the enemy or his qualities should be seen in exemplary or positive light. The humility of irony simply means that irony/dialectic can only arise when there exists this kind of reversible relationship between two characters that presuppose each other: if the enemy disappears, the victims disappear.

One of the reasons why irony is so difficult to understand or accept is that it always includes a tendency towards the simplification of literalness. That is to say that, although all the characters in a dramatic or dialectic development are necessary qualifiers of the definition of it, there is usually one particular character that enjoys the role of *primus inter pares*. For, as Burke observes, whereas any and all of the characters may be viewed in terms of any other, this one character may be taken as the summarising vessel, or synecdochic representative, of the development as a whole. This most representative character has a dual function, which Burke refers to as "adjectival" and "substantial". The character is adjectival in the sense that it embodies one of the qualifications necessary to the total definition, while it is substantial because it embodies the conclusions of the development as a whole. Irony is sacrificed to the simplification of literalness when this duality is neglected (Burke 1945/1969, 516).

Burke suggests the all-encompassing ironic formula: "What goes forth as A returns as non-A". For Burke, this is the basic pattern that places the essence of drama and dialectic in the strategic moment of reversal (Burke 1945/1969, 517). Thus, there is no *Aufhebung* here; it

is an interpretation of human action based on an idea that it is always dramatic/ironic/dialectic and ought to be interpreted in terms of the rhetoric of irony. In other words, the Burkean dialectic/irony is not the same as the Hegelian dialectic because the strategic moment of reversal does not produce any transcendence or synthesis. The dialectic does not transcend the characters to some higher lever of being. The irony simply points to the ambivalent as opposed to antithetical nature of human action. In our context it is important to understand that irony is a very sharp means to recognising and revealing political aspects of phenomena under scrutiny.

In the following subchapters, I will reread Arendt's ironies in terms of the Burkean tropes discussed above. My aim is not to carry out an exhaustive reading of the entire book. Instead, I will more closely examine the three themes that caused most of the controversy. They are the themes of Jewish cooperation and the role of Jewish leadership, Arendt's thesis of the collapse of political judgement, and the character of Eichmann's evil.

### **5.2. "THE DARKEST CHAPTER OF THE WHOLE DARK STORY"**

Arendt's critique of Jewish cooperation and the Jewish leadership was included in her third article in the *New Yorker*, published on 2 March 1963, which became Chapter VII in the book entitled *The Wannsee Conference, or Pontius Pilate*. The chapter focused mainly on the execution of the Final Solution, and its basic question was: How had it been possible to organise and execute such an enormous operation of destruction without significant resistance from either Jewish victims or gentile bystanders? Arendt pointed out that mere compliance would never have been sufficient to either smooth out all the enormous difficulties of such a huge operation or to soothe the consciences of those operators who had been brought up on the biblical commandment "Thou shalt not kill" (Arendt 1963/1965, 115). Arendt refers to Eichmann's statement according to which

Heydrich “expected the greatest difficulties” and ironically remarks that he could not have been more wrong (Arendt 1963/1965, 113). There is already an irony present here: an enterprise that had been expected to be extremely difficult to carry out turned out to proceed surprisingly smoothly. The ease with which the Final Solution was executed was due in large part to the cooperation of the Jews in their own destruction.

In addition, the chapter deals with Eichmann’s role in the execution of the Final Solution. As we saw earlier, Gideon Hausner, the chief prosecutor at the trial, did everything in his power to prove that Eichmann was the *primus motor* of the destruction of the Jews. Arendt, on the other hand, attempted to highlight all the ironies of a situation in which a group of important Nazi functionaries joined forces in order to organise an enterprise that seemed daunting and challenging even to them: “[T]he Final Solution, if it was to be applied to the whole of Europe, clearly required [...] the active cooperation of all Ministries and of the whole Civil Service.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 112)

Those who were present, “the Ministers themselves”, were tough guys, “Party members of long standing”, as an irony of cleansing had already taken place within the Party: “[T]hose who in the initial stages of the regime had merely ‘coordinated’ themselves, had been replaced.” The trouble was that these remaining men were not easily replaceable and “Hitler had tolerated them, just as Adenauer was to tolerate them [...]” (Arendt 1963/1965, 112)

The second irony that emerged was related to the agenda of the meeting. Before being able to get to the matter proper of the meeting, the participants had to settle some “complicated legal questions”, “such as the treatment of half- and quarter-Jews – should they be killed or only sterilised?” Only after these questions had been settled could the Nazi functionaries proceed to the discussion of the “various types of possible solutions to the problem”, that is to say, the various methods of killing (Arendt 1963/1965, 113).

Eichmann acted as secretary of the meeting. Again, Arendt ironically remarks that it was a very important day for a man who “had never before mingled socially with so many high ‘personages.’” (Arendt 1963/1965, 113) For Eichmann, the climax of the meeting was reached when he for the first time in his life saw Heydrich smoke and drink after the meeting ended (Arendt 1963/1965, 114).

The next irony Arendt chose to highlight was the falsehood of Eichmann’s modesty. This is related to the parallel Eichmann drew between the administrative structures of the Catholic Church and certain biblical stories and the Nazi officials. First, he called the participants of the meeting “the Popes of the Third Reich”. Then, he tried to hide behind them by refusing to take responsibility for his own actions. He said that after these powerful men had spoken he had lost all his “doubts about such a bloody solution through violence”, sensing “a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling”, which made him feel free of all guilt. Arendt remarks: “Who was he to judge? Who was he ‘to have [his] own thoughts in this matter’? Well, he was neither the first nor the last to be ruined by modesty.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 114) Here, the irony lies in the parallel between the Popes and the Nazis on the one hand and the enormity of the Nazi enterprise and Eichmann’s modesty on the other.

After having dealt with the “technical” questions of the meeting, Arendt turned to the question of what Eichmann had said about the cooperation with the Jews. She reported that Eichmann said that he knew of no one who was actually against the Final Solution, which was the most potent factor in the soothing of his own conscience: “Of course, he did not expect the Jews to share the general enthusiasm over their destruction, but he did expect more than compliance, he expected – and received, to a truly extraordinary degree – their cooperation [...] This was ‘of course the very cornerstone’ of everything he did [...] Without Jewish help in administrative and police work [...] there would have been either complete chaos or an impossibly severe drain on German manpower.” (Arendt 1963/1965,

117) Here, the irony is a kind of introduction to the decisive lines of the chapter, which have been quoted by almost all scholars dealing with the book:

To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story [...] In the matter of cooperation, there was no distinction between the highly assimilated Jewish communities of Central and Western Europe and the Yiddish-speaking masses of the East. 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, until, as a last gesture, they handed over the assets of the Jewish community in good order for final confiscation. (Arendt 1963/1965, 117–188)

The irony of these lines lies in the idea that the Nazis could count on Jewish officials to cooperate in the extermination of the Jews. Nevertheless, these lines are not, of course, meant to be exclusively ironic. Rather, they are meant to be a kind of summary of a sad fact of which most people were already aware, namely the cooperation between the Jewish and Nazi officials, which had already been revealed and discussed by a number of historians and survivors (see e.g. Poliakov 1975; Hilberg 1961; Levi 1958). It is impossible to know whether these lines alone would have been enough to arouse a storm around Arendt's report. In any case, there is something metonymical in this judgement that is strengthened by two subsequent points: the heavily synecdochic and ironic attempts to question the motives behind the action and political judgement of European Jewish leaders. The first dealt with the example of Rudolf Kastner in Hungary:

We know how the Jewish officials felt when they became instruments of murder – like captains 'whose ships were about to sink and who succeeded in bringing them safe to port by casting overboard a great part of their precious cargo'; like saviors who 'with a hundred victims save a thousand people, with a thousand ten thousand.' The truth was even more gruesome. Dr. Kastner, in Hungary, for instance, saved exactly 1684 people with approximately

476000 victims [...] 'truly holy principles' were needed 'as the guiding force of the weak human hand which puts down on paper the name of the unknown person and with this decides his life or death.' (Arendt 1963/1965, 118)

This argument alone would have been enough to make the reader understand that Arendt meant to refer to the fact that the sincerity of the Jewish rescue operations was more often than not highly questionable. She highlights the case of Rudolf Kastner as a representative example (synecdoche) of these operations. However, there is also an ironic aspect present here, as it was not enough that the deported Jews were "selected" by the Nazis; in addition, the Jewish functionaries made their own selections as to who was worth saving:

And whom did these 'holy principles' single out for salvation? Those 'who had worked all their lives for the *zibur* [community] – i.e., the functionaries – and the 'most prominent Jews,' as Kastner says in his report. (Arendt 1963/1965, 118)

The synecdoche and irony could not be clearer. The captains who cast a great part of their cargo overboard were the Jewish community leaders who relied on the hierarchical patterns of thought of the Jewish tradition discussed in Chapter One and who consequently focused all of their rescue efforts on community leaders and "prominent Jews". This did not only happen in Hungary with Kastner, but similar logic was used all over Europe.

Arendt connected another representative anecdote to the case of Kastner: the case of Leo Baeck. Her treatment of Baeck caused almost hysterical reactions among the Jews. Arendt took up Leo Baeck as representative of a typical attitude amongst well-meaning Jewish community leaders that ultimately proved to be politically stupid and ethically questionable:

No one bothered to swear the Jewish officials to secrecy; they were voluntary 'bearers of secrets,' either in order to assure quiet and prevent panic, as in Dr. Kastner's case, or out of 'humane' considerations, such as that 'living in the

expectation of death by gassing would only be the harder,' as in the case of Dr. Leo Baeck, former Chief Rabbi of Berlin. (Arendt 1963/1965, 119)

Arendt went on to report that at the trial, one witness had pointed out "the unfortunate consequences of this kind of 'humanity,'" namely that people volunteered for deportation from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz and denounced those who tried to tell them the truth as insane (Arendt 1963/1965, 119). The political mistake made by Jewish leaders like Leo Baeck was that they understood cooperation in terms of the politics of lesser evil and believed that their cooperation and concealment of facts from ordinary members of the Jewish communities would avoid a great deal of suffering in a situation in which they felt they had no other choice. Leaders like Kastner pushed the policy of lesser evil to such an extreme that it resulted in a hierarchically selective rescue policy. Although Palestinian Zionists had repeatedly announced that they would accept all Jewish refugees shipped from Europe, American, and European Jewish leaders did not even try to rescue as many Jews as possible. Instead, they chose to select the most prominent Jews from the Jewish masses.

It is important to notice that this choice was problematic for Arendt in political rather than moral terms, although both aspects were involved. As we have seen above, it was politically problematic in three ways. First, it was based on the traditional hierarchy within Jewish communities between more and less important members. In terms of the policy of lesser evil, this hierarchy was put into practice by attempting to rescue as many "prominent" Jews as possible. Second, the policy of lesser evil was partly based on self-deception, as a good portion of Jewish leaders convinced themselves to believe that cooperation really was a way to mitigate the suffering of their fellow Jews. Refusing to face the situation for what it really was, they believed that their policy was based entirely on humane considerations. Third, the policy of lesser evil was partly based on

lying in the form of failing to reveal all the facts of the situation to the entire community. In this way, the majority of the members of the Jewish communities were left without the possibility to personally assess the situation.

If one reads further, it turns out that Arendt was fully aware of the fact that the Jewish leadership was made up of a wide range of people, all of whom faced the situation at hand and led their people in different ways. Arendt classified the Jewish leaders into three types according to certain well known characteristics. Again, her classification is best understood in terms of synecdoche, that is to say representative examples. She mentions Chaim Rumkowski, the leader of the Jewish ghetto of Łódź, as representative of the first type. He was “called Chaim I, who issued currency notes bearing his signature and postage stamps engraved with his portrait, and who rode around in a broken-down horse-drawn carriage.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 119) The representative anecdote of the second type is the above mentioned case of Leo Baeck, “scholarly, mild-mannered, highly educated, who believed Jewish policemen would be ‘more gentle and helpful’ and would ‘make the ordeal easier.’” (Arendt 1963/1965, 119) Finally, the third representative example was taken from among those “few who committed suicide – like Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Warsaw Jewish Council, who was not a rabbi but an unbeliever, a Polish-speaking Jewish engineer, but who must still have remembered the rabbinical saying: ‘Let them kill you, but don’t cross the line.’” (Arendt 1963/1965, 119)

Arendt presented all of these representative anecdotes as examples of politically ungifted leadership based on false or self-deceptive strategy. In the case of Rumkowski, the problem was pure selfishness and vanity. He did not work for the common good of his community, preferring instead to personally enjoy his false power, hoping, and perhaps believing, that the Germans would make an exception and save him from destruction. As for Baeck, he was simply too good a man to ever become a good politician. He was too

credulous, sincerely believing that a policy of lesser evil could and would bring about a bearable result.

Arendt seemed to sympathise most with Czerniakow's solution, identifying in it a certain amount of deep political honesty, insight, and courage. However, his line of thought had one decisive problem. Namely, his ethics of principle led him to give priority to his own personal dignity over the consideration of whether maintaining personal dignity really was the best possible solution from the viewpoint of his community. He did not want to compromise his ethical principles and concluded that all the available alternatives were equally evil. Hence, he preferred to die a dignified death rather than to live a morally corrupt life which was doomed to destruction. In so doing, he rejected the kind of politically minded ethics of responsibility which encourage the politician to look for survival strategies within impossible situations and remind the politician of the fact that whatever he does, he is always responsible for the entire community, not only himself.

As far as I can see, what Arendt meant was that the Jewish leaders were lacking what Max Weber called the "ethics of responsibility", which a political leader should assume regardless of the situation and potential results of his decisions. Instead, they possessed and followed an ethics of principled conviction, which in Weberian terms could never lead to an acceptable political result: "For while it is a consequence of the unworldly ethic of love to say, 'resist not evil with force', the politician is governed by the contrary maxim, namely, 'You shall resist evil with force, for if you do not, you are *responsible* for the spread of evil.'" (Weber 1919/1994, 358)

More precisely, the Jewish leaders were confronted with the dilemma between the ethic of principled conviction and the ethic of responsibility:

We have to understand that ethically oriented activity can follow two fundamentally different, irreconcilably opposed maxims. It can follow the 'ethic of principled conviction' or the 'ethic of responsibility'. It is not that

the ethic of conviction is identical with irresponsibility, nor that the ethic of responsibility means the absence of principled conviction [...] But there is profound opposition between acting by the maxim of the ethic of conviction [...] and acting by the maxim of the ethic of responsibility, which means that one must answer for the foreseeable *consequences* of one's actions. (Weber 1919/1994, 359–360)

It would, of course, be easy to argue, as many of Arendt's critics did, that this distinction cannot be applied to the situation of the Jews in the Nazi Reich because it would have been impossible for them to foresee either the results of the Nazi policy or the outcome of their own actions. In Chapter Four we have seen that this argument was frequently presented in the form of: "You were not there and consequently you cannot judge the actions of the Jews in the Nazi Reich". However, as we have seen above, most of the Jewish leaders were well aware of where the Jews were being deported. Nevertheless, in political terms, the point of Weber's argument is not this, but the politician's attitude towards his actions:

If evil consequences flow from an action done out of pure conviction, this type of person holds the world, not the doer, responsible, or the stupidity of others, or the will of God who made them thus. A man who subscribes to the ethic of responsibility, by contrast, will make allowances for precisely these everyday shortcomings in people. He has no right [...] to presuppose goodness and perfection in human beings. He does not feel that he can shuffle off the consequences of his own actions, as far as he could foresee them, and place the burden on the shoulders of others. (Weber 1919/1994, 360)

In Arendt's view, the Jewish leaders faithfully and fatefully followed the ethics of conviction because they believed that they were not responsible for their actions in the world, but only for their own souls and consciences, that is to say, to God. In other words, the most dramatic political mistake made by the Jewish leaders was their misunderstanding of the nature of worldly action and their adherence to the ethics of conviction within a politically extreme situation. As opposed to adopting a worldly, political attitude and

forcefully resisting evil, they believed that their principal task as religious leaders was to continue following their religious principles and convictions regardless of the situation and circumstances at hand. Their political naivety was well reflected in their attitudes towards the Nazis: they did not understand that any and all convictions and principles would be entirely useless and powerless in the face of Nazi evil. In this respect, Leo Baeck represented one of the most unworldly-minded Jewish leaders of this time. Although his intentions were good, he ended up contributing to an unprecedented evil because of his antipolitical attitude towards the world and humankind. One of his most drastic mistakes was to deny his people's right to make their own assessments and decisions. By hiding some of the decisive facts of the situation at hand, Baeck denied his community the freedom of choice.

Correspondingly, one of the most dramatic misjudgements made by the American Jewish intellectuals was their inability to distinguish between the responsibility of ordinary Jews and that of the Jewish leadership. Arendt's critique of the Jews' conduct was understood to mean that all Jews, regardless of their concrete status and situation, were equally to blame for their own destruction. However, Arendt's thesis was not actually this simple and black and white. In fact, she argued – again ironically/dialectically – that there is no such thing as an entirely innocent victim in the human world and in human interactions. This argument did not stem from an attempt to blur the perpetrators' role in the destruction of the Jews, but aimed at highlighting the fact that there are always alternative strategies of action from which people can choose, even in extreme political situations. In Burkean terms, one could say that the irony inevitably included in the strategy of cooperation could have been avoided.

Furthermore, Arendt strictly distinguished between the political responsibility of the leaders of Jewish communities and the personal responsibility of an individual for himself. Arendt never blamed ordinary Jews for causing their own destruction, but instead

accused the Jewish leadership of political short-sightedness and self-deception, which she claimed significantly contributed to the course of events.

### 5.3. THE COLLAPSE OF THE EUROPEAN POLITICAL TRADITION

The theme of the role and conduct of the Jewish leadership inevitably raised the question of whether there had been any real possibility for resistance. Again, Arendt ironically pointed out that while the legal irrelevance of the survivors' testimony became pitifully clear, the Israeli government's political intention in this matter was not difficult to assess. She argued that as a faithful henchman of Ben-Gurion, Hausner wanted "to demonstrate that whatever resistance there had been had come from Zionists, as though, of all the Jews, only Zionists knew that if you could not save your life it might still be worthwhile to save your honor" (Arendt 1963/1965, 122).

In Arendt's view, witnesses' statements clearly showed that this was not the case, as they told the court that indeed all Jewish organisations and parties had played a role in the resistance. Consequently, "the true distinction was not between Zionists and non-Zionists but between organized and unorganized people, and, even more important, between the young and the middle-aged. To be sure, those who resisted were a minority, a tiny minority, but under the circumstances 'the miracle was' as one of them pointed out, 'that this minority existed.'" (Arendt 1963/1965, 123)

In order to grasp Arendt's point here, one has to understand what she meant by "circumstances". For her, the real miracle was the fact that there was a tiny minority which had resisted even under the circumstances in which both the Jews and the Nazis did everything in their power to make resistance impossible:

True it was that the Jewish people as a whole had not been organized, that they had possessed no territory, no government, and no army, that, in the hour

of their greatest need, they had no government-in-exile to represent them among the Allies (the Jewish Agency for Palestine, under Dr. Weizmann's presidency, was at best a miserable substitute), no caches of weapons, no youth with military training. But the whole truth was that there existed Jewish community organizations and Jewish party and welfare organizations on both the local and the international level. Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was 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. (Arendt 1963/1965, 125)

For Arendt, the real tragedy was not that the Jews had been completely unorganised and lacked leadership, but that they were organised in a dramatically faulty way. Instead of organising its people into a resistance or engineering a mass escape while there still was time, the Jewish leadership chose to cooperate with the enemy. This fateful decision stemmed from the ancient survival strategy of the Jewish communities of negotiating and making concessions with gentiles in order to alleviate their oppression. A mechanical application of the same policy with the Nazi-enemy led to a loss of political judgement. The Jewish leadership was incapable of accurately judging the Nazi policy and was unable to see that this time the strategy of concessions was doomed to fail.

Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that Arendt did not argue that the Jews were the only ones who lost their capacity for judgement. On the contrary, she viewed the conduct of the Jewish leadership as merely one dimension of a wider phenomenon which ruined the entire European political culture:

I have dwelt on this chapter of the story, which the Jerusalem trial failed to put before the eyes of the world in its true dimensions, because it offers the most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society – not only in Germany but in almost all countries, not only among the persecutors but also among the victims. (Arendt 1963/1965, 125–126)

As far as I am aware, very few people have understood that this is one of the main arguments of Arendt's book. In order to read her thesis of Jewish cooperation in its proper context, one must read it within the framework of this notion, which leads to two conclusions. First, for Arendt, Jewish cooperation was not an exceptional or separate phenomenon to be understood immanently in itself, but, rather, was the most dramatic expression of a general tendency throughout Europe. In other words, the problem was not that the Jewish leadership was exceptionally prone to cooperation with the enemy, but that it cooperated as readily as anyone else. Second, the phenomenon of cooperation was not essentially and exclusively a Jewish phenomenon, but the principal policy adopted throughout Europe. The entire European political culture was characterised by an odd unwillingness to face and admit what was going on in Germany and a simultaneous eagerness to explain everything in order to ensure a positive outcome and save one's own skin.

Arendt pointed – again ironically – to the fact that an attempt was made to justify this clear-cut political self-deception after the war as an expression of inner emigration:

We need mention here only in passing the so-called 'inner emigration' in Germany – those people who frequently had held positions, even high ones, in the Third Reich and who, after the end of the war, told themselves and the world at large that they had always been 'inwardly opposed' to the regime. The question here is not whether or not they are telling the truth; the point is, rather, that no secret in the secret-ridden atmosphere of the Hitler regime was better kept than such 'inward opposition'. This was almost a matter of course under the conditions of Nazi terror; as a rather well-known 'inner emigrant', who certainly believed in his own sincerity, once told me, they had to appear 'outwardly' even more like Nazis than ordinary Nazis did, in order to keep their secret. (Arendt 1963/1965, 126–127)

Here, the irony lies, of course, in Arendt's parallel between different groups of secret-bearers, which leads the reader to think that in their attempt to keep their secret, the 'inner emigrants' ended up

following all Nazi orders even more carefully and literally than the Jewish leaders or the SS itself. In reality, inner emigration was an expression of lost conscience which could not be explained away by postwar legitimations of the impossibility of resistance. In Arendt's view, the loss of conscience led to a situation in which people were no longer able to realise that the "new set of German values" was not shared by the outside world. However, she also pointed to the fact that despite everything, there were individuals in Germany who were opposed to Hitler from the very beginning of the regime and had to be distinguished from the fraudulent "inwardly opposed" persons. They also had to be distinguished from active resisters, because it was characteristic of them to do nothing rather than trying to take action:

The position of these people, who, practically speaking, did nothing, was altogether different from that of the conspirators. Their ability to tell right from wrong had remained intact, and they never suffered a 'crisis of conscience.' There may also have been such persons among the members of the resistance, but they were hardly more numerous in the ranks of the conspirators than among the people at large. They were neither heroes nor saints, and they remained completely silent. (Arendt 1963/1965, 104)

Thus, unlike the great majority of Germans, who had lost their political judgement, it was characteristic of these few individuals that they succeeded in maintaining their capacity of judgement and sense of reality in spite of everything. As we will see in more detail below, Arendt's conception of political judgement in extreme situations is shaped precisely by the analysis of the situation of these exemplary individuals.

For Arendt, the idea of "inner emigration" was obviously only an excuse for having been involved in the execution of Nazi policy. Politically speaking, there was no difference between those who "inwardly opposed" and those who wholeheartedly supported the Nazis, as the result was the same in both cases. In fact, at a certain point the only alternative was "not to appear at all":

Hence, the only possible way to live in the Third Reich and not act as a Nazi was not to appear at all: 'Withdrawal from significant participation in public life' was indeed the only criterion by which one might have measured individual guilt [...] If the term was to make any sense, the 'inner emigrant' could only be one who lived 'as though outcast among his own people amidst blindly believing masses' [...] For opposition was indeed 'utterly pointless' in the absence of all organization. It is true that there were Germans who lived for twelve years in this 'outer cold', but their number was insignificant, even among the members of the resistance. (Arendt 1963/1965, 127)

One of the most conspicuous expressions of the moral collapse of European political culture was the infiltration of "mitigating activities". By these "activities", Arendt was referring to the numerous civil servants who later asserted that "they stayed in their jobs for no other reason than to 'mitigate' matters and to prevent 'real Nazis' from taking over their posts" (Arendt 1963/1965, 128). As one of the most representative examples of this type of civil servant, she mentioned the case of Dr. Hans Globke, Undersecretary of State, who rose to the post of Chief of Personnel Division in the West German Chancellery after the war. Arendt ironically pointed out that he had shown rather premature interest in the Jewish question by formulating the first of the directives in which proof of Aryan descent was demanded in 1932 (Arendt 1963/1965, 128).

Slowly but surely, these mitigating activities began to take forms that turned into a complete travesty of the fair and just treatment of people. One such activity was the practice of exemption based on the hierarchical classification of Jews:

The categories had been accepted without protest by German Jewry from the very beginning. And the acceptance of privileged categories – German Jews as against Polish Jews, war veterans and decorated Jews as against ordinary Jews, families whose ancestors were German-born as against recently naturalized citizens, etc. – had been the beginning of the moral collapse of respectable Jewish society. (Arendt 1963/1965, 131)

In Arendt's view, the most morally disastrous aspect of the acceptance of these privileged categories was that everyone who demanded to

have an exception made in his case implicitly recognised the rule and became – often unwittingly and involuntarily – a participant in a practice which spelled death for all non-special cases. The sad part of the story – which highlights the irony to the extreme – lies in the fact that a number of people acted in good faith:

[T]his point, apparently, was never grasped by these ‘good men,’ Jewish and Gentile, who busied themselves about all those ‘special cases’ for which preferential treatment could be asked. The extent to which even the Jewish victims had accepted the standards of the Final Solution is perhaps nowhere more glaringly evident than in the so-called Kastner Report [...] Even after the end of the war, Kastner was proud of his success in saving ‘prominent Jews,’ a category officially introduced by the Nazis in 1942, as though in his view, too, it went without saying that a famous Jew had more right to stay alive than an ordinary one: to take upon himself such ‘responsibilities’ – to help the Nazis in their efforts to pick out ‘famous’ people from the anonymous mass, for this is what it amounted to – ‘required more courage than to face death.’ (Arendt 1963/1965, 132)

At this point, the purpose of Arendt’s ironic strategy becomes clear. By highlighting certain ironical characteristics of people’s actions and judgements to the extreme, she attempted to reveal certain politically and ethically problematic sides of both gentile and Jewish politics. She focused her ironical critique on the policy of concessions on the one hand and the pervasive policy of selection on the other. It was through this textual strategy that she attempted to show that the political situation in Europe was not only miserable but also extremely grotesque.

Another expression of the moral collapse of European political culture was the all-encompassing conviction that decent conduct and sacrifices were worthless. Returning to this theme towards the end of her report, Arendt presented the memoirs of Peter Bamm (*Die Unsichtbare Flagge*, 1952), who explained that “it is certain that anyone who had dared to suffer death rather than silently tolerate the crime would have sacrificed his life vain. This is not to say that such a sacrifice would have been morally meaningless. It would only have

been practically useless. None of us had a conviction so deeply rooted that we could have taken upon ourselves a practically useless sacrifice for the sake of a higher moral meaning.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 232)

Thus, in the mendacious and macabre context of the Third Reich, decent, morally respectable conduct began to appear entirely worthless and useless. Arendt pointed out that this was precisely the aim of the Nazi regime’s totalitarian policy. Its goal was to create a general atmosphere of moral and political indifference which would lead to a kind of mass oblivion to all the terrible things that had happened. By destroying the categories through which it was possible to distinguish goodness from evil, it aimed at destroying people’s capacity to judge.

Had these odd and morally dubious practices disappeared with the collapse of the Third Reich, one might be content to think that people simply do not adhere to respectable patterns of behaviour in politically extreme situations, and may indeed adopt any patterns whatsoever. However, the collapse of the Third Reich did not mark either a renaissance of European moral and political tradition or the birth of a new and ethically more ideal and respectable political culture. Rather, the moral collapse took the form of an attempt to bury, hide and silence all the morally questionable aspects of people’s conduct during the Third Reich. Simultaneously, the practice of exemptions and exceptions was cherished:

In Germany today, this notion of ‘prominent’ Jews has not yet been forgotten. While the veterans and other privileged groups are no longer mentioned, the fate of ‘famous’ Jews is still deplored at the expense of all others. There are more than a few people, especially among the cultural élite, who still publicly regret the fact that Germany sent Einstein packing, without realizing that it was a much greater crime to kill little Hans Cohn from around the corner, even though he was no genius. (Arendt 1963/1965, 134)

Here, we are again confronted with Arendt’s ironic treatment of the situation at hand. Arendt ironically points to the fact that although the military hostilities and policy of annihilation were over, a number

of other characteristics of the state of political abasement persisted in the postwar situation. However, in Arendt's view, even the postwar practices of self-deception and moral and political dishonesty could not change the fact that complete and total oblivion of the Nazi atrocities was impossible. She pointed out that there are simply too many people in the world for this to ever be possible. There will always be somebody left alive to tell the story. Hence, in the long run, nothing can be practically useless (Arendt 1963/1965, 232).

This does not, however, necessarily imply that there will one day be a political culture in which most people will be able to judge politically under even the most difficult and extreme situations. What follows, rather, is a general pattern of the conduct of people under conditions of terror, which should always be remembered in order to understand how totalitarian domination is possible and how to resist it. More precisely, in order to understand and resist a totalitarian situation, one should not follow what the majority of people are doing, but rather what the minority is doing in spite of everything (Arendt 1963/1965, 233).

In terms of the Burkean tropes, Arendt's conclusion might be read as a suggestion that representative anecdotes (synecdoches) may also be positive and exemplary. Indeed, Arendt dealt with these types of individuals in a number of essays written after the war (see Arendt 1968a). The dramatic dialectic seems to lie in the fact that these individuals always form a tiny minority. More often than not they are compelled to live in the margins of society and suffer some kind of personal collapse caused by the fact that they are discriminated against because of their original thinking and sharp criticism of conformism.

#### 5.4. EICHMANN'S NEW EVIL

While Arendt saw the Jewish cooperation as the most dramatic expression of the moral collapse of the entire European political

tradition and its political judgement, for her, the case of Eichmann was undoubtedly a representative example of the new type of criminal that was born under the Third Reich. Thus, while the darkest chapter of the whole dark story discussed above was not Jewish cooperation as such, but rather the guiding political principle of concession to the Nazi policy, the reverse side – which highlighted the irony – of Jewish policy was the total failure to understand the political characteristics of the criminals with whom they were confronted. As I have argued above, an attempt was made by the prosecution to hide the unpleasant fact that these criminals did not seem to fit the profile of the kind of monsters who were capable of carrying out such heinous crimes. Strongly supported by the American Jewish establishment and David Ben-Gurion, the attorney general Gideon Hausner did his best to present Eichmann as an evil arch-executioner whose crimes were radically and inherently superhuman.

Arendt was not satisfied with the image presented by the prosecution and its supporters, and although she had initially expected to be faced with a criminal whose appearance corresponded to his crimes, she soon realised that she had to re-evaluate both her understanding of Eichmann's character and his deeds. As a result of this process of re-evaluation, she concluded that one of the reasons why the Jewish leadership had failed to cope with the Nazis was that they had simply failed to comprehend the nature of the Nazi crimes. They failed to grasp that a harmless-looking chain of bureaucratic measures actually constituted an entirely new type of crime which was incomparable with anything that had ever taken place before.

Having seen the accused, Arendt paid attention to the fact that there was something strange about Eichmann's way of talking and expressing his ideas. Although he had personally apologised for the fact that "officialese" was the only language he spoke, he simultaneously seemed to suffer from a mild case of aphasia. However, the problem was not that he did not remember, but rather that he was genuinely

incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché. This was extremely important to Arendt:

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. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such. (Arendt 1963/1965, 49)

The ability to think from the standpoint of somebody else is not the same as the ability to think in general. Rather, it is a specific political faculty which can only develop and be practised and cherished within the reality of the human world. What was present in the Third Reich that suppressed this faculty in such a way that it never occurred to Eichmann that he was committing criminal deeds?

Arendt attempted to answer this question in Chapter VIII of her book, *Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen*. She argued that the question was linked to the new role of duty and obeying orders established in the Third Reich, which amounted to something more than the normal bureaucratic practice of state officials that was common throughout Europe. It amounted to a peculiar travesty of Kant's categorical imperative:

The first indication of Eichmann's vague notion that there was more involved in this whole business than the question of the soldier's carrying out orders that are clearly criminal in nature and intent appeared during the police examination, when he suddenly declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty. This was outrageous, on the face of it, and also incomprehensible, since Kant's moral philosophy is so closely bound up with man's faculty of judgment, which rules out blind obedience. (Arendt 1963/1965, 136)

This time the irony lies in the fact that the travesty of Kant's categorical imperative was not intentional. Arendt pointed out that Eichmann explained that from the moment he was charged with

carrying out the Final Solution he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles, since he felt that he was no longer the master of his own deeds and was unable to change the course of events. In Arendt's view, Eichmann had distorted the Kantian formula to read: "Act as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land [...] In this household use, all that is left of Kant's spirit is the demand that a man do more than obey the law, that he go beyond the mere call of obedience and identify his own will with the principle behind the law – the source from which the law sprang. In Kant's philosophy, that source was practical reason; in Eichmann's household use of him, it was the will of the Führer." (Arendt 1963/1965, 136–137)

In fact, the irony that emerges is twofold. On the one hand, it is inscribed in the simple fact that a criminal such as Eichmann would even refer to Kant as a basis and guide of his own conduct. On the other hand, the irony is taken to the extreme by the fact that it never dawned on Eichmann that Kant's categorical imperative is not something one can invoke at will and then suddenly replace with the will of the Führer. In addition, it is important to notice that here the use of irony acquires a new function as far as it is virtually impossible to argue against clichés in terms of "normal" deliberative strategy. Irony provides a tool with which it is possible to avoid falling into the trap of trying to argue against Eichmann in his own terms.

In Arendt's view, this household distortion was decisive in understanding not only Eichmann's conduct but also the entire functioning of the Nazi bureaucracy:

Much of the horribly painstaking thoroughness in the execution of the Final Solution – thoroughness that usually strikes the observer as typically German, or else as characteristic of the perfect bureaucrat – can be traced to the odd notion, indeed very common in Germany, that to be law-abiding means not merely to obey the laws but to act as though one were the legislator of the laws that one obeys. Hence the conviction that nothing less than going beyond the call of duty will do. (Arendt 1963/1965, 137)

For Arendt, Eichmann was nothing more and nothing less than a perfect example of the extreme bureaucratic mentality which shaped the entire Nazi machinery. His primary principle was to do his duty as well and as uncompromisingly as possible and to respect the spirit of the Führer's orders even before he had given them. The paradox and irony of this attitude was that it brought Eichmann into direct conflict with the orders of his superiors. More precisely, his uncompromising bureaucratic attitude prevented him from adapting his policy to real life situations; he went on executing his murderous duties even when defeat was certain and the rest of the Nazi officials had decided to halt the Final Solution.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to emphasise that Arendt dedicated several pages in her book to the discussion of Eichmann's obsessive zeal in prolonging the Final Solution (see Arendt 1963/1965, 138–145), although her critics claimed that she had attempted to conceal this fact by defending Eichmann as a petty bureaucrat. In reality, she did not conceal anything, but instead merely questioned whether Eichmann's dutifulness was indeed proof of his fanaticism and hatred of the Jews, as her critics had argued:

That Eichmann had at all times done his best to make the Final Solution final was therefore not in dispute. The question was only whether this was indeed proof of his fanaticism, his boundless hatred of Jews, and whether he had lied to the police and committed perjury in court when he claimed he had always obeyed orders. (Arendt 1963/1965, 146)

Arendt concluded that it would be a mistake to explain Eichmann's conduct as a logical result of his fanaticism and antisemitism:

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20. It is not always pointed out in the dispute surrounding Eichmann's character and crimes that he had certain personal reasons for not obeying Himmler's order to halt the deportation of the Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. In the beginning of 1944, he had been recruited to the *Waffen* SS and would probably have been sent to whatever was left of Eastern Front had he remained "unemployed" in Budapest.

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, as it had prompted him to move in the opposite direction for a short time three years before. (Arendt 1963/1965, 146)

However, his lack of fanaticism did not mean that Eichmann was not personally committed to his duties. On the contrary, his conduct and policy was a mixture of his bureaucratic mentality and boundless admiration for the Führer:

But the personal element undoubtedly involved was not fanaticism, it was his genuine, 'boundless and immoderate admiration for Hitler' [...] It would be idle to try to figure out which was stronger in him, his admiration for Hitler or his determination to remain a law-abiding citizen of the Third Reich when Germany was already in ruins [...] Eichmann, much less intelligent and without any education to speak of, at least dimly realized that it was not an order but a law which had turned them all into criminals. The distinction between an order and the Führer's word was that the latter's validity was not limited in time and space, which is the outstanding characteristic of the former. This is also the true reason why the Führer's order for the Final Solution was followed by a huge shower of regulations and directives, all drafted by expert lawyers and legal advisers, not by mere administrators; this order, in contrast to ordinary orders was treated as a law. (Arendt 1963/1965, 149)

Thus, the political tragedy and irony of the Final Solution was not that it was executed by a monster with superhuman powers, but that it was executed under circumstances in which lawful conduct and criminal action had become one and the same. In order to obey superior orders and respect the law, one was inevitably forced to take action which according to the traditional yardsticks of decent conduct would have been criminal. From an individual's standpoint, this situation meant that a person could no longer trust the voice of his conscience in traditional terms since the law of Hitler's land demanded that "the voice of conscience tell everyone: "Thou shalt kill". By the same token, the nature of evil changes as well:

Evil in the Third Reich had lost the quality by which most people recognize it – the quality of temptation. Many Germans and many Nazis, probably an overwhelming majority of them, must have been tempted *not* to murder, *not* to rob, *not* to let their neighbors go off to their doom [...] and not to become accomplices in all these crimes by benefiting from them. But, God knows, they had learnt how to resist temptation. (Arendt 1963/1965, 150)

If the conduct of the Jewish leadership was the darkest chapter in the destruction of the European Jewry, the corruption of lawful and moral conduct was undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the moral collapse of the entire European political culture. Here, the irony lies in the fact that all political relationships and criteria had somehow been turned upside down resulting in a grotesque travesty of “normal” human action and conduct. The grotesque irony of the situation was the fact that in terms of their own laws and principles, the Nazis, like Eichmann, acted in an exemplary manner. What Arendt argued, and what hardly anybody else recognised, was that Eichmann’s actions should have been dealt with in the framework of this corruption in order to truly understand the character of his evil. The core of this evil was that it was not inscribed in man’s intrinsic and true nature but in his deeds. What made these deeds astounding was not their exceptional or devilish nature but their seeming and apparent normalcy. For Arendt, the Eichmann case was important because he was a prime example – indeed a representative anecdote in Burkean terms – of the inclusion of the element of a new evil in perfectly normal conduct.

Hence, in Jerusalem, Arendt could not see any traces of radical evil in Eichmann, of the monstrous wickedness of his heart and brain. There seemed to be nothing particularly strange or awe-inspiring about him, nothing that pointed to the transgression of the boundaries of possible and normal self-interest. There was no trace of inhuman cruelty, sadism or even an insane hatred of the Jews, nor were there any Faustian traces of his having sold his soul to the devil (cf. Arendt 1978b, 4–5).

It was this observation that led Arendt to consider Eichmann's actual deeds and question what actually made them criminal acts. As pointed out above, she identified in him a life-long effort to be a good, law-abiding citizen. This characteristic was by no means exclusive to Eichmann. On the contrary, it was something to which Arendt had pointed immediately after the war, when she argued that the real horror of the 20th century lay in the fact that this kind of "good family man" could become the greatest criminal of the century (see Arendt 1945c, 128). She concluded that the trouble with Eichmann was that he was both terribly and terrifyingly normal (Arendt 1963/1965, 276). Beyond his extraordinary diligence in looking out for his own personal advancement, he had no motives at all. Thus the novelty of Eichmann's evil was that it was not intentional but rather banal, stemming from the fact that he never realised what he was doing.

There is, of course, an extreme irony in the argument that the Nazi evil personified by Eichmann was not, for example, radical but rather banal. However, it is of utmost importance to note that the banality of evil by no means makes it any less harmful, criminal, or immoral. On the contrary, at the core of banal evil lies something which makes it particularly dangerous. The fact that Eichmann never fully realised the enormity of his crimes was a result of the fact that he never stopped to think about what he was doing. In other words, the hallmark of this kind of banal evil is thoughtlessness.

Thoughtlessness is not the same as stupidity, and Eichmann's thoughtless evil did not mean that he did not think at all, or that he would not have had the capacity to think had he wanted to. Rather, the notion of thoughtlessness as the hallmark of banal evil means that evil is born as a result of a chain of seemingly harmless everyday deeds. In other words, what is evil in this chain is not a single deed but rather the end to which these deeds lead.

In Arendt's view, the problem, and the true horror of Eichmann's thoughtlessness and banal evil, lay in the fact that it led to personal

and political irresponsibility. Never stopping to consider what he was actually doing or supporting, it never occurred to him that “in politics, obedience and support are the same” (Arendt 1963/1965, 122). Thus, Arendt presented Eichmann as an extreme case of human conduct, in which different human faculties did not cooperate. Eichmann refused to exercise the faculty which usually follows action or even the intention to act – namely, judgement. In other words, never stopping to think about what he was really doing meant that he never stopped to judge his own deeds, their role and consequences.

It was precisely this cutting of the connection between acting and judging that led to irresponsibility, insofar as judging is the activity through which man is able to assume responsibility for his own actions. In the final analysis, what made Arendt’s interpretation of Eichmann’s evil so uncomfortable for her readers was the simple claim that Eichmann did not do anything extraordinary, but rather acted as most of us act most of the time. We rarely stop to think about what we are really doing and we often refuse to take responsibility for our actions.

I think it must have been this ironical parallel between Eichmann’s and other peoples conduct that drove Arendt’s readers mad. They believed she meant to imply that there is a little Eichmann in every one of us. They also believed that Arendt was mocking their sincere attempts to lead a decent life after the difficult and morally corrupting years of war. After the “68”, it is easy to forget how important general stability and law and order were for most people during the first decades after the war. Arendt’s readers failed to see that she did not mean to argue that we are all equally evil (at least potentially), but that the importance of personal political judgement is the only possible guiding principle of political action. In other words, one should occasionally stop to think what one is really doing. This is the only way we can try to prevent evil deeds from taking place in the future.

### 5.5. ARENDT AS JUDGE

Over the past 30 years or so, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* has often been read as Hannah Arendt's contribution to the theory of political judgement. More precisely, it has been read as a first step towards the themes she would later approach in *The Life of the Mind* (1978). In contrast with this standard interpretation, throughout this book I have argued that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is a political judgement of the conduct of the Jewish leadership and Zionist politics. I have also argued that the larger frame of Arendt's critique of Jewish politics is the total collapse of the European political tradition caused by the appearance of Nazi totalitarianism. Instead of reading Arendt's critique of Jewish politics as blaming the victims for causing their own destruction, it should be read in the context of the general collapse of political judgement in Europe. In these terms of interpretation, Arendt's theses of Jewish cooperation and the banality of evil appear as reverse sides of the same coin. The cooperation of the European Jewish leadership with the Nazis is a dramatic example of the collapse of political judgement in a politically extreme situation. The inability of the European tradition of political thought to theorise the political aspect of new phenomena was most clearly revealed in the fact that, instead of searching for politically significant novelties in unprecedented and extreme events and phenomena, it attempted to reduce all novelties to precedents and dealt with them through established patterns of thought and action. True, it would have been extremely difficult to make adequate judgements in a situation in which evil appeared in an entirely new form. Nevertheless, Arendt's point is that evil should have been seen in apparently harmless everyday situations which in themselves did not invite people to push thinking and judging further but rather encouraged them to remain trapped in old patterns of thought and behaviour.

I would like to suggest that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is best understood such as it is: a political judgement of a concrete, empirical

phenomenon. It should not, in other words, be read as a philosophical treatise of political judgement on the theoretical level. In my view, there are two problems in the common strategy of reading and interpretation of Arendt's book. First, it leads to anachronistic interpretations of Arendt's conception of judgement. Arendt scholars end up arguing that everything that she wrote in *The Life of the Mind* can be traced back to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, as if her thinking had not developed at all during a period of time that spanned more than ten years and indeed distinguishes these two texts from each other. Second, it leads to the misinterpretation of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as a quasi-theoretical treatise of political judgement inspired by Kantian theorisations of aesthetical judgement. Scholars end up in arguing that Arendt's theses and interpretations are incorrect simply because she leans too heavily on a theory which is not applicable to an extreme phenomenon such as Nazi totalitarianism.

In this subchapter, I will read the *Epilogue* and *Postscript* of the book as concrete judgements. I will challenge the commonly presented argument according to which Arendt somehow overstepped her bounds by making her own judgement of Jewish politics and the Eichmann trial. As we have seen in the previous chapters, it has been argued that as a layman and a person who "was not there", she had no right and competence to judge either Jewish politics in the Third Reich or the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Her decision to take on the role of judge and hand down her own verdict on both the trial and the accused has been seen as an outrageous act of false pride and arrogance. I will challenge this accusation by arguing that Hannah Arendt's judgement and verdict are rather expressions of well-placed pride and arrogance, both of which are necessary prerequisites for competent and valid judgement.

I claim that good political judgement is by its very character a proud and arrogant activity. In order to judge a phenomenon clearly and accurately, one must keep a critical distance, which makes empathising impossible. This judgement is outrageous because it does

not respect the conventions and pre-established patterns of thought. It has to exaggerate and push certain traits of a phenomenon to the extreme in order to make its case. It is pitiless in its impartiality, which often offends those who have something to hide. It is shocking as far it challenges our pre-established conceptions and demands that we think independently. As far as it concerns past events, it is unavoidably informed by hindsight. Thus, it is never fair, because it always knows more than the contemporaries did. Hannah Arendt's judgement shook the world because it was all of these things. It was an original and courageous judgement of a politically extreme and unprecedented situation in which most people lost their capacity for political judgement and sense of reality (cf. Parvikko 2003).

I approach political judgement as a theoretically untameable phenomenon because of its practical nature. In other words, because of its practical and contextual nature, it cannot rely on pre-existing patterns of thought and the unchanging criteria of judgement, but is always based on and shaped by the contingent conditions of concrete situations. I argue that this is why there has not been and cannot be such a thing as a theory of judgement. As an activity focused on worldly occurrences, it should be reconnected with the contingent events of the realm of rhetoric rather than the eternal truths of philosophy. Hence, political judgement belongs to politics as opposed to philosophy for the simple reason that political judgements concern concrete events shared by people in the common world. Furthermore, I also argue that from another perspective, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* may be read as a critique of the political use of trials. Arendt points to the fact that the Eichmann trial went beyond the "normal" limits of a trial and contributed to the blurring of the line between politics and court procedures.

In sum, the failure of the Jerusalem court consisted in its not coming to grips with three fundamental issues, all of which have been sufficiently well known and widely discussed since the establishment of the Nuremberg Tribunal: the problem of impaired justice in the court of the victors; a valid definition

of the 'crime against humanity'; and a clear recognition of the new criminal who commits this crime. (Arendt 1963/1965, 274)

As this quote shows, Arendt considered the trial in Jerusalem a total failure in every important respect. In the beginning of the *Epilogue*, she complained that "the irregularities and abnormalities of the trial in Jerusalem were so many, so varied, and of such legal complexity that they overshadowed during the trial [...] the central moral, political, and even legal problems that the trial inevitably posed" (Arendt 1963/1965, 253). In other words, the inherent problem with the trial was that all the politically central and important questions it raised were evaded and buried.

By this, however, Arendt did not mean to suggest that the best possible forum for dealing with politically central and important questions would be a courtroom. Rather, she meant that the Israelis failed to define and conduct the trial in such a way that it would have conformed to the purpose of a trial, which is simply to render justice. Instead of rendering justice, the Israelis chose to list "a great number of purposes the trial was supposed to achieve, all of which were ulterior purposes with respect to the law and to courtroom procedure" (Arendt 1963/1965, 253). The problem was that a number of inherently political questions were drawn into the courtroom proceedings, and they could not be resolved in the frame of a trial for two reasons. Firstly, they simply did not belong there, and secondly, they were simply too big to be dealt with in any court of law.

While a number of international legal experts considered the Eichmann trial an important step forward in the establishment of international norms of criminal law, in Arendt's view, the trial repeated the failures of both the Nuremberg and subsequent successor trials. The most important of these failures was that Eichmann was tried in a court of victors. Despite a number of pleas made by internationally respected experts, no international court was established and the trial did not even succeed in paving the way

for the future establishment of such a court. The situation was made worse by the fact that the defence was not allowed to call its own witnesses.

However, for Arendt, the particulars of the law were not the most important problem. Far more important was the fact that Eichmann had been mistakenly accused and condemned. The most important and dramatic failure of the trial stemmed from the profound misunderstanding of the nature of Eichmann's crimes. Instead of distinguishing in them an entirely unprecedented crime which had never occurred before in human history, the Israelis approached Eichmann's crimes in terms of their own history as a persecuted people:

In the eyes of the Jews, thinking exclusively in terms of their own history, the catastrophe that had befallen them under Hitler [...] appeared not as the most recent of crimes, the unprecedented crime of genocide, but, on the contrary, as the oldest crime they knew and remembered. This misunderstanding, almost inevitable if we consider not only the facts of Jewish history but also, and more important, the current Jewish historical self-understanding, is actually at the root of all the failures and shortcomings of the Jerusalem trial. None of the participants ever arrived at a clear understanding of the actual horror of Auschwitz, which is of a different nature from all the atrocities of the past, because it appeared to prosecution and judges alike as not much more than the most horrible pogrom in Jewish history. They therefore believed that a direct line existed from the early anti-Semitism of the Nazi Party to the Nuremberg Laws and from there to the expulsion of Jews from the Reich and, finally, to the gas chambers. Politically and legally, however, these were 'crimes' different not only in degree of seriousness but in essence. (Arendt 1963/1965, 267)

Thus, in Arendt's view, the basic failure of the Jerusalem trial stemmed from a profound misjudgement by the Jews of their own political history. They did not succeed in distinguishing the traditional hatred of the Jews from modern antisemitism and respectively, they did not succeed in comprehending how this modern political antisemitism was once again turned into an unprecedented policy of the genocide

of an entire people. The decisive step in this change was made when the Nazis progressed from the policy of enforced emigration to the policy of extinction:

It was when the Nazi regime declared that the German people not only were unwilling to have any Jews in Germany but wished to make the entire Jewish people disappear from the face of the earth that the new crime, the crime against humanity – in the sense of a crime ‘against the human status’ or against the very nature of mankind – appeared. Expulsion and genocide, though both are international offenses, must remain distinct; the former is an offense against fellow-nations, whereas the latter is an attack upon human diversity as such, that is, upon a characteristic of the ‘human status’ without which the very words ‘mankind’ or ‘humanity’ would be devoid of meaning. (Arendt 1963/1965, 268–269)

Here, the decisive criterion that distinguishes these different kinds of crimes from each other is the question of whom the crime is committed against. The introduction of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which legalised discrimination against the Jewish minority, was a national crime; they clearly violated national and constitutional rights and liberties, although this seemed to be of no concern to the international community. Enforced emigration, which became official policy after 1938, did concern the international community for the simple reason that those who were expelled began to appear *en masse* at the frontiers of other countries. However, neither of these crimes was unprecedented, and both legalised discrimination and expulsion on a mass scale had been repeatedly practiced in a number of countries. Genocide, in its unprecedentedness, is distinguished from all earlier crimes by the fact that it is committed against humankind as a whole, which is why modern criminals like Eichmann should have been prosecuted by a court that represented humankind as a whole:

[S]o these modern, state-employed mass murderers must be prosecuted because they violated the order of mankind, and not because they killed millions of people. Nothing is more pernicious to an understanding of these

new crimes, or stands more in the way of the emergence of an international penal code that could take care of them, than the common illusion that the crime of murder and the crime of genocide are essentially the same, and that the latter therefore is 'no new crime properly speaking'. The point of the latter is that an altogether different order is broken and an altogether different community is violated. (Arendt 1963/1965, 272)

Thus, for Arendt, the execution of the Jerusalem trial was just another chapter in the long history of the Jewish absence of political judgement, which stemmed from a mistaken self-understanding of their own political history. Once again, they misinterpreted the character of the crimes with which they were confronted. This time, however, the Jews were not the only victims, as far as humankind itself was to suffer from the lack of an international criminal court with the authority to properly deal with these kinds of crimes:

Had the court in Jerusalem understood that there were distinctions between discrimination, expulsion, and genocide, it would immediately have become clear that the supreme crime it was confronted with, the physical extermination of the Jewish people, was a crime against humanity, perpetrated upon the body of the Jewish people, and that only the choice of victims, not the nature of the crime, could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred and anti-Semitism. Insofar as the victims were Jews, it was right and proper that a Jewish court should sit in judgment; but insofar as the crime was a crime against humanity, it needed an international tribunal to do justice to it. (Arendt 1963/1965, 269)

The Israelis' misjudgement was made worse by the fact that they shared the assumption present in all modern legal systems: that the intent to do wrong is a prerequisite of committing a crime. This assumption prevented them from understanding that "this new type of criminal, who is in actual fact *hostis generis humani*, commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or to feel that he is doing wrong" (Arendt 1963/1965, 276). Eichmann was loaded with all kinds of evil motives, because "when this intent is absent, where, for whatever reasons, even reasons

of moral insanity, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong is impaired, we feel no crime has been committed.” (Arendt 1963/1965, 277)

However, notwithstanding of his motives, Eichmann did commit the crime of playing a central role in an enterprise whose open purpose was the permanent elimination of certain groups of people from the face of the earth, and this was precisely why he, too, had to be eliminated:

[T]here still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder. For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same. 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. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang, (Arendt 1963/1965, 279)

These are the final words of Arendt’s personal verdict on Eichmann, which she stated at the end of the *Epilogue*. A number of her critics found it outrageous that she dared to “correct” the judges who had presided over the case. They failed to understand that Arendt was not really criticising the judges or the verdict, but was merely suggesting that a different formulation of the verdict might have more clearly revealed the real nature of Eichmann’s crimes. She pointed out that one of the principles of justice is that it must not only be done, but must also be seen to be done. Thus, a verdict should reveal the nature of the crime a criminal has committed as clearly as possible (Arendt 1963/1965, 277).

Even more importantly, Arendt pointed to the fact that the real focus of any trial is the deeds of the criminal defendant. Although it has become commonplace to assume that a criminal must have evil motives or intentions in order to do wrong and be capable of committing a crime, motives themselves are not punishable. Only

criminal deeds are punishable, and in the case of “normal crimes” expiated, as motives alone cannot do damage to the world and injure the human community regardless of how evil they may be. Only deeds have an effect on the world, which is why Eichmann also had to be punished on the basis of what he did.

In Arendt’s view, ignoring Eichmann’s motives did not diminish either the enormity of his crimes or his guilt. Rather, it focused attention on the real character of his crimes as offences against humankind and its inviolable right to inhabit the earth. Eichmann’s greatest crime was that he refused to share the earth with the Jewish people. This refusal constituted a violation of the basic human right to inhabit the earth with other people, which was the most important of all the inviolable human and political rights, without which human life on the earth and the sharing of the world would be impossible. Thus, Eichmann’s crime had three decisive characteristics. First, it was a deed which was committed against humankind in the most profound sense. Second, it was irreconcilable because of its profound nature and enormity. And third, because of its irreconcilability, it was unpunishable. The elimination of a criminal who had committed an irreconcilable crime against humankind could only be a formal substitute for a punishment which would have fit the crime.

In Arendt’s view, this was the real dilemma of the Eichmann trial. It revealed that the administrative mass murder committed by the Nazis was a new type of crime for which the European political and judicial tradition was entirely unprepared and which it was entirely unequipped to handle. Because of their sheer enormity, there was no punishment that fit these crimes. Yet they had to be dealt with somehow.

Even more importantly, the real dilemma revealed by the Eichmann trial was not the Nazi crimes as such but the fact that they had actualised the potentiality of these kinds of crimes for the first time in history. Humankind as a whole remained completely unprepared for the possibility that something similar might happen

in the future. Once actualised, there were no guarantees that such crimes would not manifest themselves in some other form:

It is in the very nature of things human that every act that has once made its appearance and has been recorded in the history of mankind stays with mankind as a potentiality long after its actuality has become a thing of the past [...] whatever the punishment, once a specific crime has appeared for the first time, its reappearance is more likely than its initial emergence could ever have been. (Arendt 1963/1965, 273)

More precisely, the character of a phenomenon entirely changes when it changes from a potentiality into a reality. As long as there is only the potential for something to occur, it does not really belong to the world, but as soon as it has been actualised it becomes a constituting element of the reality of the world. Hence, crimes against humankind reach their peak in the fact that they affect and change the human condition on earth in a dramatic and irreducible manner. They mark a point of no return which changes the conditions of life on earth.

This was the real dilemma of the Nazi crimes, to which the Eichmann trial offered no real solution. It left humankind with an unsolved puzzle of administrative mass murder. For Arendt, it marked a total collapse of the entire European political tradition, as it revealed that this tradition lacked the necessary tools with which to deal with such crimes morally, legally, and politically. In the final analysis, the Nazi crimes constituted a dilemma because they left humankind without firm criteria of judgement for the present and future (Arendt 1963/1965, 283). Instead of relying on pre-established patterns of thought and norms of behaviour, one ought to have learnt to judge freely and independently:

There remains, however, one fundamental problem, which was implicitly present in all these postwar trials and which must be mentioned here because it touches upon one of the central moral questions of all time, namely upon the nature and function of human judgment. What we have demanded in these trials, where the defendants had committed 'legal' crimes, is that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they

have to guide them is their own judgment, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them. (Arendt 1963/1965, 294–295)

The notion of judging freely and without precedent inevitably raises the question of the nature and function of human judgement. This is, indeed, Arendt's final question in her trial report, which she answers by claiming that the collapse of the former political tradition marks the beginning of a new era of independent judgement informed by the "arrogant" conviction that nobody can be trusted:

And this question is all the more serious as we know that the few who were 'arrogant' enough to trust only their own judgment were by no means identical with those persons who continued to abide by old values, or who were guided by a religious belief [...] Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgments, and they did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by, under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no rules existed for the unprecedented. (Arendt 1963/1965, 295)

Arendt's apology for the arrogance of judgement may appear outrageous and impudent in the context of the Holocaust. It may even seem to be an expression of intellectual and political elitism to claim that only a few individuals were actually able to maintain their judgement under Nazi pressure. However, independent judgement is arrogant in a very particular way, as it does not imply that one would despise or look down on other people. Nor does it mean that one would have a total lack of respect for other people and their right to inhabit and share the earth with each other. On the contrary, it stems precisely from the firm conviction that it is an inviolable right of every human being to inhabit and share the world with other people. However, there is a fundamental political commandment inscribed in this right, as it is bound with the duty to exercise human faculties of action and judgement in such a way that sharing the world is possible. In other words, the inviolable right to inhabit

the world can only be realised on the condition that it is cherished by acting in concert with other people and by judging their deeds concerning the common world.

Moreover, the arrogance of judgement means that one cannot trust anyone else's judgement because it is actually not necessarily a judgement at all, but rather an expression of obedience and, as such, an irresponsible thoughtlessness. In Arendt's view, independent judgement had already proven too difficult and demanding for most people, many of whom preferred to hide behind other people's judgements. However, things were made even worse by an increasingly prevalent inclination to deliberately refuse to judge: "The argument that we cannot judge if we were not present and involved ourselves seems to convince everyone everywhere, although it seems obvious that if it were true, neither the administration of justice nor the writing of history would ever be possible." (Arendt 1963/1965, 296)

Here, Arendt is pointing to the fact that independent judgement is inevitably always external. Unlike those who argued that one cannot judge if one is not present, Arendt maintains that one cannot judge if one is present, because being present blurs the distance required in order to make good political judgements. Distance is necessary in order to both see the whole situation and be able to judge in somebody else's place.

Being present not only prevents one from keeping one's distance from the phenomenon under scrutiny but also leads to self-righteousness, which stems from the conviction that one always knows what really happened. The problem of self-righteousness is that it is morally corruptive; it builds a moral hierarchy in terms of which only those with sufficient personal experience can distinguish right from wrong. Pushed to its logical conclusion, this attitude leads to a situation in which one can only judge one's own deeds, as nobody else is experienced enough to judge them. Politically speaking, this results in a situation in which political existence becomes impossible since it always is based on sharing the world, and the common world

can only be born as a result of action and judgement which concerns the world as a whole.

One more element is needed in order to outline the frame of the Arendtian universe of judgement and draw together all of its aforementioned aspects. This element is responsibility:

Justice, but not mercy, is a matter of judgment, and about nothing does public opinion everywhere seem to be in happier agreement than that no one has the right to judge somebody else. What public opinion permits us to judge and even to condemn are trends, or whole groups of people – the larger the better – in short, something so general that distinctions can no longer be made, names no longer be named. Needless to add, this taboo applies doubly when the deeds or words of famous people or men in high position are being questioned. This is currently expressed in high-flown assertions that it is ‘superficial’ to insist on details and to mention individuals, whereas it is the sign of sophistication to speak in generalities according to which all cats are gray and we all are equally guilty. (Arendt 1963/1965, 296–297)

If distinctions cannot be made and names cannot be named, two things become impossible. First, the practice of judgement itself is impossible as far as it is always based on distinguishing between right and wrong. Second, it is no longer possible to determine and distinguish the relations and elements of responsibility, as acting in the world is always the action of concrete, living people who commit certain deeds as opposed to trends which occur without protagonists. The aforementioned quote suggests that Arendt firmly refutes the tendency to blur individual moral responsibility by making generalisations. For her, making a judgement of an individual’s conduct requires the examination of details and pinpointing of individuals who have committed certain deeds. In my view, this is a strong plea for the rehabilitation of individual moral judgement and personal responsibility. However, it does not mean that all the responsibility for anything and everything that has ever happened should be placed on the shoulders of individuals. In other words, Arendt does not claim that everyone is the architect of his or her own fortunes.

On the contrary, she emphasises that individual responsibility for one's own deeds must always be distinguished from political responsibility, which is never personal in the same way:

This, of course, is not to deny that there is such a thing as *political* responsibility which, however, exists quite apart from what the individual member of the group has done and therefore can neither be judged in moral terms nor be brought before a criminal court. Every government assumes political responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of its predecessor and every nation for the deeds and misdeeds of the past [...] It means hardly more, generally speaking, than that every generation, by virtue of being born into a historical continuum, is burdened by the sins of the fathers as it is blessed with the deeds of the ancestors. But this kind of responsibility is not what we are taking about here; it is not personal [...] It is quite conceivable that certain political responsibilities among nations might some day be adjudicated in an international court; what is inconceivable is that such a court would be a criminal tribunal which pronounces on the guilt or innocence of individuals. (Arendt 1963/1965, 298)

These concluding words of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* are decisive in order to understand Arendt's true point regarding the nature of Eichmann's crimes and their relation to juridical and political systems. In my view, her central argument is that political crimes cannot be punished, as they are synonymous with the policy of a certain government. Only the criminal deeds committed by individual members of a government can be punished. In this sense, the greatest paradox of Eichmann's crimes was that everyday administrative procedures became the greatest crimes ever committed in the history of the world.