

Judgment and the Order of Passivity

*An Investigation of the Banality of Evil in the Cases of the Rwandan and
Cambodian Genocides, and Modern Bureaucracy*

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

In the controversy surrounding Hannah Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* the discussion of her work has come to recognize that Arendt's account of the banality of evil is not meant to excuse Adolf Eichmann for serving as the SS officer charged with overseeing the logistical arrangements needed to enact the Final Solution. This writing will examine three case studies – a discussion of the genocides in Rwanda and in Cambodia and a discussion of modern bureaucracy – and consider both to what extent Arendt's notion of the banality of evil contributes to an understanding of the practices of genocide and modern bureaucracy, and to what extent does an examination of these practices contribute to an understanding of the banality of evil. The argument will be made that Arendt's use of this phrase refers simply to the willingness to perform activities if they are viewed as being in compliance with the prevailing moral and/or legal order of the society in which they occur. Though this suggests her offering a fairly straightforward message about the “dangers of conformity,” or the willingness to thoughtlessly engage in conventional practices to such an extreme degree, the thesis will seek to demonstrate the complexity of recognizing that this level of conformity is present under these circumstances.

The examination of the three cases being discussed will centre both on Arendt's discussion of the human faculties as well as the form of sociological investigation developed by Alan Blum and Peter McHugh known as Analysis, and the focus of this method upon understanding the merits of human activity. The argument seeks to show that by following the reflexive turn in Analysis an understanding of what is involved in showing a concern for the meaning of human activity is not arrived at “subjectively.” Rather the suggestion will be made that even if the resolution of this meaning is without a definitive outcome its importance is

demonstrated through a consideration of the cases examined and the concern shown within each of them for matters such as friendship, justice, the activity of thinking and the nature of evil. Lastly, the argument will use Arendt's work to suggest that not only the activity of thinking but each of the different human faculties can potentially offer a way to appreciate the "thoughtlessness" that Arendt suggests is indicative of the banality of evil, and which may be encountered in the mundane setting of modern bureaucracy and/or in the extreme situations of genocide.

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many discussions I have attended displays a truly impressive mastery of material that I am very glad to have seen being exercised.

The last word I want to give to my sons Oliver and Quinn. Arendt once wrote of twins that an “uneasiness” is experienced when in their presence due to the sense that each one of us has of what it means to be a uniquely human individual. But on this matter, I will have to firmly disagree with her. Just like many other parents I know few things that can compare to the pleasure of looking upon each of their faces.

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Only our concept of time makes us call the Last Judgment by that name; in fact, it is a court in standing session.

- Franz Kafka

Chapter 1

Practicality, Household Morality and the Problem of Reconciling “Is” and “Ought”

In the field of the finite, absolute determinacy remains only a demand, a demand which the Understanding has to meet by continually increasing delimitation – a fact of the greatest importance – but which continues ad infinitum and which allows only of perennially approximate satisfaction.¹

– G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (Quoted in Edith Wyschogrod, *Spirit in Ashes*)

Introduction

An often commented upon feature of issues debated in a public forum is the spectacle that accompanies subjects that are deemed to be controversial and the way in which this spectacle impacts the taste for discussion. The cynical view that controversy attracts opportunism and steers away genuine interest may lend support to the suggestion that these issues inevitably get overblown. But these reservations about the merits of public discourse do not rule out the possibility that through a discussion of a controversial subject an understanding could be developed that works out the concerns being addressed. In the case of the controversy surrounding Hannah Arendt’s coverage of the Eichmann trial in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* the discussion of her work has at least come to recognize that Arendt’s account of the banality of evil is not meant to excuse Adolf Eichmann for serving as the SS officer charged with overseeing the logistical arrangements needed to enact the Final Solution. This suggests that her report on Eichmann could be appreciated as being in the tradition of Max Weber’s notion of *Verstehen* with its focus upon understanding the subject of analysis without necessarily intending to endorse its orientation to the world. Building from this

understanding Arendt departs from the Weberian approach and makes the judgment that Eichmann should be hanged for his involvement in the Third Reich on the grounds that his part in carrying out a policy that sought the elimination of entire populations makes him the type of person no one would want to continue to share the earth with – an assessment that is clearly far from either excusing or endorsing what he had done. This writing will examine three case studies – a discussion of the genocides in Rwanda and in Cambodia and a discussion of modern bureaucracy – and consider both to what extent Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil contributes to an understanding of the practices of genocide and modern bureaucracy, and to what extent an examination of these practices contributes to an understanding of the banality of evil. The argument will be made that the key notion for understanding what is meant by the “banality of evil” is that the activities performed are in compliance with the prevailing moral and/or legal order of the society in which they occur. On the basis of the understanding that is developed through the discussion of these three cases judgment about what is involved with the banality of evil and the practice of genocide and modern bureaucracy will also be worked out.

The Concept of Evil in Arendt’s Work

Arendt situates banal evil as a break from previous accounts of the concept of evil including her own earlier explanation in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* that drew upon Kant’s use of the phrase of radical evil. Kant had used this phrase to break with the traditional explanation of “moral” evil (versus the natural “evils” suffered from flooding and other natural disasters) which argues that the performance of evil acts is a matter of ignorance on the part of the doer and not something that anyone would willingly choose to commit. Kant’s explanation of the concept of radical evil contends that individuals will pursue evil activities out of a narrow-minded sense of “self-interest” that shows no concern for the “good” of the moral law. The way Arendt further

radicalized this concept is by suggesting that the evil committed by totalitarian regimes is deliberately chosen but not for humanly understandable motives such as self-interest. The examples she cites in support of this argument include the decision on the part of the Nazis to have resources such as the use of trains to deliver supplies and reinforcements badly needed for the battle with Russia on the Eastern front diverted towards the effort to enact the Final Solution, as if winning the conventional war against the armed forces of a hostile nation was less important for securing the safety of Germany than the murder of defenceless civilians. As well, the existence of the concentration camps also seems to eschew utilitarian motives considering that as work camps they had a negligible benefit in terms of providing productive labour and as death camps they prolonged the lives of those slated for extermination.

The Eichmann trial convinced Arendt to not only introduce a concept of evil that takes shape in a banal form but to also reject the idea of radical evil in both Kant's version of this concept and her own earlier version in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*. This she explains in a relatively well-known passage from a letter to Gershom Scholem:

It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is "thought-defying," as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its "banality." Only the good has depth and can be radical.²

The suggestion that evil has width and can become dangerous through its capacity to spread with ease seems to account for the willingness to accept the enactment of the Final Solution throughout Europe. The more debatable part of Arendt's statement is the suggestion that evil is "never radical" and "possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension" considering that the term that she uses synonymously with the banality of evil is "thoughtlessness."³ If evil is either more or less extreme, and so different by degree but not in kind, then according to this explanation Hitler would be extremely thoughtless, Eichmann would also be extremely thoughtless but to a lesser degree than Hitler and so on down the chain of command. This may seem like a problematic way to characterize Hitler's intentions as the architect and driving force behind a policy of mass murder that deliberately sought to eliminate entire nations of people.

Dignee Brandt offers a way to respond to this difficulty by suggesting that a distinction can be made between the banal evil of Eichmann's intentions and the radical evil of the deeds he was involved with performing.⁴ The argument in this writing will also recognize that evil in different forms is capable of working towards the same end although with the focus of this argument on social order and its endorsement of a policy of mass murder the issue of intentions will be considered secondary in importance relative to the activities that are being performed. The cover provided by this type of social order creates conditions for motives that may be radical, banal or (as will be discussed) criminal, all of which may be compatible with one another. The significance of these motives will be considered *potentially* relevant to examine in the cases where they serve as mitigating factors in assessing individual responsibility for supporting a policy of mass murder. In terms of understanding the concept of evil the case will be made in this writing that evil is different in kind, but even if it is viewed as being different only by degree as Arendt proposes in her letter to Scholem – through her suggestion that evil is

always banal and just more or less extreme – social order will still be viewed as a key consideration for sustaining the practice of genocide. Its endorsement of a policy of mass murder would be no less important for ensuring that banal forms of evil can coexist together at varying levels of intensity to work towards achieving genocidal ends.

What should also be added to these remarks is that, like its counterpart the “good,” no claim is being made to know in an absolute sense what is meant by the notion of evil or the activities that can be identified as being evil. A central focus of the discussion will be to respond to the lack of certainty concerning these notions by working out what relevance, if any, they have in relation to understanding the practice of genocide. This focus will be pursued with particular attention upon the way Arendt’s unfinished remarks on the faculty of human judgment can be a part of developing an understanding of what evil and the “good” involve in these matters. In terms of method the argument will seek to work out this understanding with the approach to social inquiry presented in the writings of Alan Blum and Peter McHugh known as Analysis. The choice of this method will be explained by examining the well-known statement of “just following orders” made by Nazi officials at Nuremberg to develop an initial sense of what “good” the practice of genocide is considered to have by its practitioners in offering this defence. This discussion will also seek to clarify what is meant by the banality of evil and the way in which this notion can be said to involve both thoughtlessness and a willingness to comply with a social order that endorses a policy of mass murder.

Social Theory and the Nuremberg Defence

The starting point for this discussion of method will be to consider the review that Stanley Raffel presents in his article “Revisiting Role Theory: Rules and the Problem of the Self” of the different ways the concepts of role and self have been formulated by a number of the most

prominent perspectives within social theory. Raffel uses Analysis to examine the different perspectives in his review beginning with the Functionalist perspective that is most well-known through the work of Talcott Parsons. The objections that Raffel identifies with the notion of selfhood that Parsons makes available in his account of role seems to have obvious applicability to an actor who claims to be “just following orders”. For instance, Raffel argues that:

Even though the Parsonian self is active, in that his or her activity is totally a matter of complying with expectations, doesn't the orthodox Parsonian solution, then, really solve the problem of order at the cost of robbing actors of selves? ... It seems more a case of going along with what others or the whole society expect, quite irrespective of what one actually wants. ⁵

The apparent aptness of using Raffel's description to show the compliance of Functionalism with the account given by the Nazi defendants is somewhat mitigated by Parsons' personal opposition to the Nazi movement that he voiced by advocating for America's early entry into the Second World War to fight against the Axis powers.⁶ Parsons' resistance to the dangers posed by oppressive forms of government also included his opposition to the spread of Stalinism in Europe after WWII and in his standing up to McCarthyism after being the target of Hoover's investigations.⁷ He justified this stance theoretically with an explanation given in quasi-evolutionary terms that suggested that rigid social systems create instability when they are unresponsive to the needs of individuals under their domain as these individuals seek to answer to the demands of their moral environment.⁸ Parsons' explanation seems problematic for what response it would recommend individuals should have when they are a part of “unstable” social institutions that restrict their moral freedom. If the argument is that they will “naturally” be

inclined to do what is moral then this was simply not borne out in the Third Reich where the vast majority of individuals showed no evidence that they wished to see the Nazi worldview “evolve.”

If the most significant shortcoming of Functionalist theory in accounting for selfhood is its inability to recognize the dangers associated with a social system that is working well rather than suffering from some form of defect, then Conflict Theory might seem to represent a more viable alternative to understanding the connection between role and self. Using Ralf Dahrendorf’s work to represent this perspective Raffel notes Dahrendorf’s argument that “the idea of persons as role-followers ... tends to rob persons of anything like a self” and that this indicates that sociology is incapable of accounting for what individuals experience in being part of society.⁹ This would imply that sociology’s explanation of self in terms of role not only demonstrates that any attempt to understand the self in society will be inadequate but also that these attempts could potentially be deceiving and harmful in their suggesting that selfhood amounts to rule-following and nothing more – as illustrated by the “just following orders” defence.

Raffel then turns to the work of Erving Goffman and recognizes his notion of role distance as a sociological concept that offers a glimpse of the self. This is a notion that refers to the situations where individuals consciously choose to reject the expectations set by roles and thereby show the self to be engaged in more than just the effort to meet these expectations. Raffel cites Goffman’s example of a child who only pretends to be thrilled by a ride on a merry-go-round as the way this child demonstrates how they have grown up and moved past the initial stages of enjoying or being frightened by the ride. Raffel then makes reference to Andrew Travers’ criticism of Goffman, which argues that role distance offers a version of the self that is

only negatively defined in terms of what it rejects.¹⁰ Goffman's notion of role distance could perhaps be defended against this criticism if it was likened to Arendt's account of the activity of thinking that she suggests has ability to stop individuals from performing the activities they are engaged in, whether or not these activities meet the expectations of society, and consider if their performance would shatter their sense of self. Although more will be said about Arendt's notion of thinking in the remaining chapters, her description of this faculty as a highly active state would seem to imply that during this activity the self is expressed not "negatively" in terms of what it will not do but in terms of the self actively exercising its capacity to consider the options it can exercise.

Assuming for the moment that this criticism of Goffman's notion of role distance could be answered through a comparison to Arendt's notion of thinking the more troubling issue with the explanation of self in his work is that his dramaturgical model suggests that to meet the demands of society selfhood is simply abandoned. Goffman proposes that individuals spend their time divided between the front and back stage, where they are preoccupied with managing impressions in the case of the former and making the necessary arrangements for this performance in the case of the latter, but at no time seeing themselves as the authors of the expectations they are seeking to meet. The possibility that the notion of "just following orders" could comply with Goffman's dramaturgical model would then seem to apply, a point also affirmed by Arendt's discussion of the "inner emigration" argument (more on this below).

This possibility to recognize individuals as the author of the expectations they strive to meet is recognized by Harold Garfinkel through his development of the ethnomethodological perspective and its explanation of the concept of reflexivity. This concept, which will be of great significance to the development of Analysis, acknowledges that "the actual events of everyday

life constitute a complex and ever changing array of contingencies such that no fixed expectations could ever be sufficiently detailed to dictate to actors what they should actually do to fulfill their roles.”¹¹ This state of affairs calls upon social actors to improvise their script as part of their making sense of the world since an approach to convention that makes sense of its demands by treating them as a set of rules to be interpreted literally would not allow members to competently perform their role in society. The extent to which ethnomethodology recognizes that a social actor is the author of the activities they perform concerns the implementation of the expectations they are dealing with but without acknowledging the capacity of these actors to set these expectations in ways other than those dictated by convention. Raffel notes this by suggesting that for the ethnomethodological perspective “the form of activity envisioned is only that required for competence, for going along with the conventions, and the weakness of this is that it is possible, even easy to imagine an actor who is highly competent at their task and still would not really be seen as able to express their self in their role”.¹² The description of a “highly competent” actor who lacks the ability to recognize themselves in their activities would also seem to provide a very fitting description of the Nazi officials in charge of organizing the Final Solution who claim to be “just following orders”.

Raffel further emphasizes the recognition of the reflexive element of selfhood within social theory by noting George Herbert Mead’s conception of the self as an object to itself that gives consideration to the significance of its activities. Mead suggests that the self gauges this significance with respect to the “generalized other,” which represents the expectations of others in society that individuals seek to conform to, rather than “a more direct encounter with rules or norms.”¹³ This way of describing a social actor’s method for assessing the merits of their

activities as strictly a matter of what is demanded of their role by society would again seem to accept the plausibility of offering a defence of “just following orders.”

Raffel argues that the more direct reckoning with the significance of society’s expectations is available with Analysis through its discussion of the distinction between rules and principles. This distinction grants to social actors the capacity to potentially take into consideration not just the way in which to competently perform the activities associated with a role but also the rightness of choosing to perform these activities. Raffel discusses the notion of a principled actor in relation to the concept of role by using an example from the work of Lawrence Blum of a teacher named Herbert Kohl who took on extra duties to assist a struggling student. Raffel notes that personal preference did not motivate Kohl’s interest in helping the student as he found the student hard to get along with and did not particularly like him personally. Kohl was also not simply meeting the expectations of his role as he could have competently fulfilled his duties by not taking on the extra work of helping the student. Raffel suggests that this shows Kohl to be a committed teacher in the sense of an individual “convinced of the *worth* (rightness) of and not just the obligatory character of”¹⁴ the activities associated with teaching. The objection might be raised that Kohl was simply looking for other ways to meet the expectations of his role and helped the student as a means to an end, such as improving his reputation in the community or possibly even trying to earn a promotion. These alternatives are possible but do not rule out the possibility identified by Raffel of Kohl’s interest in assisting the student being representative of his concern with the merits of the teaching role independent of the expectations associated with this role. Another example not cited by Raffel but which could also be mentioned as an expression of self in the performance of a role that a concern with principle makes possible is McHugh’s own decision to resign from his position as a professor at

York University after he felt the expectations of this position prevented him from being a committed teacher.¹⁵ In each example the way in which Analysis suggests that social actors are capable of making a distinction between rule and principle would deny the understanding that that individuals can claim to be “just following orders.” This line of defence is denied not on the basis of an empirical discovery about the “true” feelings of the defendants hidden away in diaries, private conversations or through other forms of historical revelation but by suggesting that social actors can always be held accountable for what orders they are “just” choosing to follow.

In different ways each of the sociological perspectives Raffel examines leading up to his discussion of Analysis seem to verify Arendt’s critique that “we have become very much accustomed by modern psychology and sociology, not to speak of modern bureaucracy, to explaining away the responsibility of the doer for his deed in terms of this or that kind of determinism.”¹⁶ Structural Functionalism presents a version of a social actor who actively performs their role, but Conflict Theory, by focusing on the expectations these roles contain, suggests that the way the notion of role is understood prevents individuals from realizing a sense of self in these roles, and Goffman proposes that by default individuals are engaged in not being themselves through the roles they perform. Ethnomethodology identifies the reflexive capacity of social actors who acknowledge their responsibility in how they meet what is expected of them in the roles they play but whether the expectations of these roles should be met is not part of what the self takes into consideration, while Mead recognizes the importance of considering the significance of the roles being played but this significance is determined by the self in relation to meeting the expectation that others have of these roles. The way in which Analysis develops the notion of reflexivity presents a version of a social actor who does not necessarily accept the

notion that they are “just following orders” in the roles they play by holding the self responsible for being concerned with what is “good” about these roles rather than considering their performance as subject to some form of determinism.

Analysis and the Banality of Evil

In discussing the contribution that “radical interpretative reflexivity” can make to understanding Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil, Kieran Bonner challenges this almost de facto acceptance of deterministic explanations of human conduct by making reference to Jean-Paul Sartre’s concept of bad faith. The radical interpretative approach that Bonner refers to as “a configuration of ethnomethodology, hermeneutics and analysis”¹⁷ takes as a focal point of its analysis the responsibility that a social theorist has for what they say about the world. For this perspective Sartre’s notion of bad faith and its criticism of those that deny the production of the reality that they have a hand in creating is a notion that is clearly relevant in responding to the claim that the social sciences are only “describers” of society and are not responsible for the version of society presented by the objective observations they make. Dahrendorf’s concerns about the concept of role providing only a limited understanding of self through its conception of social actors as rule followers is comparable to Bonner’s argument to the extent that both have misgivings about the way the account of society offered by the social sciences reinforces and/or is reinforced by certain aspects of conventional ways of understanding the matters being addressed. An important difference is that Bonner is not resigned to accepting the accounts offered by conventional understanding and uses the notion of bad faith (as adapted by Peter Berger) to recognize the choice social actors have about meeting the expectations associated with the roles they play in society. In line with the concern shown by Analysis, Bonner’s Radical Interpretative approach further pushes the notion of bad faith by noting that its concern with

saying yes or no extends only to acknowledging the possibility of choice without an interest in trying to work out what choice to make in a particular case.¹⁸

Bonner's criticism seems to be confirmed by the story Sartre tells of a young man who approached him during the Second World War and sought his advice about whether he should join the French Resistance or stay at home to help his ailing mother. Sartre responds by inquiring:

By what authority, in the name of what golden rule of morality, do you think he could have decided, in perfect peace of mind, either to abandon his mother or to remain with her? There are no means of judging. The content is always concrete, and therefore unpredictable; it has always to be invented. The one thing that counts, is to know whether the invention is made in the name of freedom.¹⁹

The absence of a "golden rule" may emphasize the importance of recognizing that decisions made about what should be done are freely decided upon on a case by case basis. But to acknowledge a lack of absolute certainty that would achieve "perfect peace of mind" does not rule out the possibility that judgment can be exercised as part of working out the choices to be made.

Bonner's development of the notion of bad faith as involving a concern not just for making choices but for the "good" of the choices being made also seems to further develop a sense of the particularity of the problem associated with the banality of evil. In noting the deterministic sense in which Eichmann treated the orders he was given, Bonner observes that:

Accepting the rule or the order as an expectation that has to be met allows the agent to alienate the content of the action by focusing on the impressions of the doer. It displaces the focus from what he is doing to how he feels about what he is doing. Is this an everyday method that enables the conflation of the difference between moral convictions and table manners?²⁰

The reference to “moral convictions and table manners” alludes to Arendt’s criticism of the willingness shown by the populations under the control of the Third Reich to simply shed one set of morals for the next in order to remain in compliance with the conventional sense of right and wrong.

This view is dramatically illustrated in the film version of Joseph Heller’s novel *Catch-22* in a conversation that takes place in a brothel between a young American soldier and an old Italian man in which the old man defends “the greatness of Italy.” After the old man makes the argument about the importance of survival over all other concerns the soldier asks him if he has any “principles” and he replies: “of course not.” “No morality?” the young soldier asks next, and the old man replies:

I am a very moral man. And Italy is a very moral country. That is why we certainly will come out on top again if we succeed in being defeated ... I was a Fascist when Mussolini was on top and now that he has been deposed I am anti-Fascist. When the Germans were here I was fanatically pro-German but now I am fanatically pro-American. You will find no more loyal partisan in all of Italy than myself.²¹

This example illustrates the understanding that steadfastly maintains a fidelity towards moral convention through its changing proscribed forms of conduct but in a way that is without regard for principle and its concern with the “good” of an activity. What though is the connection that Bonner identifies between this willingness to disregard principle for moral convention *and* a focus on the “impressions of the doer” that draws the performer’s attention away from the deeds they are performing no matter how horrible these deeds may be?

The narcissistic tendency of this attitude that is also noted by Arendt in her description of Eichmann and what she refers to as his “inability to ever look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view”²² is a phenomenon that she suggests is not Eichmann’s alone. Arendt also identifies this attitude as a stable part of the speeches made by the leader of the SS Heinrich Himmler, which he was able to utilize in motivating the soldiers charged with performing the killings. She suggests that it was his “gift” to recognize:

how to overcome not so much their conscience as the animal pity by which all normal men are affected in the presence of physical suffering. The trick used by Himmler...was very simple and probably very effective; it consisted in turning these instincts around, as it were, in directing them toward the self. So that instead of saying: What horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!²³

Bonner recognizes the broader significance of Arendt’s description for her political theory as the self-absorption indicative of the attitude shown by Eichmann and Himmler represents a reversal

of her conception of political thinking which she praises as the capacity to adopt an enlarged perspective capable of considering (without necessarily endorsing) the perspectives of others.²⁴

Essential to appreciating the connection between this attitude and the performance of monstrous deeds is, as Bonner notes,²⁵ Arendt's discussion of the humour she finds in Eichmann's words both in his pretrial examination and during his testimony at trial. She both summarizes and emphasizes this point in the opening inscription to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* by quoting Bertolt Brecht: "O Germany – hearing the speeches ring from your house one laughs. But whoever sees you reaches for his knife."²⁶ The apparent contradiction of this phenomenon that involves something that is to be taken both lightly but also something that is to be considered dangerously serious seems to have little in common with other occurrences that involve this type of dynamic, such as the thrill seeker who gets a rush from the dangers associated with an activity like skydiving. As a form of laughter it does not seem to resemble either the type of "joyful wisdom" that Nietzsche describes as emerging from an encounter (often tragic) with one's own limits.

What is laughable about Eichmann is that he is not "in" on the joke which makes him ridiculous and a more apt comparison would seem to involve likening him to another ridiculous figure like Don Quixote. The "remoteness from reality" that Arendt observes in Eichmann seems applicable to describing Quixote but also suggests a distinction that could be made between the two figures besides Eichmann's prominent role in genocidal violence. This is a difference that can be appreciated in a speech made by Cervantes' character in the 1950's play *Man of La Mancha*:

When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies?

Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams – this

may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness – and maddest of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!²⁷

Cervantes' words if applied to Eichmann would suggest that Eichmann's attitude is one that reflects a concern with being "too practical," but in what way could a "remoteness from reality" be associated with this attitude?

One way to pursue this question is to consider Bonner's discussion of the *Gorgias* in which a different response from that of Cervantes' character is worked out in relation to the view that practical concerns negate the interest in what ought to be. In responding to the exchange between Socrates and Gorgias' student Polus over "the good" of rhetoric, in which Polus claims that those who are unjust are also the happiest, Bonner suggests that:

Polus can be interpreted as the kind of actor who as a practical man of the world recognizes that bad things happen in the world, and bad things happen to good people and has reconciled his beliefs accordingly. However, Socrates shows him a way to reconcile what we want to believe (unjust people are unhappy) with what we must believe (the truth).²⁸

The speech from Cervantes acknowledges the importance of maintaining a sense of what should be but frames this as a response to the conflict between "life as it is" and the "dream" of what else it could be. In Bonner's account the problem is framed in terms of seeking ways to reconcile the tension between what is and what ought to be rather than fashioning a response that involves escaping from the lunacy of day-to-day life.

Arendt's discussion of "inner emigration," which was an argument that made the rounds in post-war Germany, would seem to fit well with the understanding that practicality nullifies the

opportunity to be concerned with life as it should be. As previously noted the idea behind this argument could easily be explained in terms of Goffman's dramaturgical model as the Nazi officials suggested that their support for the party masked their personal distaste for its policies. This act was (allegedly) kept up all the more so by those who appeared to support the party most fervently as they had to work harder at "managing impressions" and silence any suspicion about the bad impressions they secretly held of the regime. The inner emigrant's attitude of being too practical might seem like an appropriate way to characterize Eichmann's support for the Final Solution in light of Bonner's observation that at the key moment when Eichmann learns of the plan to murder the entire Jewish people he reports that after this decision he lost all joy in his work. Despite his personal misgivings about the duty he was expected to perform Eichmann obviously continued in his position and for him to suppress his personal inclinations would understandably account for the lack of joy that someone who prioritizes their feelings and personal impressions of events above all else would experience in these circumstances. Presumably by having an attitude that can be characterized as too practical Eichmann would acknowledge that his own impotence prevents him from acting upon what he feels to be truly important; less clear is how he comes to possess the resolve that allows him to set aside his personal inclinations. This type of reserve would not seem to align with Eichmann's character if he is thoughtlessly trapped into considering the implications of what he is involved with exclusively in terms of the impression they make on him personally.

What might also give pause to characterizing Eichmann as an inner emigrant is that Arendt does not make this association when explaining the way in which Eichmann accounts for his support of the Final Solution. Her explanation considers the importance that Eichmann's conscience had in determining which activities he would choose to support, which would seem

to have given Eichmann the capacity to set aside his personal inclinations about the activities he engaged in performing. The dedication that Eichmann demonstrates towards acting upon the dictates of his conscience are illustrated by two occasions where Eichmann had a “weak moment” and allowed his personal feelings to interfere with what his conscience had told him to do. These occasions involved his effort to secure the freedom of three Jews with whom he was personally connected and when these instances were brought up at his trial Arendt suggests that “this inconsistency still made him feel somewhat uncomfortable”²⁹ even on the stand where mentioning his efforts to save lives would have obviously served his defence well. His reaction to these instances also seems hard to reconcile with the inner emigrant argument considering that this argument would suggest that securing the release of these individuals would be a source of great pride for Eichmann as it would show that he had had the courage to act upon what he felt should be done. That Eichmann had the opposite reaction and was embarrassed by these instances suggests the importance he attached to ensuring that in answering to his voice of conscience he made sure to disregard his personal feelings about the activities he was to perform.

Eichmann also mentions his conscience in speaking about the significance he draws from his involvement in the Final Solution by making the disturbing comment that “I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews [or “enemies of the Reich,” as he always claims to have said] on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction.”³⁰ Arendt suggests that the import of this statement is undercut by Eichmann’s pronouncement that “I shall gladly hang myself in public as a warning example to all anti-Semites on this earth.” She considers these statements to be another example of Eichmann’s thoughtless disregard for what he is saying and a demonstration of how little he cared about

contradicting himself so long as he was “elated” by using words that stir within him great emotion.

However, some consistency might be found in Eichmann’s two statements if they are explained in relation to his concern with answering to his conscience. The “laughter” that Eichmann speaks of could be likened to someone who “laughs all the way to the bank” and the reason that Eichmann seems to think he has made off so well is that his elimination of the enemies of the state is a testament to how well he responded to what his conscience called upon him to do. His comment about being a warning to anti-Semites seems to suggest that the horrid way the Nazi movement pursued this worldview is a demonstration of how dangerous this form of prejudice can become. This would not contradict Eichmann’s statement about drawing “great satisfaction” for the part he played in the Final Solution if understood as him taking the position that the folly of joining a misguided movement does not diminish his record of doing what his conscience demanded of him by maintaining an unwavering commitment to the cause to which he had sworn his allegiance. The conscience understood in this regard would not operate as an innate sense of right and wrong but would make its claim to preserving a sense of what *ought to be* in response to what *is* by serving as a reminder of what an individual is duty-bound to perform.

A difficulty with this explanation is the plea that Eichmann entered at his trial would seem to indicate that a conscience that operates in this way does little to maintain a concern for what ought to be. Eichmann stated that he was “not guilty in the sense of the indictment” and his lawyer later explained on his behalf that Eichmann meant that he felt he was morally but not legally responsible for what he had done.³¹ This response appears to run counter to the self-understanding of someone who claims to be concerned with answering to their conscience but

can be explained in relation to the influence that Kant's Categorical Imperative had upon Eichmann's decision making. In describing this influence Arendt suggests that "from the moment he was charged with carrying out the Final Solution he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles, that he knew it and that he had consoled himself with the thought that he no longer 'was master of his own deeds,' that he was unable 'to change anything.'" ³² Arendt's account also suggests that Eichmann could not so easily give up his old Kantian habits and he maintained "what he himself called the version of Kant 'for the household use of the little man.'" ³³ This meant answering to his conscience became synonymous with answering to Hitler's orders as law and with a dedication reflective of an "odd" attitude "very common in Germany" of treating the laws as if they were self-legislated and not originating from an external source of authority. ³⁴

The occasion when Eichmann seems to have decided to fully exchange his Kantian principles for the household version of Kant seems to have occurred early on in his involvement with the Final Solution when his conscience objected to the murder of *German* Jews which had been ordered after the killing of Jews from Eastern Europe had already begun. Unlike the occasions when Eichmann's feelings were offended, such as the resentment he held towards being passed over for promotion where he had been able to perform his duty without interference, Eichmann acted upon the objections his conscience had to sending German Jews to their death. He felt at liberty to make arrangements for them to arrive in the Lodz ghetto in Poland where the killing had not yet begun instead of further East where his superiors had ordered them to face a firing squad. ³⁵ Eichmann's understanding of Kant's Categorical Imperative, in which he had accepted the death of Jews from Eastern Europe with apparently little or no objection had still managed to convince him that he could decide for himself whether

the orders he had been given concerning the deaths of Jews from Germany were right or wrong and that he should act upon his sense of right and wrong in this case.

These Kantian principles were soon abandoned by Eichmann but he did not abandon the habit of answering to his conscience. His concerns were re-dedicated to operate in a way that would tell him that to obey Hitler's orders was right and to disobey them was wrong but without Eichmann considering the rightness or wrongness of the orders he was receiving. With his conscience now operating under the auspices of this household version of Kant it "began to function the other way around" with its voice demanding that he fully dedicate himself to Hitler's order to eliminate all Jews. This dedication was shown when Eichmann disobeyed the orders he had been given by Himmler that were issued in support of his efforts at the end of the war to gain personally from securing the release of Jews from Nazi persecution. Although he was unsuccessful at opposing these efforts Eichmann felt compelled to act and knowing that Himmler's activities went against Hitler's wishes he answered to what his conscience demanded and sought to carry on the killings without Himmler's full authorization.

Eichmann may have acknowledged that his observance of Kantian principles – in the problematic way he understood these principles – was corrupted by his acceptance of the household version of Kant but by continuing to consult his conscience he could continue to claim that he was concerned with what *should* be the case and not just what *is* the case. Eichmann's reasons for treating Hitler's orders as the set of laws that determine what he should do are left unexplained, a point that Bonner makes clear in his discussion by noting that:

Sociologically, the issue for understanding action is not that Eichmann chose to obey and do his duty as a soldier (i.e. knowingly meet the role expectations) and so is in good faith, but

his failure to provide an account for why he *supported* legal crimes.³⁶

Eichmann's understanding of what he ought to do does not attempt "to reconcile what we want to believe (that resistance to genocide is possible) with what we must believe (that going along with the practice was appealing to most)." His concern for what he *should* do seemed to have no regard for what *was* being done and like Cervantes' character he sought to exchange a dreamworld for the "lunacy" of the everyday world. In Eichmann's case this created the funny but horribly dangerous spectacle of someone who participated in mass murder as a way to answer to what his conscience demanded. This is to say that Eichmann's case demonstrates he was caught up with additional concerns besides the problems associated with the "evil of banality" or the fixation on day-to-day affairs that tempts individuals into becoming "too practical" and giving up their concern for what they should do. Eichmann's involvement in the Final Solution was also a matter of him consulting his conscience about what he should do, which suggests that the banality of evil held an attraction for him by appealing to his sense of "the good."

According to this argument, then, the fairly subtle difference between suggesting that Eichmann was driven not by feeling but by conscience is significant to note not just as an idiosyncratic observation about his personality, but also in terms of what it seems to indicate about the banality of evil. Eichmann maintains an unreflexive appreciation of "the good" of his activities but without losing his concern for what he should do. This understanding of Eichmann acknowledges "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"³⁷ – uncompromising, that is, in pursuing the elimination

of the Jewish people. In Eichmann's case the way in which the banality of evil appeals to the concern for "the good" of an activity drew him in to being involved in the Final Solution for the sake of what he thought he should do, but the defence of "just following orders" seems to suggest an appeal to "the good" can be very open-ended. The "inner emigrant," the ideological fanatic, those who answer to their conscience and the criminally motivated can all claim to be concerned with some version of "the good" through their acceptance of a banal form of evil which orders society in a way that mass murder becomes conventional. The emphasis on "just following orders" may seem to be a simplistic way to understand the significance of the banality of evil but the importance of this statement is that it is hidden in plain sight. The simplicity of this notion is precisely what gives it such broad appeal.

Conclusion

This brief introduction to the banality of evil has discussed its connection to an unreflexive sense of "the good" and suggests that Analysis, through its focus upon working out an understanding of "the good" in relation to the matters its approach takes into consideration, is able to contribute to a discussion of the banality of evil that addresses its connection to "the good." An interest has also been expressed in understanding what Arendt's notion of judgment could also contribute to this discussion, which is a consideration that may seem to make a discussion of genocide seem unnecessarily judgmental and self-righteous in its condemnation of a practice that obviously very few observers would support. An objection might be raised that this sort of self-congratulatory attitude misses the opportunity to reflect upon the banality of evil and develop a sense of a problem that is not a simple matter of "good overcoming evil" but concerns an ambiguity whose significance could be endlessly worked out as part of a discussion that considers the significance of genocide as a practice. One way this problem could be

formulated would be to characterize social order (or even the notion of “the good”) as a *pharmakon* that is indispensable for the generation of social life while also recognizing that this order is a necessary part of generating a way of life with genocidal aims that seeks to eliminate all who participate in it. The response to this problem would shift from making easy arguments about the importance of opposing genocide to developing a way to deal with the understanding that social order is something that is needed but also capable of doing great harm.

The possibility of recognizing that the banality of evil concerns problems that can be ambiguous and need to be continuously worked out to be understood is not ruled out by considering the notion of judgment. The additional contribution that judgment can make to this discussion is its appreciation of the different human faculties and their appropriateness in addressing a particular concern in relation to the banality of evil. For instance, a focus on the banality of evil in terms of its significance would be recognized as the providence of the activity of thinking which formulates the problems it addresses as matters that could be endlessly considered. Judgment could also be a part of responding to the suggestion that “we are all like Eichmann” and faced with the same circumstances would not be able to avoid doing as he had done by formulating an understanding of a social actor who shows the possibility of doing something very different than Eichmann had done. In this sense a judgment of people or practices would not be a focus on condemning others or other ways of doing things but a more reflexive concern of attempting to “better” appreciate each of the human faculties, which is a problem that potentially anyone who participates in the exercise of these faculties can choose to address. The interest in this writing will be to consider the way in which this appreciation of what the exercise of each of the human faculties involves can be worked out through a consideration of the banality of evil as discussed by Arendt in connection with Eichmann and the

Final Solution by considering the extent to which this notion is relevant to a discussion of the practice of both modern bureaucracy and the horrors of the genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia.

Chapter 2

The Genocide in Rwanda and the Appeal of Everyday Concerns

*Judgment is for the greater part employed in throwing stumbling-blocks in the way of the imagination, in dissipating the scenes of its enchantment.*³⁸

– Edmund Burke, *On Taste*

Introduction

A long-standing problem with discussing genocide has been the arguments suggesting that under certain circumstances its occurrence is not a subject that should be addressed. This has played out in the political arena when a debate over national sovereignty is manipulated not only by the power carrying out the genocide who wishes to avoid outside interference but also the countries who have no wish to take part in the military intervention required to bring an end to the killing when this type of military action is assessed as being not in their geopolitical interest. In the case of Rwanda the current government that came to power after overthrowing the previous genocidal regime has actively sought to censure commentary on the country's events that it finds disagreeable. Their contention has been that certain commentators lack the standing to voice their views on events in Rwanda on account of them not being from Rwanda, particularly in the case of Western nations whose track record brings into serious question how genuine those commentators actually are in their commitment, understanding and concern for the well-being of the region. The standard argument made to defend the merits of addressing the issue of genocide has involved an appeal to human rights, but in what way can the basis of this appeal be articulated? Its implication is that those who commit genocide are answerable for their understanding of what human activities should be engaged in, but can anyone claim to have a better understanding than others of what is involved with being human?

After a brief introduction of the events in Rwanda that are relevant to this discussion of the Rwandan genocide, the analysis will examine the issues associated with the merits of addressing the subject of genocide. The argument will be to consider the way in which the judgment about whether the Rwandan genocide is a matter of human rights or a matter only for Rwandans can involve a discussion of these concerns that represents more than an exchange of opinion about the merits of these two positions. In response to this demand the analysis will present a version of judgment that recognizes its reflexive component of being concerned with the “good” of addressing the way that a particular instance of genocide has relevance to the question of what is involved with being human, while also recognizing that such a question can never be given a definitive answer.

Background: Rwanda’s Place in Human History

As a former colonial state the influence of foreign rule upon Rwanda’s history marks both the events in this history and the telling of these events. The legacy of Belgium’s influence has the dubious distinction of racializing the traditional feudal-like arrangement between the Tutsi “nobility” and Hutu “peasants,” which has been a defining feature of much of the violent conflict in the region of Burundi and Rwanda ever since.³⁹ Just prior to Rwanda gaining its independence in 1961 a number of small- and large-scale massacres began against the Tutsi minority that continued throughout the years of a Hutu-led dictatorship until the government ordered the genocide in 1994. The event that sparked the genocidal campaign was the downing of the plane containing the leaders of both Rwanda and Burundi who had been meeting to discuss the Arusha Accords peace agreement. This agreement was signed the previous year after Rwanda had been invaded by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), who under the leadership of their former military commander Paul Kagame have formed the government in Rwanda since the end of the genocide.

The RPF began as a rebel group that drew its membership largely from the families of Tutsis living in refugee camps in Uganda after they fled the massacres in Rwanda in the late 1950's and early 1960's. The Rwandan government prior to Kagame's rule had initially sought to delay the implementation of the power-sharing arrangement laid out in the Arusha Accords in order to maintain the dominance of the Hutu elite in Rwandan society but under the pressure of the international community Rwanda's President Juvenal Habyarimana had begun to show signs in the days leading up to his assassination of agreeing to begin the peace process in earnest.

The responsibility for the assassination of the Rwandan President continues to be a matter of debate with suspicion being directed at the RPF whose forces had been amassing along the border in preparation for a new advance into Rwanda when Habyarimana's plane went down. Given that the climate of anti-Tutsi sentiment in Rwanda had intensified after the RPF's first invasion and the history of violent massacres in the past, the President's death could be expected to spur further violence against the Tutsi minority. This new wave of violence would provide the RPF with a pretext to justify their plans for a second invasion.

The case could also plausibly be made that the assassination was ordered by political rivals within the President's own party, the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MRND). Many of the top-ranking members in the MRND stood to lose personally from the implementation of the Arusha Accords and to counter the aims of those looking to normalize relations with the Tutsi the party's more radical members were pushing a "Hutu power" movement that endorsed the violent removal of all Tutsi from Rwanda. The United Nations mission under General Romeo Dallaire that was stationed in Rwanda as part of the Arusha Accords had reported in the infamous "genocide fax" that the government had already begun to make preparations for a genocidal campaign prior to the assassination.⁴⁰ The President's death

could be seen as being in the interests of his rivals in the MRND as it would lend credibility to the views of Hutu extremists; this stoked fears about the Tutsi secretly conspiring to subjugate the Hutu population as they had done before with the assistance of the Belgians during colonial rule. These fears are representative of the traditional stereotype that portrays the Tutsi as being relentless in their pursuit of power and wielding it for the purposes of exploiting the Hutu population. This situation was framed by the extremists as necessitating that steps be taken to ensure the removal of all Tutsi from the country.

The Western powers played a significant part in the political events in Rwanda around the time of the genocide but mainly through the notable inaction of the UN force. The MRND had already calculated in advance that the Western powers were far from committed partners in Rwanda's political future and they chose as one of the first targets of their attacks a small contingent of Belgian soldiers from the peacekeeping force. The Belgian forces stationed in Rwanda were the backbone of the UN mission as they provided it with its largest contingent of well-trained and well-equipped personnel. The deaths of its soldiers had the impact the MRND had hoped for as the Belgian government promptly made the decision to withdraw the remainder of its forces to avoid risking any further casualties. Before withdrawing the Belgians did assist with the evacuation of foreign nationals who were undoubtedly at an increased risk of danger by remaining in the country but were not the direct targets of the genocide. As the Belgian forces left the positions assigned to them by the UN mission to take part in these evacuations the Rwandan government forces immediately moved in to murder the thousands of Rwandan citizens that had been left behind.⁴¹ These incidents seem to confirm Dallaire's assertion that the genocide could largely have been prevented with a modest increase in the force size and capability of the UN mission. Dallaire instead ended up having to fight against the UN leadership

to prevent them from completely withdrawing the UN mission from Rwanda and he was left with only a skeletal force to command as the genocide was taking place. A larger UN force did eventually arrive to intervene in the hostilities but only after the MRND forces were already fleeing in surrender. These reinforcements that were sent by the French government to support the UN mission have drawn criticism for doing little more than providing safe passage out of the country for their former allies from the MRND who along with their supporters were the individuals responsible for the genocide.

The track record of the West in Rwanda has been used by the current RPF government to make the argument that Rwandans not only have a special relationship to their telling of their nation's history but Westerners who seek to comment on this history are most likely meddling in Rwanda's affairs in a way that will lead to no good. One problem with this argument is the RPF's own beginnings in a foreign country as its founding members were born and raised in Uganda before moving to Rwanda as adults. Once in power the RPF also made the decision to have English, which they learned to speak as their native tongue in Uganda, replace French as the country's official language. This is not a move that would suggest the RPF had a concern with preserving Rwandan culture from foreign influence, considering that French was spoken by most Rwandans at the time this change was made. In relation to the criticism concerning the undeniable harm the West has done in Rwanda, its suggestions that those who have hurt Rwandans are disqualified from commenting upon the country's history could be challenged by acknowledging that the genocide was largely the work of Rwandans killing other Rwandans.

These criticisms could be answered by noting that the forced expulsion of Tutsi from Rwanda is the reason that the RPF came to live in the refugee camps in Uganda; to deny them of their Rwandan heritage for having to endure this type of suffering seems both inappropriate and

extremely harsh. In response to the primary involvement of Rwandans in carrying out the genocide, the West has been accused of being responsible for instigating the hostilities between the Hutu and Tutsi in a way that manifested itself in violence not seen prior to their arrival. This criticism also would not be applicable to the Tutsi in Rwanda who were the targets of the genocide or the RPF who brought an end to the killing when the involvement of the Western powers in the conflict failed to do so. What seems to underpin these arguments about the Rwandan people's stronger claim to telling the nation's history is the juxtaposition between the thoughtless disregard for the country's affairs that is observable in the West's fleeting commitment to the region and the greater loyalty shown to the area by its local inhabitants.

Theory and Method in the Study of Rwanda

The different responses to these concerns about academics from other countries commenting on the events in Rwanda are reflected in the differences between the methodological approaches that have been used to study these events. In *Remera*, Pierre Bettez Gravel's study of the rural region of Remera in Rwanda during the early 1960's, Gravel speaks in relativistic terms about the cultural practices he observes in Rwanda to try to ensure the appropriateness of his comments about another culture. In his discussion of the inherent bias of the Rwandan legal system which favours the country's most powerful members Gravel reminds his readers to take into consideration the cultural context of the phenomenon he is examining. He explains that in the arrangement of the country's legal affairs:

There is no morality involved. The English language has no words available to express these ideas. The closest we can come to it is: might is "right," which, morally speaking, is not true. The *moral* concepts of "right" and "wrong" *as understood in our culture* were

introduced by the missionaries, although there have been values concerned with appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in terms of cultural norms.⁴²

Gravel's acknowledgement of the cultural norms observed in Rwandan society seems to imply that they do provide some sense of what is appropriate conduct but in a way that is less developed than the understanding provided by Western notions of morality. This is a view that would only seem to support the concern about Westerners lacking the sensitivity to comment upon the events in Rwanda's history. A purely relativistic argument that avoids making these blanket assertions about the superiority of one set of cultural practices over another could respond to these concerns by making the argument that all cultures are equal but different. A challenge that has been recognized for those who make this argument and seems to apply when speaking about Rwanda is explaining what type of contribution the West could make by commenting on the practices of another culture if all cultures are different from one another and share no common ground.

An approach that tries to avoid the difficulties associated with cultural relativism by striving to describe events objectively has also had to answer to criticisms about the merits of an explanation deriving from a Western source. This has been shown in the response of the RPF to the accusations that their soldiers committed war crimes in incidents that have been documented in works such as Allison Des Forges' *Leave None to Tell the Story*. The RPF's argument has been that those who have compiled this evidence lack an awareness of the situation on the ground, which makes their depiction of events overly naïve. This has been shown both by their inability to appreciate the political motivations of the local actors who are charging the RPF with these

crimes, as well as by their inability to appreciate the way war needs to be conducted in the region in order to be won.

This charge of an unintended bias being contained in the work of foreign scholars reporting on events in Rwanda – as a general problem and not just in this specific case involving the accusations of war crimes against RPF soldiers – could be answered by an approach that is focused on the way that Rwandans voice their understanding of events. One example of this approach is Scott Straus' work *Intimate Enemy: Images and Voices of the Rwandan Genocide*, which contains transcripts of the interviews he conducted with inmates in a Rwandan prison who had been convicted for their involvement in the genocide. The idea behind Straus' work of allowing his readers to judge the evidence for themselves by publishing these interviews without further commentary or analysis seems open to the criticism that those lacking an understanding of the context might be naive in their appreciation of the accounts being provided. An approach that seeks the type of awareness that avoids the unintended bias that is of concern to this criticism is demonstrated in Lee Ann Fujii's work *Killing Neighbours: Webs of Violence in Rwanda*, in which Fujii focuses on developing relationships with the Rwandans she interviews to better understand the way her status as a foreigner impacts their interactions. She describes being told in an exchange with one of the interviewees "that I was not like other *bazungu* [foreigners], whom she then parodied with a vivid impression of a fastidious and standoffish foreigner. Laughing over a common joke and sharing a meal were indicators that we were building relationships."⁴³

A comparable approach is also used by Susan Thompson in *Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda*, who directly addresses the RPF's influence upon the way events in Rwanda's history are discussed. After describing how

the Rwandans she interviewed came to view her as “one of them” by virtue of the harassment she was receiving at the hands of government officials while living in Rwanda and researching her book, Thompson argues that the voices of many Rwandans are being suppressed, not as much through the unintended bias of foreign academics, but through the active efforts of the RPF to silence its critics.⁴⁴ The tactics they employ to this end are characterized by her as being conducted in an almost colonialist fashion, but in a disguised form. Thompson cites the government’s revival of the traditional “*gaccacca*” or grass courts to show the way the RPF plays a double game of enacting policies that proclaim to create unity and end ethnic divisiveness while in practice the Tutsi are being privileged within Rwandan society at the expense of the Hutu. The idea behind these courts was to deal with a prison population that had grown beyond the state’s capacity to manage after swelling from the vast number of Hutus incarcerated for their part in the genocide. Relief upon the system was to be accomplished through a model of restorative justice that would use the *gaccacca* courts and its method of having the community be given a voice by meeting as a whole to decide the fate of the accused.

One of the difficulties with these “community” courts was the government representatives from the RPF sent to oversee their proceedings would frequently have them conducted in their native tongue of English rather than the locally spoken French or Kyrwandan. The courts have also been accused of accepting false accusations, particularly against those Hutu who fled during the war and returned to the communities to find the property they once owned has been claimed by others in their absence. This manoeuvring within the courts against the Hutu fits as part of a narrative that contains a politically charged notion of a “survivor” where only the survivors of the genocide are recognized as having suffered during the various conflicts in Rwanda and only the Tutsi are recognized as the “survivors” of the genocide who are entitled to

the very tangible benefits of seeking restitution for their suffering. Perhaps not surprisingly these sorts of activities by the *gaccacca* courts have contributed to the view that the RPF government is more interested in imposing a form of victor's justice rather than a form of restorative justice. This is an understanding that is reflected in a comment by one of the respondents in Thompson's study, who says of the country's efforts at reconciliation: "For me, the state means those with power, and with power you protect your own people."⁴⁵

Network Theory and Cultural Acceptance

One response to the suggestion that power arrangements within Rwandan society are in flux and depending on who is "in charge" will favour one group over another would be to study the way these allegiances shift in order to anticipate what their future developments will be. This has been a concern of one of the currently more influential contemporary sociological theories, social network theory, which focuses upon identifying patterns that illustrate the flow of influence in society. The first iteration of social network theory appeared in John Arundel Barnes' 1954 article "Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish" as part of his study of the social dynamics of a small fishing village in Norway. Barnes considered the class-centric models used to describe British society inadequate for describing the egalitarianism of Norwegian society whose citizenry had developed a distaste for domination by the political centre in response to the period the country spent under foreign Danish rule. His analysis begins by examining the organization of relationships in the village's main occupational setting of fishing and describes these as being arranged hierarchically with the decision-making process involving little consultation between those who hold power and their subordinates. The composition of a fishing crew is considered by the villagers to be a vital feature for the success of a fishing boat, which may seem to make the notion of networking understood in the everyday

sense of “making contacts” a relevant way to account for who joins which crew. Barnes is careful to explain though that his use of social network theory does not pertain to the organization of relationships in the autocratic set of arrangements characteristic of the workplace and he offers a more Social Darwinist type of explanation to describe the process by which the fishing boat captains recruit their members.

Barnes stresses as an important feature of his understanding of social network theory the relative equality between the members of society interacting through these networks as well as the importance its members attach to the idea of arriving at their decisions through universal consensus. He describes the presence of intermediaries within the system who act as buffers to bridge the gaps between members in the network to ensure a sense of equality within the network as a whole. Barnes also describes the challenge of maintaining a sense of universal consensus in the cases when disputes arise over decisions that divide members of the community. In these circumstances a “trial vote” is held in which the available options are weighed by use of a secret ballot. The secrecy involved with this vote might seem unnecessary in a social network if all members must openly agree to the decisions made by the community, but this voting is used as a way to prevent its members from voicing their dissent with the group’s decisions publicly. Barnes explains that: “When there is an irreconcilable division of opinion this is sometimes concealed by first taking a trial vote, to decide which view has greatest support; this is followed by a confirming unanimous vote, which alone is recorded in the minutes.”⁴⁶ The trial vote shows what the majority opinion is, or what is in closest proximity to consensus, which all members will agree to support in the vote held openly. Barnes comments further on why the employment of this technique is significant to the process of arriving at a consensus:

Why then is the achievement of formally unanimous decisions considered so important? Here I think we are dealing with a principle of fairly wide application. People living and working together inevitably have conflicting interests but in general they have also a common interest in the maintenance of existing social relations. Individual goals must be attained through socially approved processes, and as far as possible the illusion must be maintained that each individual is acting only in the best interests of the community. As far as possible, that is, the group must appear united, not only vis-à-vis other similar groups, but also to itself. Voting is a method of reaching decisions in which divergence of interest is openly recognized, and in which the multiplicities of divergence are forced into the Procrustean categories of Yes and No. Significantly, voting is rare in simple societies and in small groups of modern society. Membership in a collectivity implies accepting a share in the collective responsibility for the group's actions as well as a share in the decision to act in a certain way.⁴⁷

The explanation Barnes gives of social networks seems to share with Functionalist theory the understanding that a well-run society is one in which its members strive to achieve consensus as well as the idea suggested by the Durkheimian notion of mechanical solidarity that the members of a small-scale society such as this fishing village will hold views with a high degree of commonality. The village's voting procedure may seem somewhat contrived, but since each of the participants publicly voice their consent to the decisions being made, this would seem to

challenge those who would claim that they may take part in activities that are being performed collectively even though they do not necessarily agree personally with what is being done.

The more recent and well-known work of Bruno Latour presents a version of network theory that is not focused on the notion of consensus or other concepts used within the Functionalist perspective. Latour actually disavows any association between his writing and the social sciences' discussion of social network theory, preferring to use the term "actor network theory" (AT) to describe his work. He provides in his article "On Actor Network Theory. A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications" an overview of his theory that he claims not only moves beyond social theory but repudiates a number of concepts commonly employed in theoretical discussions in general.⁴⁸ Latour acknowledges ethnomethodology as an influence upon his work, and if understood in ethnomethodological terms then broadly speaking one of the main thrusts of actor network theory is to collapse the distinction between theorist and member and avoid second-order explanations. In his article he makes this point by suggesting that: "A network in mathematics or in engineering is something that is traced or inscribed by some other entity – the mathematician, the engineer."⁴⁹ Latour describes the way that a theoretical account that employs actor network theory differs from others in that it recognizes it is also an "acting" part of the network that it is describing:

An actor network is an entity that does the tracing and the inscribing. It is an ontological definition and not a piece of inert matter in the hands of others, especially of human planners or designers. It is in order to point out this essential feature that the word "actor" was added to it.⁵⁰

Latour repeatedly returns to and emphasizes this point that an actor network acts as a frame of reference for its own explanation while the contribution of the theorist is to add to an actor network by suggesting ways it can be expanded and connected to the frames of reference of other networks. By doing so the theorist's explanation then becomes part of the network it explains.

Latour discusses the use of the word "cause" in science as an example to demonstrate the contribution a theorist makes to the explanation of an actor network and how this contribution may be evaluated. He argues that: "Either the cause designates a body of practices which is tied to the network under description – and this is what growth of networks means – or it is not related and then is just a word added to the description, literally it is the word 'cause.'"⁵¹ The relevance of the notion of cause is described in terms of the capacity of this concept to offer a frame of reference that is appreciable to other frames of reference. Through this same understanding Latour suggests that actor network theory "solves" the problem of reflexivity. The importance of reflection to an actor network is established on the criterion of the degree to which it expands the connective possibilities of the network.⁵² Failure to do so, however, would simply append the word "reflexivity" to an actor network in the same empty way the word "cause" is appended to a network if it generates no connection. The theorist is "not left to despair or navel gazing"⁵³ by focusing on concerns associated with reflexivity that have no connection to the frame of reference of the network being discussed.

Latour's description of actor network theory and its focus on the capacity of actors to be understood by other frames of reference may seem to resemble Arendt's description of political thinking, which is concerned with developing an enlarged perspective capable of appreciating the perspectives of others. One important difference between these explanations is Latour's insistence that an actor does not necessarily or even typically have to be endowed with human

agency. Any entity that generates action, including non-human entities such as cellphones, board meetings, *etc.* can be counted as an “actor.”⁵⁴ The idea that actors are conceived only as human, Latour argues, is relative to the frame of reference of a particular actor network that has chosen to accord special status to a particular type of actor, but this special status need not be granted within the frame of reference of another network. Actor network theory actually denies human beings this special status on the basis that expanding the notion of an actor to include non-human entities grants actor network theory greater explanatory power.

A criticism of Latour’s idea of granting agency to non-human actors could be developed from Arendt’s discussion of the suggestion that objects contain some form of agency. Her argument is to trace back the significance of objects to the human agents who bestow it upon them, suggesting that even the works of art that express the unique style of a great artist only (passively) represent the human agent who (actively) worked upon them:

The essence of who somebody is cannot be reified by himself.
When it appears “objectively” – in the style of an art work or in
ordinary handwriting – it manifests the identity of a person and
therefore serves to identify authorship, but it remains mute itself
and escapes us if we try to interpret it as a mirror of a living
person.⁵⁵

Arendt’s understanding of an actor focuses not on the influence they have upon the behaviour of others but on what their activities demonstrate about the actor who gives these activities their significance. With objects being “mute,” their significance must always be spoken of from some other source – a human agent – that actively engages in an explanation of what an object means.

Latour's account of an actor shows that his discussion of actor network theory does not share Arendt's focus upon understanding what is involved with acting "freely" in this sense of being an agent who has the capacity to give meaning to their activities. The problem that seems to concern Latour when he discusses actor network theory is understanding what is involved with gaining acceptance. This type of focus initially might appear to position his theory well for responding to concerns about the appropriateness of Westerners commenting on the situation in Rwanda as he elaborates in detail upon finding ways to connect seemingly unrelated "frames of reference" with one another. Latour even argues that, for actor network theory, forging these types of links and associations represents a new type of ethical obligation for a theorist, and through this commitment he suggests that his theory:

is not reduced to moral relativism but gets back a stronger deontological commitment: either an account leads you to all the other accounts – and it is good – or it interrupts constantly the movement ... and it is bad. Either it multiplies the mediating point between any two elements and it is good – or it deletes and conflates mediators and it is bad. Either it is reductionist – and that's bad news or irreductionist and that's the highest ethical standard for AT. We will see that this touchstone is much more discriminating than the quest for epistemological purity or for foundations or for moral norms.⁵⁶

Latour argues that actor network theory is ethically committed to developing accounts that are receptive to further expanding and connecting with other accounts but he does not explain what is "good" about making these types of connections. In relation to the concern about Westerners

commenting on Rwanda's history, actor network theory may be able to formulate an account that connects these two frames of reference that would further develop an understanding of the practices of both societies, but the response to this explanation could simply be: So what? What benefit is served by this understanding and what business is Rwanda's affairs to those who are not Rwandan?

This discussion of the appropriateness of Westerners commenting on events in Rwanda's history has sought to work out an understanding of the sensitivity needed to conduct a dialogue between these two cultures. This understanding has been developed through an examination of the works of Gravel, Des Forges, Straus, Fujii and Thompson and the different approaches they each take in their studies of Rwanda. Barnes' and Latour's accounts of network theory have also been considered in this discussion to further develop an understanding of what constitutes a competent way of approaching an analysis of this society and its practices. The discussion of Latour's work suggests that even if his analysis, with its focus upon bringing together different frames of reference, competently addresses the concerns about the differences between Western and Rwandan culture, the problem of what "good" is sought by pursuing its explanation would still need to be addressed.

The Claim for Human Rights

One example where this concern for the merits of an explanation is recognized is in Des Forges' comments about the reports of war crimes committed by the RPF. These comments are described in a BBC article that states: "While stressing there can be no equation between genocide and war crimes, Alison Des Forges of Human Rights Watch says RPF leaders do have a case to answer. 'Their victims also deserve justice,' she says."⁵⁷ In these comments, Des Forges makes the type of straightforward plea often heard from representatives of human rights

organizations about the need for the sake of working for what is just to combat the harm that is done in the world. The “good versus evil” sense to this appeal belies the more complicated issues associated with the concern for human rights violations that is based upon the view that the offences committed by certain activities are in some sense significant to humanity. This implies that part of what is involved with responding to these offences is an understanding of what being human means as well as making the argument that this understanding justifies intervening against those who violate human rights.

A claim “to know better” than others can encounter the type of difficulties that Bonner describes when he discusses the type of reception those making this claim likely will receive:

Imagine in our modern era a person saying to us that we don’t believe what we say we believe. We can imagine many people would be offended at the presumption built into that proposition. We can imagine someone saying— how dare you try to speak for my beliefs and worse contradict me when I speak for my beliefs?⁵⁸

The arguments about respecting the sovereignty of another nation even when they are committing genocide against their own people – whether this argument is made either genuinely or cynically out of political calculation – could be seen as another version of this understanding that those who “dare speak for others” are out of line. A counterargument that could be made when discussing Rwanda would be to recognize that the rest of the world is answerable for its impact upon the country’s affairs but that the Rwandans who perpetrated genocide are answerable for the impact they have on world affairs through the implications that their genocidal activities have upon what being human means. But does this concern for the meaning of human activity, which is used to justify the need to intervene in the affairs of another

sovereign nation, have any relevance to understanding what constitutes an appropriate response to genocide or is it simply a matter for outside academic observers to debate?

One way that this relevance has been given consideration is Arendt's suggestion that the banality of evil is representative of a form of thoughtlessness, which is an understanding she proposes after observing Eichmann to be someone who displays an inability to think. Her understanding could be used to discuss the activity of thinking in a way that recognizes a distinction between an inability to think, which is indicative of thoughtlessness, the occasions when an individual is simply being "thoughtless" or inconsiderate, and "not thinking," which is crucial to the ability to think by allowing a break to be taken from its activity. This break from thinking that "not thinking" provides could be compared to the way that rest is required as part of physical exercise by even those in the best of shape or the way that with the breathing cycle exhaling is a necessary part of the intake of air. These distinctions suggest that a problem to consider with the activity of thinking is not to be concerned with ways of eradicating the cessation of thinking in all its forms. The focus is instead with working out an understanding of when a break from thinking is needed as part of a "healthy" engagement in this activity, and when not being involved in its engagement involves being inconsiderate, or in extreme cases, is reflective of an inability to think. A difficulty in working out this understanding is that the meaning of human activity can be endlessly considered and this implies that for the activity of thinking the "good" of not thinking is not something that can ever be known in an absolute sense.

A lack of certainty about the way thoughtlessness might develop suggests that the inability to think can potentially be a part of any line of thinking just as it can always potentially be avoided by one. This implies that if an analysis examines a particular line of thinking – whether the formal work of a theorist or part of everyday understanding – and argues that its

understanding could *potentially* be supportive of a banal form of evil, then making this argument would by no means equate this line of thinking with the thinking of those whose everyday activities are directly involved in choosing to go along with mass murder. The possibility to provide this support would not be an indication that this thinking will necessarily develop into compliance with genocide when given the opportunity, nor would it suggest excluding from consideration the possibility for this thinking to be the basis of an individual's refusal to take part in mass murder. For example, Goffman's notion of front and back stage may seem to support the claim of being an "unwilling" participant in genocide but this same notion could be understood in a way that would suggest to individuals to conceive of themselves as being able to maintain a sense of distance from the demands of society when it calls upon them to commit mass murder.

This argument that a situation is not an absolute determinant of either the thinking involved or the choices that will be made in response to it can also be applied to some of the different ways in which the perpetrators of genocide have been portrayed. In *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Romeo Dallaire details the advantages that each of the belligerent parties in Rwanda received militarily by engineering/allowing the genocide to take place but despite recognizing its practical advantages for these parties he contends that the decision to perpetrate genocide cannot be understood as a decision that human beings would be capable of making. He elaborates upon this point in an interview discussing his meeting with the "devils" who were the main architects of the genocide in Rwanda and how these men were physically different from other human beings:

When I shook their hands, their hands were cold. But they weren't cold as a temperature. They were cold as if another body. Although they had a human form their eyes were not human. Their eyes were

reflecting the most evil that I could ever imagine. It was being personified and that personification coming from my religious background was the devil ... I had been literally able to shake hands with the devil.⁵⁹

Dallaire portrays the perpetrators as doing something that is not possible for humans to do, while others have used Arendt's discussion of the banality of evil to suggest that when a demand is placed upon individuals to take part in genocide the human response is to comply.

Arendt seems to reject both of these assertions in a response she makes to the way the banality of evil has been interpreted by commentators:

You say that I said there is an Eichmann in each one of us. Oh no! There is none in you and none in me! This doesn't mean that there are not quite a number of Eichmanns. But they look really quite different. I always hated this notion of 'Eichmann in each one of us'. This is simply not true. This would be as untrue as the opposite, that Eichmann is in nobody.⁶⁰

Arendt proposes seeking a middle ground between the view that "we are all like Eichmann," in the sense that in the same situation we could not help but carry out genocide when asked to do so, and the other extreme that says he is an inhuman monster with a lust for killing and to whom those without a psychological imbalance cannot relate. An image that could be used to appreciate this understanding is the view taken of a character in a novel who has a recognizable identity but in the choices they make – which each of us *could* but do not *have* to replicate – they are not necessarily the sort of person others (completely) identify with and consider to be "just like themselves."

Rwanda and the Banality of Evil

Des Forges' focus in *Leave None to Tell the Story* to provide an objective account of the events during the Rwandan genocide does not include as part of its considerations a concern with working out the implications upon the meaning of human activity of committing mass murder. One of the few attempts in this work to go at all beyond a straight reporting of events is the demographic profile it seeks to compile of those who performed the killings in Rwanda. The information collected together for this profile details the way that:

many of these zealous killers were poor, drawn from a population 86 percent of whom lived in poverty ... They included young men who had hung out in the streets of Kigali or smaller commercial centres ... Many refugees from Burundi, who transferred their anger from their Tutsi-dominated government at home to the Tutsi of Rwanda, also rushed to join the killing campaign ... Some Rwandans, previously scorned by their communities, seized on the genocide as an opportunity to gain stature as well as wealth ... Not all killers were poor and living in misery. The authorities that directed the genocide constituted a substantial part of the Rwandan elite.

... Some who refused at the start became convinced to act when all authorities seemed to speak with one voice... Unlike the zealous assailants, the reluctant set limits to their participation: they might massacre strangers in churches or barriers, knowing only that they were Tutsi, and refuse to attack neighbours, knowing they were Tutsi but knowing also they were not enemies. They might agree to

pillage a Tutsi they envied for his wealth and refuse to burn the house of a poor widow; they might join in killing a young man who loudly proclaimed his loyalty to the RPF but refuse to slay an infant. Some became more hardened with experience and learned how to slaughter even those whom they once refused to harm; others went the other way, apparently swept up by fear or greed in the first days of slaughter, they were later repelled by the efforts to exterminate even the vulnerable.

Tens of thousands of Hutu refused to join the killing campaign and saved Tutsi lives. Hundreds of thousands more disapproved of the genocide but did nothing to oppose it or to help its victims.⁶¹

Des Forges' description of the genocidal killers in Rwanda includes the observations that these individuals were rich, poor, locals and foreigners, and in their attitudes they displayed enthusiasm, or reluctance, or they grew more or less enthusiastic throughout the campaign. Essentially her findings suggest that as a group the killers came from all backgrounds and showed all levels of enthusiasm towards their participation in the killings and that from an empirical standpoint they do not possess any characteristic or set of characteristics that would clearly distinguish them from the rest of the population as a whole. These findings could further be put "under the microscope" and operationalized using the tools of statistical analysis for the purposes of identifying the presence of an empirical difference with this population that lies dormant. But even if a statistically significant feature of this population could be demonstrated

this demonstration would not address the significance of collecting “the killers in Rwanda” into a category or explain the benefits sought by investigating this group of individuals.

The works of Jean Hatzfeld in *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* and Straus in *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda* mention Arendt’s notion of the banality of evil to understand the perpetrators of the genocide but without considering the implications of this notion for human activity. Hatzfeld introduces Arendt’s work into his discussion when he describes some of the reservations he felt ethically about interviewing men who were imprisoned and “have been deprived of their physical liberty and thus of freedom of expression.”⁶² He mentions as one of his influences to proceed with his study “the power of Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which was written after she had listened to the words of a prisoner, indeed, on the eve of his sentencing.”⁶³ Straus also refers to “the problems of interviewing perpetrators,” and though he does not discuss what he thinks these problems represent he explains that his reasons for conducting the interviews are similar to Hatzfeld’s, noting that this “approach is not uncommon to studies of the Holocaust, and my method in part derives from that literature.”⁶⁴ In a footnote to this comment Straus stresses how the work of Arendt and Christopher Browning were “particularly influential” for him, although between these two authors he acknowledges a greater debt to Browning.⁶⁵ This debt is apparent in his argument that the statistical data he has accumulated:

support “ordinary men” theories of genocide perpetrators. I find that the profile of Rwanda’s perpetrators strongly resembles the profile of adult men in the country. Rwanda’s perpetrators were not especially mad, sadistic, hateful, poor, uneducated, ideologically committed or young.⁶⁶

Hatzfeld also describes how the men he interviews were by all appearances “ordinary Rwandans” that prior to the genocide “seemed destined for nothing beyond choosing a wife to share a rural existence on a hill in a little country in the heart of Africa, a life lived in uneasy tolerance of their neighbours, without television or any influx of immigration to connect them to the vast outside world.”⁶⁷

In their discussion of Arendt’s work on Eichmann both Hatzfeld and Straus interpret the “banality of evil” in a more literal sense that focuses on the individuals who took part in the killings and suggests that in terms of their background they are ordinary people. Straus’ characterization of the findings of his work as being supportive of “ordinary man theories of genocide” that are “particularly influenced by Arendt” is based upon his analysis that the demographic profile of those who performed the killings in Rwanda is no different from that of the general population. Hatzfeld develops his argument that the prisoners in his study are “banal” in who they are as people when he contemplates what motivated them in agreeing to be interviewed: “Perhaps they are telling their stories to convince us they are ordinary, the ordinary people described by ... Hannah Arendt. In some confused way they are also probably trying to emphasize, to all of us at the edge of that exterminating whirlwind, an agonizing truth.”⁶⁸ He then quotes one of the informants, Alphonse, to suggest what this “truth” might be:

Outside the marshes [where these men took part in the killings],
our lives seemed quite ordinary. We sang on the paths, we downed
Primus or *urwagwa*, we had our choice amid abundance. We
chatted about our good fortune, we soaped off our bloodstains in
the basin, and our noses enjoyed the aromas of full cooking pots.
We rejoiced in the new life about to begin by feasting on legs of

veal. We were hot at night atop our wives, and we scolded our rowdy children. Although no longer willing to feel pity, we were still greedy for good feeling.

...

At the end of the season at the marshes we were so disappointed we had failed. We were disheartened by what we were going to lose, and truly frightened by the misfortune and vengeance reaching out for us. But deep down, we were not tired of anything.⁶⁹

In this and other passages Hatzfeld plays on the suggestion from the men that the summer they spent participating in the genocide was the “lucky season.”⁷⁰ He suggests this “lucky season” stands out from the “natural” cycle of seasons his interviewees patterned their lives on as farmers. In part this is explained when Hatzfeld notes in passing that while the men took part in the killings they allowed their crops to lie fallow during the growing season.⁷¹

Hatzfeld’s focus on their neglect of their fields provides an insight to his overall analysis of the perpetrators: they may have been ordinary farmers before the genocide, and they may even continue to talk in the manner of their profession and use “natural” terms like “seasons” to describe their participation in the killings. Despite these “ordinary” appearances their experiences during the “lucky season” in which the genocide occurred separated these men from what came “naturally” to them. This separation taught them that killing is not just an acceptable way of life, but with the “abundance” it provided for them during their participation in the genocide, it became the way of life they preferred. Hatzfeld’s argument recognizes these men not to be diabolical agents of evil by nature or birth but he also does not accept the position that they

were simply innocents driven by circumstance to commit a crime that was not of their own making. The genocide put the men in a position where they were confronted with having to breach the inhibitions they felt towards killing and once they chose to breach these inhibitions they willingly left them behind.

Hatzfeld is suggesting that his analysis modifies the understanding that the perpetrators are the “ordinary people ... described by Arendt” with his argument that the experience of participating in the genocide transformed his interviewees’ views towards killing. Hatzfeld does not focus on the issue of whether or not the perpetrators’ growing acceptance of killing was an inevitable transformation or if they could possibly have viewed becoming involved in a different way. A clearer point of comparison with Arendt’s writings is the idea that a person’s views towards perpetrating genocide can be transformed to suit the circumstances or social “milieu” in which they find themselves. This aspect of Hatzfeld’s work seems to align with Arendt’s comments about the “moral collapse of Europe” under Nazi rule and the way that:

morality, at the very moment of its collapse ... stood revealed in the original meaning of the word, a set of mores, of customs and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with no more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of a whole people.⁷²

Hatzfeld focuses on the way the change in the conditions of society changed the prisoners in his study into something abnormal when prior to their involvement in the genocide he argues they were simply “banal” individuals who were normal and ordinary in every sense. Arendt’s focus is on the banal understanding of morality as a concern for normality and the way in which

individuals will support committing genocide when this is what society demands of them to be normal.

Des Forges' comments to the BBC about the importance of defending human rights suggest that the merits of investigating genocide can be worked out through a concern for the impact that the activity of committing genocide has upon the meaning of human activity in all of its forms. Des Forges does not take up a discussion of these concerns in her study of Rwanda and Arendt's notion of the banality of evil, which she represents as thoughtlessness, was used to consider the significance that genocide has upon the (human) activity of thinking. Hatzfeld's and Straus' discussions of the banality of evil in their studies of Rwanda were also considered but their work was recognized as being concerned with the ordinariness of the people who perpetrated genocide and not with the impact that genocide has upon human activity and the way in which this concern might be related to a consideration of the merits of investigating the subject of genocide.

The *Skandala* and the Shift from Intentionality to the Activities Performed

One way an investigation might seek to identify those who take part in mass murder while also reflecting upon the "good" of conducting this investigation is by considering Arendt's discussion of the *skandala*. This is a notion that Arendt attributes to Jesus of Nazareth, which is a name she uses to distinguish the religious figure of Jesus Christ who preaches forgiveness of sin from the moral figure that speaks about the importance of exercising judgment to evaluate the merits of an activity being performed. She comments that:

This great lover of sinners, of those who trespassed once
mentions ... that they there are others who cause *skandala*,
disgraceful offences, for which "it were better that a millstone were

hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea.” It were better that he had never been born. But Jesus does not tell us what the nature is of these scandalous offences: we feel the truth of his words but cannot pin them down.⁷³

The discussion of *skandala* turns the focus away from the doer and their intentions and directs it towards the nature of the offences committed. This is an understanding that Arendt uses to make sense of the banal form of evil that Eichmann displays through his claim that he is not responsible for the momentous, monstrous deeds that he had an integral part in authoring.

The *skandala* are referred to as being like stumbling blocks or boulders that block the pathway of those who commit these offences, which connects in an interesting way with Arendt’s description of thinking as an activity that stops to reconsider the endless significance of things. The impediments that emerge from committing *skandala* could be seen as the ghostly remnants that represent what is left over from the occasions where thinking has been neglected. Arendt’s arguments seem to suggest that these remains become planted in an individual’s consciousness, and that from the impact that these offences have upon the self the activity of thinking becomes petrified. Arendt’s account of thinking describes it as involving a self-dialogue which requires an individual to be a reasonable partner for themselves to converse with and she contends that those who refuse to take part in the type of offences that the *skandala* involve seem to understand that this is what is required for the self-dialogue to occur. This is a point that is reflected in Arendt’s comments about the nonparticipants in the Final Solution whose refusal to comply with its orders she suggests represents an unwillingness “to live together with a murderer – themselves.” In Kantian terms to live with oneself as a murderer involves the contradiction of a universal law that it self-legislated but the self does not agree should be applied universally. The life the

murder lives relies upon the understanding that thou shalt murder and thou shalt not murder, which entails forming a partnership with the self that cannot be sustained in thought.

The Banal Accommodation to Order

The cases involving genocide offer ample evidence of the situations where the measures that could have been in place to stop mass murder – such as a concern for preserving a sense of self that would permit the self-dialogue that thinking engages in – clearly were not enough to prevent it from happening. In Rwanda the government’s order to commit genocide was accepted for a variety of different reasons by the nation’s inhabitants, the most easily identifiable being the appeal to a racist ideology. The groundwork for this appeal was laid in part by the “Hamitic hypothesis” which argued that the Tutsi came to the area of Rwanda-Urundi centuries ago to conquer the original Hutu inhabitants.⁷⁴ This hypothesis was initially embraced by the Tutsi during colonial times as it made the case that they were descended from the lost biblical tribe of Ham in Ethiopia and shared (some) ancestral roots with Europeans, allegedly making the Tutsi the “natural” leaders of the more local and African Hutu population. From independence onwards the more radical elements of the Hutu population reinterpreted the Hamitic hypothesis to make the claim that they were the rightful rulers of Rwanda on the basis that the Hutu were the original inhabitants of the region and their numerical superiority over the “foreign Tutsi invaders” gave them the democratic right to be in power. This hypothesis was recognized by the killers in a very gruesome way during the genocide as the bodies of thousands of murdered Tutsis were thrown into the Kagera River in Rwanda – a tributary of the Nile – as a way to symbolically “send them back to Ethiopia.”⁷⁵

The mainstream acceptance that the assassination of the President helped to give the racist ideology of Hutu extremism is noted in a number of firsthand reports that acknowledge the

way Habyarimana's death helped to mobilize the populace to commit genocide. This includes his death being mentioned by all 23 prisoners who participated in Straus' study⁷⁶ *Intimate Enemy* although their remarks also make clear that the racist views of extremism were not universally accepted even among those who carried out the killings. One respondent mentions his doubt about the idea that all Tutsi were traitors secretly assisting the invading RPF forces: "I thought the accomplices were in the city. But with my neighbours, I did not think about it."⁷⁷ The same type of hesitancy is expressed in Hatzfeld's *Machete Season* by a prisoner named "Jean-Baptiste" who took part in the genocide when he comments upon the rumours that Tutsi women saw themselves as being "too good" to do farm work. Jean-Baptiste explains that the "Hutu noticed none of that hearsay in the Tutsi women of their neighbourhood, who bent their backs beside their Hutu wives and lugged water home the same way they did."⁷⁸

Those who killed Tutsi without claiming to be convinced by the racist views of Hutu extremism often describe the way their participation in the killings was related to their normal, everyday activities and concerns. The militia in charge of rounding up and organizing civilians into death squads was named the *interhamwe* or "those who worked together," which seemed to encourage the sense that murdering Tutsi was simply a matter of taking an alternative line of work to farming. The weapons of choice were also typically farm implements and the prisoners in Hatzfeld's study draw comparisons between the similar feel physically of wielding a machete for the purposes of doing the cutting needed to look after their crops and livestock and the use of a machete for the purposes of cutting human beings.⁷⁹ More commonly mentioned than these attempts at "branding" the killings as work are the threats and/or promises of reward made to the would-be participants in the genocide. These are aimed at having an impact upon very practical

matters like the financial loss incurred by having to pay for a bribe to get out of participating in the death squads and the financial gain that will be obtained from looting.

Once the order was in place to murder Tutsi it could accommodate those who were racist, looking to do a job, securing the welfare of their private, practical concerns or were motivated by some combination of these factors. This reflects the understanding that the activities engaged in to pursue these interests are determined by the prevailing social order without a concern for the merits of the way in which they are being pursued and it takes the form of the banality of evil when complying with this order involves committing mass murder. Arendt's discussion of the *skandala* would suggest that those who claim not to be committed to the aims of the genocide they took part in are no less responsible for what they had or had not done to contribute towards its execution. But an unsettling implication of the banality of evil is the suggestion that a desire to comply with the prevailing social order will allow everyday concerns to draw in supporters who will participate in mass murder, perhaps even more effectively than racist views that lack the backing of mainstream support.

Judgment as Self-Defining

The individual exceptions to the vast majority who comply with an order to participate in mass murder shows that the way everyday concerns draw in participants is not unavoidable. The example of these exceptions, while important not to overlook, is also important to discuss in a way that avoids suggesting everything works out in the end. This is not to say that a concern for genocide prevention should be entirely ruled out but to suggest also considering ways of responding to the occurrence of genocide other than the problem of imagining how it will disappear. This is an understanding that can be developed by reflecting upon the example Fujii discusses of "Gustave," who describes the way he drew from the everyday notion of friendship

as a resource to resist becoming involved in the practice of genocide. Gustave characterizes his understanding of what friendship involves:

Gustave: A true friend is someone who gives you good advice ...

Interviewer: Can you give me an example of bad advice?

G: For example, someone might recognize you and might ask you to help kill someone or to go steal the belongings of others, saying you'll be rich.

I: Was there ever someone who asked you to help kill someone or steal another's things?

G: No one did, because when I notice that someone has bad ways, I cannot go near them. Even today, I cannot be friends with people who think like that.

I: In general, how do people show they are true friends to one another?

G: True friends must have the same ideas, that is good ideas. They have to help one another in everything. Each has to steer the other in the right direction.⁸⁰

Gustave is described by Fujii as a “resister” and is distinguished from those she classifies as “joiners” who (for one reason or another) had gone along with the killings in Rwanda. Fujii notes that both joiners and resisters place a high value on obedience but in the case of resisters “the valorization of obedience, however, did not translate into obeying orders ... [known] to be wrong.”⁸¹ Gustave's account acknowledges the temptation obedience holds for him when he

states he does “not go near” those who act in “bad ways” and describes a “true” friend as someone that can “steer the other in the right direction.”

Fujii does not further discuss the relation between right and wrong and obedience, but it is a phenomenon considered at some length by Arendt in her essay “Personal Responsibility Under a Dictatorship.” She asks, “In what way were those few different who in all walks of life did not collaborate?” and her answer connects her discussion of keeping good company with oneself with the notion of judgment:

The nonparticipants, called irresponsible by the majority, were the only ones who dared judge by themselves, and they were capable of doing so not because they disposed of a better system of values or because the old standards of right and wrong were still firmly planted in their mind and conscience ... [They] were those whose conscience did not function in this ... automatic way – as though we dispose of a set of learned or innate rules which we then apply to the particular case as it arises, so that every new experience or situation is already prejudged and we need only act out whatever we learned or possessed beforehand. Their criterion, I think, was a different one: they asked themselves to what extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds; and they decided that it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then be changed for the better, but simply because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves ... To put it crudely, they refused to murder,

not so much because they still held fast to the command “Thou shalt not kill,” but because they were unwilling to live together with a murderer – themselves.⁸²

The considerations Arendt mentions when describing judgment share with Gustave’s account the understanding that the decision to act (or not act) is arrived at not through some mechanically-minded process but with an eye towards keeping good company with oneself. Gustave’s concern with avoiding those with bad ways and wanting to only be around those who can steer him right suggests an important difference with Arendt’s notion of friendship. To be so concerned with the physical proximity of others seems to suggest that friendship has a hypnotic power that negates the capacity for judgment and allows ideas to be transmitted between friends almost by osmosis. This is not to deny that friendship can be influential in both good and bad ways but to suggest also adding to this understanding of its influence other possible ways to relate to those who have good or bad ways beyond simply falling under their grip. Friendship then would become not so much a matter of being subject to the fortune of having good or bad friends but to emphasize the importance of finding ways to relate to the good and bad of friendship. The way that Gustave wants to discriminate between the good and bad of friendship could be developed beyond the circularity of saying that bad friends give bad advice by using as a criteria Arendt’s sense of seeking to befriend ourselves through what we do. This circularity need not be thought of as ever being fully avoidable considering that what is involved with befriending ourselves is also not a matter of self-evidence or capable of being determined in a mechanical fashion.

Arendt’s discussion of “obedience” in the same essay provides an example of judging action with a concern for keeping good company with ourselves. She describes her distaste for the word obedience and the praise it receives as a political virtue. The trouble she sees is with a

notion of obedience that fails to recognize the importance of consent, i.e. that any political system one obeys is de facto a political system that is also being consented to and supported by our-“selves.” This distinction between obedience and consent seems to bring the concern for “living at peace with ourselves” into the judgments we make about our political involvements by emphasizing that our participation is something our-“selves” agree to even when this involvement appears to have been imposed upon us by others.

One of the implications of the idea that our judgments about certain actions may prevent us from being at peace with ourselves is this begins to introduce a sense of finality into the way actions are understood. Arendt suggests that the acts Eichmann commits make him someone that nobody would want to share the earth with,⁸³ and her judgment is by no means one that needs to be universally accepted: other views and reactions towards what Eichmann has done are clearly possible. This judgment says something about Arendt, and this is precisely the point about the open-endedness versus the finality of judgment: it says something about those who exercise it but the exercise of judgment also admits to endless interpretation about its application.

A difficulty with judgment is to avoid appearing judgmental even though the exercising of judgment seems called for in certain circumstances or becomes notable in its absence when not exercised. If judgment is not exercised mechanically then for it to avoid becoming judgmental seems to require attention to the circumstances in which it may be called for and working through the particulars of those circumstances to decide upon the appropriate way for it to be exercised. This understanding of judgment suggests the “good” of an analysis focused on its concern with understanding “right” and “wrong” as the discussion of the banality of evil has shown that everyday concerns can draw support for mass murder if no consideration is given to the “good” of the order being followed.

Arendt argues that the Eichmann trial makes the notion of judgment a central issue since the point of a trial is to judge a defendant.⁸⁴ The next case to be examined will be the trial of a notorious war criminal from the Cambodian genocide, Kiang Kuk Iev, a.k.a. “Duch.” Duch’s trial will be used to evaluate the extent to which Arendt’s assessment of Eichmann as “banal” is instructive for assessing a major war criminal on trial for his participation in genocidal killings, when in Duch’s case this trial occurs in a very different time and place than either Nazi-occupied Europe or Rwanda.

Chapter 3

Re-Creation as Part of Working Through: The Particular and the Universal in the Cambodian Genocide

*Neither in knowledge nor in reflection can anything whole be put together, since in the former the internal is missing and in the latter the external; and so we must necessarily think of science as art if we expect to derive any kind of wholeness from it. Nor should we look for this in general, the excessive, but, since art is always wholly represented in every individual work of art, so science ought to reveal itself completely in every individual object treated.*⁸⁵

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre*
(quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*)

Introduction

The discussion of the Rwandan genocide in the previous chapter suggests examining the willingness to comply with mass murder in relation to the notion of thoughtlessness. The argument considers the way in which this form of compliance is possible to avoid through exercising judgment and the focus of this faculty upon understanding the “good” of an activity being performed. This discussion develops its argument by addressing the issue of what conditions need to be met to provide appropriate commentary on the Rwandan genocide, with the initial focus on *whose* commentary should be considered appropriate. In the examination of the Cambodian genocide in this chapter the issue of what constitutes appropriate commentary will again be taken up in relation to the notion of thoughtlessness with an interest in developing an understanding of what is meant by notions that (like the “good”) are supposedly of universal

human significance. The investigation will consider the way in which society was ordered during the Cambodian genocide as its (particular) case to examine and develop an appreciation of what is involved with the (universal) concern for the notion of justice, which is the notion that emerges as a focus in this discussion of the genocide. The discussion will also seek to treat the relation between the universal and the particular as not only a resource but a topic of its examination by including as part of its investigation a reflection upon what is possible to learn from applying universal notions to particular cases.

Background: The Comparison between Nazism and the Khmer Rouge as a Matter of Historical Accuracy

The Holocaust and the “killing fields” of Cambodia stand as well-known symbols of the horrors of genocide, but even if little thought is required to make this association, the significance of designating an event as “genocidal” is often not as easily settled. One of the concerns in developing a sense of the term’s significance is that it involves taking into consideration the unique set of circumstances of each occasion where genocide is said to have occurred. In comparative forms of investigation the use of genocide as a general term to classify these occasions seems problematic considering the complexity involved in comparing different instances of genocide with distinct historical, cultural, etc. backgrounds. The concern typically shown in these forms of investigation with recognizing the uniqueness of each case being compared may even seem to lend credence to the suggestion that little can meaningfully be said about what the term genocide signifies other than it refers to killing that occurs on a tremendous scale.

If the meaning of this term is recognized as being not fully settled then one way to respond to this sense of uncertainty would be to employ a method that examines the situations

categorized as genocidal and attempt to discover their connection with other phenomena. What this term refers to could then be explained by making reference to the prevailing economic conditions, the ethnic composition of the affected population, etc. The interest shown in resolving concerns about the meaning of the term genocide by seeking to accumulate additional phenomena that it can be associated with seems reminiscent of Durkheim's concerns about sociology being conceived of as a discipline without a field of study due to a lack of its own distinct set of phenomena. One of the differences between the seeming lack of phenomena connected with the killing that transpires during genocide and the disappearance of sociological phenomena described by Durkheim is that Durkheim cautions against conceiving of sociology as a catchall category that simply replicates the work done in other disciplines while the phenomena associated with comparing different instances of genocide disappear not through replication but simply by not appearing at all.

A comparison between the details of the Holocaust with those of the Cambodian genocide may offer a more tangible explanation of the way the phenomena associated with a comparative study of genocide seem to "vanish". The tension between the understanding this form of study seeks to establish and the difficulty associated with being sensitive towards the context in which different instances of genocide occur seems apparent by even just proposing that a global conflict originating in Europe be juxtaposed with a regional conflict sparked by the Vietnam War thirty years later in Southeast Asia. This brings to mind some obvious historical, cultural differences such as Germany's standing as one of the leading industrialized nations in the world during Hitler's reign and Cambodia's status under the Khmer Rouge as a developing nation emerging from its colonial past. The "racial revolution" started by the Nazis in peacetime that expanded into a war of conquest across Europe and the globe also stands in contrast with the

Khmer Rouge's communist revolution that emerged as part of a civil war provoked by the devastating impact of the American bombing raids on Cambodia (which are estimated to have contained three times the amount of explosives that the U.S. dropped on Japan during WWII).⁸⁶ Unlike the Nazi revolution the devastation from which the revolution in Cambodia emerged avoided exploding into a larger conflict until the Khmer Rouge started a small-scale war with neighbouring Vietnam at the end of its short time in power.

With a little imagination, however, this same set of circumstances could be used to illustrate the commonality between the reign of the Nazis and the Khmer Rouge by (for instance) deemphasizing the differences in scale between their levels of industrial development, the wars they each provoked and/or the specific content of their revolutionary aims in transforming society. Their similarities could then be found by stressing that both regimes were overthrown through their involvement in these wars that they started and by noting that the revolutions founded by each of these governments involved a conscious effort to radically alter and re-engineer a society that was in disarray (the economic devastation that the treaty of Versailles imposed on Germany; the devastation from the aftermath of the war experienced in Cambodia).

Whatever a direct and certainly more thorough comparison between Nazi Germany and Democratic Kampuchea might determine about the similarity or dissimilarity of the conditions within the two nations prior to and during their enactment of policies of mass murder, the possibility of connecting the two regimes seems to be strengthened by the attention that the designation of "genocide" brings to their legacies. For example, the way in which the legal framing of the Nazis' activities as crimes against humanity (and later as genocide) brought a focus upon Eichmann has a parallel in Cambodia in the figure of Kaing Kek Iew – known better as "Duch" – who gained notoriety for his involvement in the country's genocide as the director

of the infamous S-21 Tuol Sleng prison. This connection may seem a bit unsatisfying, however, as it suggests that the difficulty with identifying genocidal phenomena when comparing the different instances where these activities are said to have occurred can be resolved by simply designating the activities of the regimes being compared as “genocidal.” These phenomena may seem contrived if they are only making their appearance by being given this designation after the fact.

One way to counter the concerns about the potentially ephemeral quality of genocidal phenomena is to verify them on the basis of their historical accuracy, but a comparison between the figures of Eichmann and Duch much like the more general comparison between the regimes of which they were a part seems to be a matter that is open to interpretation. For instance, Eichmann acted more as an administrative coordinator overseeing the transportation by rail of Jews to the various concentration camps across Europe under Nazi control while Duch was the director of one infamous prison in Cambodia. This difference in position also meant differing forms of involvement in the killing process as Eichmann was the prototypical “desk murderer” who made his contribution without spending much time at the concentration camps. Duch had a more direct involvement in the day-to-day operations of his prison and focused upon ensuring that the “best practices” of torture and execution were employed by his guards, even admitting during his trial that he had taken part (perhaps more routinely than he suggests) in the torture and killings himself.⁸⁷ Duch’s “closer” involvement in these operations gave him a hand in the deaths of tens of thousands of individuals as opposed to the more “distant” part Eichmann had in the deaths of millions.

These sorts of differences suggest Duch’s position had a greater resemblance to one of the directors of the concentration camps than to the more administrative position occupied by

Eichmann. Rudolph Hoess then might come to mind as the most appropriate figure to compare given his position as the commandant of Auschwitz, the most infamous of the concentration camps. A case could also be made to compare Duch with the commandant of Treblinka, Joseph Stangel, as Stangel shares with Duch the same horrendous track record of leaving only a handful of remaining survivors among the thousands that came under his power. If the raw number of deaths that occurred at S-21 is the focal point then a smaller camp from the Third Reich might seem to offer the closest comparison, while a different form of analysis might emphasize that the operations at S-21 had the unique task of securing confessions and carrying out the executions of many of the Khmer Rouge officials who had fallen out of favour with the party. This made its operations distinct not only from many of the killing centres of Nazi Germany but (as Duch himself has pointed out)⁸⁸ from others in Cambodia.

Even if the historical evidence offers little support for either a comparison between the positions Eichmann and Duch held within their governments, or for the amount of attention they have received relative to other officials more instrumental in the atrocities committed by their respective governments, one commonality they share is the position they symbolically occupy as figures who represent the atrocities committed by the regimes in which they each served. A discussion of the figures used to represent genocide shifts the focus of the analysis towards the discourse surrounding this subject matter though without necessarily abandoning the relevance of its historical considerations. Other figures besides Eichmann and Duch might make more sense historically speaking to represent the genocide committed by the Nazis and the Khmer Rouge (excluding from consideration the more well-known leaders of these respective movements, Hitler and Pol Pot). One figure that merits consideration in this respect would be Eichmann's boss Reinhard Heydrich, who is credited with having an instrumental role in

planning the Holocaust including being involved with organizing *Kristallnacht*, the *Einsatzgruppen* or “mobile killing units” responsible for shooting hundreds of thousands of civilians during the war, as well as for his position as chair of the Wannsee conference.⁸⁹ The argument could be made that Heydrich’s death during the war allowed Eichmann to obtain greater notoriety during the Nuremberg trials where he was named in absentia as a central figure in orchestrating the Final Solution, a status that later would heighten the drama of Eichmann’s capture and trial in Jerusalem.

As for an appeal to the historical record in Cambodia a case could be made for Duch’s boss Nuon Chea, who had a lead role in organizing the mass killing committed by the Khmer Rouge, including having responsibility for ordering the deaths of many of those sent to Toul Seng for torture and execution. Duch’s notoriety relative to Chea and others within the Khmer Rouge was enhanced by the more prominent position he occupied at Tuol Sleng which more than likely would not have become a famous memorial site in Phnom Pehn if Duch had been more competent and not failed to execute Chea’s orders to destroy the prison along with all evidence of its murderous activities.

“Just” Telling the Truth: The Demand to Investigate the Cambodian Genocide and the Limits of Historical Accuracy

A concern for the historical accuracy of using Duch as a figure to represent the Cambodian genocide seems to imply that the account that can make the strongest claim to being objective is also the one that is most convincing. This is an understanding that puts the historical record in the position of verifying whether Duch is a significant figure in the Cambodian genocide or if this is “just the way he is being talked about.” The sense might develop from this understanding that the relation between the historical representation of genocide and other forms

of the discourse is inherently adversarial. This sort of antagonism might be recognized in the account photojournalist Nic Dunlop gives in *The Lost Executioner* of his (successful) search through Cambodia to find Duch in hiding. The concern that seems to drive Dunlop during his journey is to “bring home the truth” of the Cambodian genocide and show the importance of addressing its occurrence by obtaining a fuller understanding of its events than previously reported. Dunlop demonstrates this type of focus in his discussion of the international attention received by the trial of former Khmer Rouge official Sam Bith. During the genocide Bith ordered the kidnapping and execution of three foreigners from Britain, Australia and France in an attack in which, Dunlop points out, “ten Cambodians were also killed.”⁹⁰

Dunlop is critical of the attention given to the case involving Bith and notes that, even though Nuon Chea was called to testify at Bith’s trial, the foreign press showed little interest in questioning Chea despite his central involvement in orchestrating the genocide. Dunlop contrasts his interest in the trial with that shown by other members of the foreign press by describing the day Chea was called to testify and what the reaction was to an announcement made by court officials that Bith was too ill to take the stand, and the proceedings would be temporarily postponed. “The assembled journalists groaned and gathered their gear, then crammed around the courtroom door, ready for Sam Bith. I kept an eye out for Nuon Chea.”⁹¹ Dunlop then describes how as Bith left the courthouse the other reporters rushed to take his photograph but “out of the corner of my eye I noticed that another LandCruiser [for Chea] was making for a different gate. I broke from the crowd and ran to follow it out into a busy main street.”⁹² In Dunlop’s telling of this episode, a historically accurate version of events and the attention given to the reporting of these events literally and figuratively head in two different directions. This point is further reinforced in his description of the conclusion of the trial when Bith was found

guilty and Dunlop refers to the British ambassador's enthusiastic view of the ruling as a "major step 'towards justice for the families of the three young men.'" Dunlop also notes that in the ambassador's comments "no mention was made of the ten Cambodians who lost their lives."⁹³ Dunlop ends his discussion of Bith's trial by emphasizing that his own lack of interest in this trial shares the locals' appreciation of the situation. He explains that "most Cambodians I spoke to were unimpressed with the verdict, believing the case was an isolated example and the result of pressure from three Western governments, all of them major donors to Cambodia's national development programme."⁹⁴

Dunlop's discussion of Bith's trial illustrates his concern with having an understanding of the Cambodian genocide that focuses on the historical relevance of the concerns addressed and is sensitive to the appreciation that the locals have of its events. His concern with developing this type of understanding is also consistent with the actions he takes in pursuit of finding Duch as he demonstrates by these actions his firm commitment to bringing the parties most responsible for the atrocities committed against the Cambodian people to justice and avoid having them simply fade into history. The impressive level of commitment Dunlop demonstrates to accomplish this aim is reflected in his decision to pursue Duch in even the most remote and dangerous parts of the country, including the regions of the jungle still under the control of the Khmer Rouge. Just as Dunlop's actions during Bith's trial reflect his way of distinguishing his interest in the Cambodian genocide from other foreign journalists, his journey through Cambodia also reflects his way of acquiring a different sense of the genocide than the one many Westerners receive from the more "touristy" experience of visiting the memorial site set up at Tuol Sleng in the capital city of Phenom Penh.

Dunlop does not suggest, however, that his main ambition in pursuing Duch stems from a sense of pure adventurism or from wanting to compensate for some lack in the “typical” Westerner’s experience of the country. At the outset of his journey he describes a set of aims that reflect both his concern with making a contribution towards what can be known and learned from the Cambodian genocide and with addressing some of the outstanding problems it continues to present. “If we were ever to understand the Cambodian holocaust, and bring any measure of justice,” Dunlop explains,

finding Duch and others like him was vital. Duch was the most important witness to those dark years and could shed light on a highly secretive period in his country’s history. And I wanted to know what it was that had turned a seemingly ordinary man from one of the poorest parts of Cambodia into one of the worst mass murderers of the twentieth century.⁹⁵

The claim that Duch is “the most important witness to those dark years” aside, Dunlop does not seem concerned about the bounty of fame rewarded for helping to bring the former prison director into custody. His attraction seems to be to the idea that a clear statement of the atrocities committed during the Cambodian genocide and the apprehension of its most notorious offenders is all that is required to inspire a call for justice against those who had a hand in perpetrating its crimes.

Dunlop shows the conviction he feels towards this idea – and his disappointment in its expectations not being met – when he mentions at the end of his story the thousands of “mug shots” taken of the prisoners who entered Tuol Sleng prison and asks in disbelief: “If we can’t respond to the overwhelming evidence in the form of photographs of the condemned, what does

it say about us? What does it say about photography?”⁹⁶ This unhappy ending Dunlop puts on his story is written while in the midst of the uncertainty created by a lengthy postponement to the beginning of Duch’s trial that (at the time of his writing) created doubts about him ever having to face prosecution. The disappointment Dunlop expresses towards his experiences in Cambodia could be used to illustrate two observations pertaining to other investigative work on the subject of genocide. Consider first the closing words of Dunlop’s book in which he offers a contrast between the sense of clarity he has from the photographs he captured of Duch during his journey and the empty feeling that persists with him whenever he views the prison photograph of a young mother, Chan Kim Srun and her baby, who were killed together in Tuol Sleng:

The pictures I took of Duch are safely in my drawer. Although I was nervous when I took them, they are incredibly sharp. And if I look closely I can just make out my own silhouette in the reflection of the eyes. I look at Kim Srun’s as she looks back at her tormentors and I see nothing.⁹⁷

The idea that the photograph of Kim Srun portrays an image that Dunlop is incapable of identifying with even though he is highly sympathetic of the terrible fate she met is perhaps interesting to keep in mind when recalling the beginning of his story when he talks about the need to find Duch if “any measure of justice” can be brought to the region. In both cases the language Dunlop uses suggests that the efforts to work on behalf of those killed in the genocide are only partial and inadequate while the need to do this work is unquestionable considering that if this need is not addressed then “What does it say about us”?

This sentiment about the content of genocide studies presenting an unquestionable need to pursue justice is certainly not unique to Dunlop’s writing on the subject and it relates to a

second observation concerning the form he uses to present his findings from Cambodia. Dunlop considers the evidence that has been well-documented in photographs to be indisputable and the mimetic properties of photography as a medium makes this seem like a hard position to oppose. This interest in presenting indisputable evidence is also not unique to Dunlop's work and is a common scholarly practice reflected in the type of written documents well-known within the field of genocide studies, such as Alison Des Forges' lengthy and factually-oriented report on the Rwandan genocide discussed in the previous chapter.⁹⁸ A parallel could perhaps be drawn within genocide studies between presenting evidence in a form that is considered indisputable and considering the content of this evidence to present an unquestionable need for justice. Dunlop's work shows his interest in these "parallel" considerations, but even though he considers the evidence from the photographs to be unquestionable and indisputable in both the form in which it has been presented and in the need to address the issues presented by its contents, he is compelled to acknowledge that the significance of the evidence he is dealing with is still subject to discourse. He acknowledges this as much by what he writes about in expressing his disappointment that Duch was not swiftly taken to trial once he was brought into custody as by his decision *to* write about his experiences in Cambodia. This decision displays Dunlop's recognition of the need to further explain the significance of the photographic evidence documenting the genocidal activities that took place in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge and how these activities desperately call for justice to be done.

The Discourse on Genocide and its Phenomena

This discussion of comparing different instances of genocide has considered the problem of what makes an account seem significant and the way in which this problem is addressed by an appeal to historical accuracy. Dunlop's concern with making this appeal by ensuring what is

reported about the Cambodian genocide carries the weight of the historical record is reflected in his focus upon the firsthand accounts provided by Duch's testimony and the photographs taken at S-21. In the end his approach seems to come full circle after he acknowledges that the evidence he considers to be most convincing does not necessarily develop into a concern for appreciating the significance of the events they document and the way this evidence is discussed and interpreted is essential to its understanding. Both the content of Dunlop's writing and his decision to write about his experiences in Cambodia suggest that the way he understands the difficulty with developing this concern is as a matter of a lack of public interest in the events that occurred during the genocide. This suggests that Dunlop's concern with "setting the record straight" by exposing the "hard" evidence to a larger audience is not unlike a realization that General Romeo Dallaire comes to when listing off what he considers as his failings as former head of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Rwanda. Dallaire argues that he initially underestimated the importance of effectively communicating events to the media and came to view attracting international attention away from other news stories like the Tonya Harding scandal as one of his central tasks as a military commander in charge of preventing genocide.⁹⁹

Both Dallaire and Dunlop are clearly disappointed in the response to well-documented evidence of genocide and show the ambivalence of not wanting to have to further explain the importance of this evidence while also experiencing a need to increase its exposure to a wider audience. In spite of this ambivalence Dallaire displays both a tremendous amount of drive in the public relations campaign that he orchestrates to draw attention to the situation in Rwanda as well as a certain amount of savvy during his interactions with the media. His aptitude in these matters provides a clearer example of the phenomena associated with the discourse on genocide being treated as phenomena in their own right as opposed to the view Dunlop seems to favour of

having the expectation that these phenomena will simply fade into the background of the discussion after the “hard” evidence is presented. Dallaire’s approach is to focus upon the different techniques that can be used to effectively present evidence of a genocide in addition to thoroughly documenting its events, as he seems to take the view that the discourse is a means to inspire his audience to take some form of action against the injustices committed. The historical or cultural relevance of the phenomena associated with this discourse could be viewed with indifference if the goal of efficiently and effectively communicating a particular message is given priority. But even if the discourse is open to being interacted with in a cynical fashion this certainly would not rule out the possibility to take a more complementary approach that seeks to present the phenomena that are considered to be the most historically and culturally relevant while also being cognizant of the public’s perception of genocidal events.

The differing levels of emphasis placed upon the accuracy and accessibility of the materials presented could be seen as a difference in the ways the discussion of genocide can be used to respond to the tension between the need to present irrefutable evidence of its occurrence and the “irrefutable” need to act against the injustices presented by evidence of genocide. In Dunlop’s work the tension between meeting these demands seems to come to a head when he describes these needs not just as competing interests to be weighed against one another but in one circumstance coming into direct conflict with each other. Dunlop recognizes this conflict in his observation that:

For most Cambodians ... talk of justice means little in their struggle to survive in what has been one long trail of suffering. As they overcome their problems in a country still reeling from the effects of a protracted war, they have more pressing needs. After all, it has

been over two decades since the Khmer Rouge genocide was exposed and made known to the world.¹⁰⁰

To observe that most Cambodians are uninterested in the way the genocide that took place in their country has been responded to is clearly a problem for Dunlop's interest in wanting to work on behalf of the individuals impacted by its injustices while also being sensitive to the local appreciation of its events. How can he make a claim to work on their behalf in seeking justice for the atrocities committed during the genocide if those who were targeted by the genocide show little interest in the proceedings set up to administer justice? What if the problem is not simply a technical matter and what if the issue is not the manner in which justice is pursued but whether or not a concern for justice is even relevant when confronting genocide?

These are questions that will be considered as the discussion in this chapter progresses but what is perhaps interesting with Dunlop's reaction in light of his focus on hard evidence is that he seems to be acknowledging that the direct involvement of Cambodians in the genocide is not the sole determinant of their views of its events. In explaining the factors that contribute to the lack of interest shown in these matters by the local populace he again mentions the lack of effort put towards bringing about swift justice. In addition to these actions (not) taken in response to the genocide he also acknowledges the impact that the discussion of the Cambodian genocide has had upon the views of those who were most closely involved in its events. This was demonstrated in the Sam Bith trial when Dunlop observed the local population's cynical response to the proceedings' focus on the impact that the Cambodian genocide had upon Westerners. The damage that has been done by neglecting the pursuit of justice and by discussing the genocide in a way that neglects to mention concerns relevant to Cambodians suggests that different words and actions could potentially sway the local population to become more engaged

in the response made to the country's genocide. To acknowledge this possibility is not to deny the difficulty of engaging the local population's interests through either dialogue, a more vigorous prosecution of the parties deemed responsible for the genocide, and/or by somehow alleviating the "struggle for survival" that Dunlop suggests deters many Cambodians from becoming more involved in the efforts to seek justice. The question of the specific strategies and techniques needed for this engagement would not necessarily address an issue suggested by Dunlop's observation about the attitude of the Cambodian population towards the judicial proceedings. This issue is the tension between trying to reconcile the difficulty of claiming to be sensitive to issues that are relevant to the concerns of the local population while also claiming to seek justice on behalf of a Cambodian populace that has shown a lack of interest in the legal proceedings set up to prosecute those who committed offenses during the genocide. In this case even if those who suffered the most from the genocide could be convinced to take an interest in the response to its occurrence, what would justify going against their (initial) wishes of not being concerned with this response? One way to address this tension is to consider Dunlop's claim that the injustices that took place under the rule of the Khmer Rouge government necessitates responding to the Cambodian genocide despite the lack of public interest. This claim implies developing an understanding of the Cambodian genocide that is aware of but does not necessarily replicate the local appreciation of events. In Dunlop's case this seems to involve treating what the notion of justice means as self-evident and supposing that anyone who knows what is just will respond to the events of a genocide with a sufficient level of concern once they are presented with evidence of mass murder being committed. In contrast to Dunlop's position, or at least the way this position has been represented here, this analysis will seek to depart from the understanding that a concern for justice can be treated as self-evident by recognizing that

what constitutes justice is representative of a universal problem that can never be known universally. This suggests that the meaning of what constitutes justice in relation to genocide is to be worked out through a consideration of each instance in which it occurs.

The starting point for working out this understanding of justice will be to consider Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial and its focus on the possibility for justice in his case, a focus that she makes clear in explaining her understanding of the aims of his trial:

The purpose of a trial is to render justice, and nothing else; even the noblest of ulterior purposes – “the making of a record of the Hitler regime which would withstand the test of history,” as Robert G. Storey, executive trial counsel at Nuremberg, formulated the supposed higher aims of the Nuremberg Trials – can only detract from the law's main business: to weigh the charges brought against the accused, to render judgment, and to mete out due punishment.¹⁰¹

Arendt's account of Eichmann continues to be a source of controversy and the debate over her work will be considered in this chapter as part of developing a version of what justice would mean in relation to his case. Events concerning Duch's case will also be discussed to consider what relevance if any the idea of applying a notion of justice that is of universal significance has to a discussion of the Cambodian genocide.

The Arendt Controversy: Judgment as a Private Matter

“If one reads the book carefully, one sees that Eichmann was much less influenced by ideology than I assumed in the book on totalitarianism. The impact of ideology upon the individual may have been overrated by me.”¹⁰² This appraisal Arendt makes in a comparison of

the views her two books *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* provide of the notion of ideology identifies one of the issues that has been part of the lengthy and involved controversy over her work on the Eichmann trial. Critics of Arendt have alleged that Eichmann is a fanatical anti-Semite and have been angered by her refusal to acknowledge the importance that his hatred for the Jewish people has for explaining his participation in the Final Solution and by extension the participation of many other lesser known Nazi supporters. These critics have argued that her account fails to hold Eichmann and others responsible for their actions and also fails to acknowledge that the Holocaust is representative of the dangers uniquely posed to the Jewish people by one of Western civilization's oldest afflictions, antisemitism. Arendt's critics seem concerned that this danger is being identified using the most recent theory du jour such as the perils of modern technology, modern rationality or some other potential threat posed generally to people never targeted by the Nazi killing machine: in Arendt's case her "theory" warns of the dangers posed by the banality of modern bureaucracy. One component of her argument that has been especially troubling for critics is the attention Arendt devotes to discussing the Jewish councils that were enlisted by the Nazis to organize the shipment of Jews to the death camps. Her critics seem troubled by the suggestion that if Eichmann is not recognized as a committed anti-Semite then this leaves less room to distinguish his involvement in the Holocaust from the Jewish councils. If a clear distinction is drawn between anti-Semites and Jews then this would make clear that the act of forcing Jews to participate in the murder of their own people is indicative of the sadistic impulses of a convinced Nazi like Eichmann.

Even in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, where ideology is featured more prominently in Arendt's argument, she is far less focused on its antisemitic content. Her emphasis is upon viewing ideology as a form of understanding that structures the way its followers mentally

comprehend and experience the surrounding world. While she contends that “the actual content of postwar antisemitic propaganda was neither a monopoly of the Nazis nor particularly new or original” what distinguished their usage was that it “was ingenious enough to transform antisemitism into a principle of self-definition, and thus to eliminate it from the fluctuations of mere opinion.”¹⁰³ By making Judaism and Aryanism a hereditary characteristic, human volition was no longer viewed as having an impact on the key political determinant for the German people and the rest of the European peoples who came under Nazi control. Its ideology operated as a master narrative that fit all events into an interpretive scheme and even became part of what constituted these events through the consequences of its harsh organization of the population into categories of Aryans and non-Aryans.¹⁰⁴ The animosity that has historically been directed towards the Jews has a clear affinity with the Nazis’ views but Arendt stresses that over and above the intense hatred characteristic of antisemitic belief the defining features of Nazi ideology were that it became both inescapable and all-encompassing in its scope for those under Hitler’s rule. Its explanation of events might be suspiciously repetitive for anyone who might stop and give a second thought to the idea that race uniformly explains everything that happens in the world but the key notion is precisely that the consistency of Nazi ideology fulfills the need for understanding without the faculty of thought having to be exercised. In the *Origins* Arendt observes that “human beings need the constant transformation of chaotic and accidental conditions into a man-made pattern of relative consistency” and argues “that totalitarian movements conjure up a lying world of consistency which is more adequate to the needs of the human mind than reality.”¹⁰⁵ Ideology maintains an unmodified explanation of events “through sheer imagination” by which its followers “are spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations”.¹⁰⁶

Arendt's suggestion that her coverage of the Eichmann trial shows she had overstated the impact of ideology in the *Origins* is somewhat complicated by her use of the same example in both works to illustrate the fanatical grip that ideological movements can have upon its followers. In the *Origins* she discusses the Nazi propaganda at the end of the war that promised that the Fuhrer "in his wisdom had prepared an easy death for the German people by gassing them in case of defeat".¹⁰⁷ She further shows in *Eichmann* the wide acceptance of this propaganda within the general populace by relating a story told by a doctor about a private German citizen "who was not a leader, may not have even been a party member" and was asking about receiving treatment for varicose veins as the Russian armies were quickly bearing down on their city.¹⁰⁸ When the doctor advised this woman to be more concerned about evacuating the area before the arrival of the advancing Red Army she responded in a satisfied tone that "the Fuhrer will never permit it. Much sooner he will gas us" and much to his dismay the doctor notes that among others listening nearby "no one seems to find this statement out of the ordinary."¹⁰⁹ The additional emphasis in *Eichmann* upon the pervasiveness of Nazi ideology among not just the upper party ranks but also the civilian populace seems to further conflict with her assessment that after covering the trial she realized her work in the *Origins* had overestimated the impact ideology had upon the followers of Nazism.

The shift in her position towards de-emphasizing the importance of ideology is made clearer through a consideration of the way the notion of agency is treated within these two works. This is a point noted by Corey Robin in an article written in response to the back and forth debate over the significance of newly released portions of the "Sassen interviews" conducted with Eichmann in Argentina that are the subject of Bettina Stanglth's work *Eichmann Before Jerusalem*.¹¹⁰ Stanglth concludes from these interviews that the blatant antisemitism

Eichmann was willing to express in private shows that his performance at the trial managed to trick Arendt into thinking that he was simply some banal bureaucrat. Robin defends Arendt against this charge by suggesting that “banality” and “antisemitism” are not mutually exclusive notions and Arendt’s portrayal of Eichmann shows the way he exhibits both of these qualities.¹¹¹ Although not responding to Robin directly, Steven Aschheim challenges this argument by conceding that “Arendt’s insights – that genocide and bureaucratic banality are not necessarily opposed, that fanatical antisemitism (or for that matter, any ideological predisposition) is not a sufficient precondition for mass murder – remain pertinent”¹¹² but still contends that the evidence Stangleth provides clearly indicates that anti-Semitic ideology was Eichmann’s primary interest and motivation for his involvement in the Nazi party. What could also be added to Aschheim’s criticism is that the idea that Eichmann took a lead role in the deaths of millions of Jews during the Final Solution but was not acting primarily from anti-Semitic motives is on its face a very counter-intuitive argument.

Aschheim uses Stangleth’s work to demonstrate the difficulties with describing Eichmann as banal but interestingly his depiction could be seen as offering confirmation for some of Arendt’s observations about Eichmann at his trial. This includes Aschheim’s description of Eichmann’s boastfulness, his inability to take into account the concerns of those he converses with and his repeated use of clichés without any concern for directly contradicting himself in what he says. Eichmann displays these traits in the Sassen interviews when he explains his great pride in having executed the Fuhrer’s will through his prominent role in the Final Solution while he is speaking to an audience of Holocaust deniers and Hitler apologists who want nothing more than one of the “great architects” of the Final Solution to deny that millions of Jews were murdered during Hitler’s reign. Eichmann also contradicts the claim he made during his trial

about adhering to Kantian morality and its universal moral precepts by reciting Nazi party slogans about artificially imposed “international” moral laws that lack the gravitas of the biological laws of racial struggle.¹¹³ Whereas Arendt recognizes Eichmann as continually seesawing between these types of contradictions without fully coming to rest on any one position over another, Aschheim argues that Eichmann is consciously playing different parts to different audiences. He suggests that the “true” Eichmann is the one who relishes his central role in having brought about the death of millions of “enemies of the Third Reich” and as a matter of principle refused to pander to his sympathetic neo-Nazi listeners by renouncing his previous involvement in Hitler’s plans.¹¹⁴

These two depictions of Eichmann agree that his actions during the Final Solution were a matter of choice and something for which he should be held accountable but they differ on the way to ensure that the discussion does not exclude a sense of volition from its considerations. The difference between these positions on this point is illustrated by the puzzlement Arendt expresses about those who criticize her work for making judgments about the participants in the Holocaust and repeat the argument against her that “judging itself is wrong; no one can judge who had not been there.” She responds to this criticism by noting that:

This, incidentally, was Eichmann’s own argument against the district court judgment. When told there had been alternatives and that he could have escaped his murderous duties, he insisted that these were postwar legends born of hindsight and supported by people who did not know or had forgotten how bad things had actually been.¹¹⁵

A version of this argument was repeated even recently by the 104-year-old former secretary of Joseph Goebbels, Brunhilde Pomsel, who (in an explanation that seems almost as if postwar denials were dutifully passed down the Nazi ranks) defended her decision to work in the Third Reich's propaganda ministry by suggesting that "the people who today say they would have done more for those poor, persecuted Jews I really believe that they sincerely mean it. But they wouldn't have done it, either."¹¹⁶ The charges against Eichmann or other Nazi supporters of privately holding anti-Semitic beliefs is meant to act as a safeguard against the claims that their involvement in the Final Solution was a matter of "just doing a job" without having full knowledge of its operations and/or the power to alter the course of its events. Stangleth and her supporters use the Sassen interviews to frame Eichmann's involvement in the Final Solution as a question about the facts of what he personally believed and circumvent the questions about judging the activities committed in public during the reign of the Third Reich. These activities may seem easy to condemn in Eichmann's case but harder to assess in the case of other participants¹¹⁷ and suggest the need to develop in both of these cases an understanding of judgment which is concerned with matters that cannot be resolved by an appeal to facts.

The title of Stangleth's work seems to also reflect the idea that the exercise of volition is restricted to the private realm as the statements made by the *Eichmann Before Jerusalem* are more of a focal point for her analysis than the *Eichmann in Jerusalem* who appears and makes statements in public at his trial. The accusations against Eichmann of secretly holding antisemitic views not only seek to maintain the culpability of those who chose to become involved with the Final Solution but also lend support to the idea that individuals cannot be held responsible for their actions if they are part of an organization whose goals differ from what they personally believe. The concern with exempting the actions committed as part of an organization is

somewhat curious considering that to deny that Eichmann is accountable for his involvement in the Final Solution, whatever his level of enthusiasm for antisemitism, would be a fairly extreme position to take. It is especially puzzling as a way of criticizing Arendt for her “softness” towards Eichmann given her emphatic denial of any suggestion that coercion absolves Eichmann of his involvement in the Nazi organization. Quoting Mary McCarthy, Arendt suggests that “If somebody points a gun at you and says, ‘Kill your friend or I will kill you,’ he is *tempting* you, that is all.”¹¹⁸

The Phenomenon of Thoughtlessness

The way Arendt frames her discussion shows what a portrayal of Eichmann looks like that understands him to be conditioned by his involvement in the Nazi organization but still responsible for the actions he commits within it. How might this be reconciled with the criticisms of her work that suggest that Arendt’s references to the notion of the banality of evil are incompatible with the understanding that Eichmann is accountable for his part in the Final Solution? One striking aspect of her explanation in light of the extensive controversy that has ensued is how little attention she actually devotes to the phrase “banality of evil” within *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. This brevity is itself informative for understanding what Arendt aims to do in her writing as it underscores that she considers herself to be merely making an observation about Eichmann at his trial without attempting to fully work out the implications of the “phenomenon” she has observed.¹¹⁹

Aside from the subtitle, Arendt uses the phrase “banality of evil” in the very last line of her report on the trial when she is describing Eichmann’s execution and suggests his final words in which he repeats platitudes typically said of the deceased at a funeral almost conveniently drive home “the lesson” that above all Eichmann’s defining characteristic is his banality.¹²⁰ Her

only other remarks in which she mentions the “banality of evil” appear within the postscript in a paragraph addressing the critics who were upset with her over the implications of her description of Eichmann. Arendt suggests in a “don’t shoot the messenger” type of response that she simply was observing the “fact” of Eichmann’s banality, which she contends was so obviously on display at his trial that it “stared one in the face.”¹²¹ She refers again to Eichmann’s final words and how plainly they make clear the “lesson” of him being banal, which is clearly not the same as trying to explain *why* this is a defining characteristic of one of the central figures in the Final Solution, nor explaining any other of the unsettling implications that may follow from recognizing that what defines Eichmann above all else is him being banal.

Arendt also briefly clarifies that she does not mean to suggest Eichmann is “stupid” by referring to him as banal but that he exhibits the quality of “thoughtlessness”¹²² to an extreme degree. His grasp of his surroundings is accomplished in a formulaic fashion – hence the heavy reliance on cliché – that seems to leave him without the ability to adjust his prior notions of the world and take into consideration the way others experience life from their perspective. Eichmann’s execution shows this thoughtlessness to not simply be a lack of empathy for others, as his inability to appreciate the way individuals form their experiences of the world also extends to himself and his own encounters with his surroundings. Instead of his last words being a reflection upon his life that he uniquely lived and experienced as “Eichmann” he simply recited these nice-sounding clichés typically said at funerals about the deceased. Eichmann faced his death as if he was having an “out-of-body experience” although without even having the ability to relate to or imagine what going through an execution would be like for the “Eichmann” who was about to be hanged. “Under the gallows, his memory played him the last trick” Arendt remarks, “he was ‘elated’ and he forgot that this was his own funeral.”¹²³

The description Arendt provides of Eichmann's banality shows further affinity with her suggestion in the *Origins* that the followers of ideology "are spared the never-ending shocks which real life and real experiences deal to human beings and their expectations." But importantly, what she observes about Eichmann does not seem to fit with her suggestion that ideology shields its adherents from reality by encasing them in an unwaveringly consistent and comprehensive worldview. Surprisingly, one of the top Nazi officials in charge of the Final Solution had little need to be inspired by a revolutionary spirit that sought to radically transform society according to the fantasies of racial purity. What sustains Eichmann's involvement in the Final Solution is that "he merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing."¹²⁴ He drew satisfaction from using a bland turn of phrase to describe some of the most disturbing events the world has ever known and in Arendt's words this disparity between what he experienced and the way he describes these experiences is "word-and-thought-defying."¹²⁵ Although Arendt considers the criticisms that question her description of Eichmann as banal to have little merit or relevance she also suggests that she could have imagined an "authentic controversy" developing over her use of the phrase the "banality of evil" for the serious implications it has for a number of issues. This includes recognizing "the strange interdependence of thoughtlessness and evil"¹²⁶ or the idea that an individual could do more harm by failing to appreciate what they were doing was wrong than by deliberately seeking to do harm.

Thoughtlessness as an Empirical Pattern

One approach to take in considering the relevance of the banality of evil as a way to understand the Cambodian genocide would be to seek evidence of a pattern by identifying individuals that figured prominently in the organization of mass murder during the Cambodian

genocide and examining if they could plausibly be characterized as banal in the way that Arendt uses this term to describe Eichmann. Various accounts of Duch and his activities during the genocide suggest he might be a viable candidate for this type of comparison, including the account provided by the psychiatric evaluation used to determine his competency to stand trial, which concluded that Duch is normal in all respects except for a notable lack of ability to see the world from the perspective of others.¹²⁷ Duch also responds to the questions about his decision to not execute the few prisoners left alive in S-21 at the end of the war by explaining that he “didn't think about those people I was keeping for my own use. I never imagined that the Communist Party of Kampuchea would be overthrown ... That's why they survived. Not because I had pity on them or had a plan for them. I simply did not think about them.”¹²⁸

Duch and Eichmann also show themselves to be extraordinarily sharp at remembering in vivid detail events of interest to them personally even though they often forget the events that they were a part of which would be of greater significance to a general audience.¹²⁹ In Duch's case he had developed a friendship with a French prisoner, François Bizot, who was captured by the Khmer Rouge and was held in a prison camp that Duch ran prior to his assignment as director of S-21. Bizot later wrote a published work about his experiences in this camp and at trial Duch could recall the specific page numbers from the book that (for him) brought back fond memories of Bizot's time as his prisoner,¹³⁰ which was indicative of Duch's attitude throughout Bizot's testimony. Duch treated being on trial for mass murder as an occasion to catch up with an old friend and talk about the passages he liked from his book, even though Duch claimed he could not remember the descriptions from this same book of the murderous living conditions and torture that occurred within the camp under his command.¹³¹

The selectiveness of Duch and Eichmann's memories during their trials is not always to their advantage and on occasion what each of them recalls without provocation provides an opportunity for further incrimination. In Eichmann's case Arendt observes that: "Even the judges had to admit that they knew no answer to the question: 'Why did the accused confess before Superintendent Less to a number of incriminating details of which, on the face of it, there could be no proof of his confession, in particular his journey to the East, where he saw the atrocities with his own eyes?'"¹³² Duch's conversion to Christianity and desire to confess his sins seems to inspire his willingness at the outset of his trial to admit wrongdoing for the activities he performed during the genocide while Eichmann speaks more from his tendency to be boastful about having done his duty, and done it so well. Duch also showed concern for his legacy as the former director of S-21 as he seemed to take pride in the "rational" approach he took towards running his prison. In one instance he compared his operations to the prisons in the area of Democratic Kampuchea under the control of Ta Mok by noting that Ta Mok "didn't bother interrogating his prisoners ... He just killed them"¹³³ suggesting his diligence in making sure to torture his inmates before their inevitable execution is a credit to Duch's measured disposition.

The desire to protect his "life's work" may even be seen as an explanation for Duch neglecting his orders to destroy S-21 and its mountain of documents. This mirrors Arendt's suggestion that Eichmann grew tired of being a nobody and wanted to be found in hiding in Argentina in order to lay claim to the notoriety he gained since the war.¹³⁴ She notes as well that Eichmann saw himself taking a reasoned approach to his task, although in Eichmann's case he maintained his "rational" approach to orchestrating the mass murder of the Jews by claiming to have done only what was in fulfillment of his duty to the Fuhrer and by "humanely" avoiding any excess cruelty.¹³⁵ The sense that Duch's religiosity might not be entirely free of egotism

could also be argued by noting his interest in gaining renown as a repentant sinner. When he was initially confronted in hiding by Dunlop about his past and was compelled to reveal his identity as the former director of S-21 Duch went on in his confession to compare himself to St. Paul. His claim to this persona seems to have been undercut by both his attempts to use his trial as an occasion to employ his skills in the game of interrogation and confession¹³⁶ and by his decision to ultimately recant his guilty plea at the end of his trial. Duch did so on the argument that he did not like the insinuation that he alone (or even primarily) was responsible for the killings committed by the Khmer Rouge and certainly his position on this point is not entirely without merit.

The idea that Duch displays a sense of “thoughtlessness” in these matters is more evident in the observations that Thierry Cruvellier provides throughout his coverage of Duch’s trial that as a skilled and seasoned interrogator he grew annoyed by the amateurism of the prosecuting lawyers who sought to make the case against him.¹³⁷ Duch, who Cruvellier refers to as the “master of confessions,” even thought that from his experience with the to and fro of interrogation he would be capable of swaying court and public opinion in his favour – as his “friend” Bizot had done to him years before in the M-13 prison – and eventually convince his captors to set him free. However, Duch’s defence is more reminiscent of the buffoonery displayed by Eichmann during his trial, considering that as part of his closing statement to the court Duch decided to win over his audience by reciting poetry. The poem he read out dealt with the subject of facing one’s fate bravely and Duch offered in commentary the suggestion that “sometimes we do a job we don’t like,”¹³⁸ an observation that a witness for the prosecution answered by remarking that “I’m not sure that a truly honorable man could wish for anything other than fair retribution for the crimes of which he knows he is guilty.”¹³⁹ Upon hearing this

Duch bowed deeply and respectfully in acknowledgment of the soundness of witnesses' words, a gesture he had performed only one other time to a witness during the trial. Later on, after being handed down a thirty year sentence at the close of the trial, Duch chose to appeal the decision in search of a lighter sentence.¹⁴⁰

An approach that understands the relevance of the banality of evil for investigating genocide in terms of patterns of behaviour might also consider situations in which thoughtlessness is interrupted and determine if this type of interruption correlates with genocide prevention – an issue that is often a focal point for the study of genocide. A clue for identifying the situations in which this type of interruption occurs is offered by a fairly well-known, and gruesome, motivational speech that the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, gave to a killing squad under his command:

This is one of the things that is easily said: “The Jewish people are going to be exterminated,” that’s what every Party member says, “sure, it’s in our program, elimination of the Jews, extermination – it’ll be done.” And then they all come along, the 80 million worthy Germans, and each one has his one decent Jew. Of course, the others are swine, but this one, he is a first-rate Jew. Of all those who talk like that, not one has seen it happen, not one has had to go through with it. Most of you men know what it is like to see 100 corpses side by side, or 500 or 1,000.¹⁴¹

Himmler contrasts the experience of his “hardened soldiers” with the hypocrisy and big talk of other apparently dedicated Nazis who lack a full commitment to the party’s extermination program on account of their personal fondness for some of the living, breathing individuals

targeted in the “Final Solution.” This tendency to make exceptions for a favoured few was not only evident among the rank and file members of the Nazi party that Himmler alludes to in his speech but reached all the way to the top to the Fuhrer himself who granted protection to a doctor in Austria classified as Jewish under Nazi law. Hitler extended his protection out of gratitude for the kindness the doctor had shown in treating his mother for cancer when he was an adolescent.¹⁴² In Eichmann’s case, he had shown concern for Dr. Josef Lowenherz, the head of the Jewish council of Vienna and on one occasion after losing his temper and slapping Lowenherz’s face he apologized to him in front of his Nazi staff.¹⁴³ In Cambodia, Duch’s willingness to seek the release of Bizot came at personal risk and suspicion of his loyalty to the party and this type of suspicion of course could have meant his death sentence. Dunlop also describes Duch’s words about how he began to have doubts about the arbitrary nature of the arrests being made when his “friends and colleagues began to arrive at the gates of S-21,” becoming depressed and engaging in the “contemplative” activity of spending “more and more time with the artists and painters” interned at S-21.¹⁴⁴ Of course whatever doubts Duch may have felt, he was able to continue his work at the prison and this is perhaps an indication that having a personal liking to those targeted in the killing is not a reliable form of genocide prevention, particularly if this is to be accomplished in a systematic fashion.

If the idea is taken into consideration that thoughtlessness can be used to identify a pattern of behaviour when discussing different instances of genocide then several points of comparison emerge from Eichmann and Duch’s appearances at trial. This includes the observation that each seems fixated on their personal biographies while remaining unconcerned with the events they were a part of that had an impact on world history. They both seem to show little care about their part in deciding the fate of others in matters of life and death, and what

concern they do show only ever seems to extend to their friends and personal acquaintances. They share the odd idiosyncrasy of rhyming off empty expressions that sound good to them in the moment but present obvious contradictions which trivialize their legal defences. They each describe their willingness to take part in genocide despite having personal misgivings about their willingness to comply, with Eichmann considering his continued involvement a matter of duty and Duch claiming that he came to the understanding that the communist principles he believed in had been corrupted by the Khmer Rouge and once he recognized this he only continued his involvement with the party as a way to survive. But even if a pattern of “thoughtlessness” can be identified empirically through evidence, perhaps more convincingly than what has been suggested anecdotally in this discussion by comparing these two figures, the issue of what conclusion is to be drawn from recognizing this pattern remains unclear. Would this mean that in situations where mass murder is the generally accepted practice that thoughtless compliance with the prevailing social order is inevitable or is “thoughtlessness” a derisive term that only refers to those (presumably others) who are “weak-minded”? If thoughtlessness is taken seriously as a problem that is neither completely overwhelming nor completely avoidable then what is a possible response to the challenge it can pose?

The Demand to Think

One example of a way in which to respond to thoughtlessness is the dialogue within Rithy Panh’s film *Master of the Forges of Hell* between Van Nath, one of the few remaining survivors of S-21, and a group of the prison’s former guards. This dialogue takes place at the site of the prison and involves the guards reenacting their routine and being interrogated by Nath about their involvement in the killing and torture that took place there on a daily basis. In his first meeting with the guards Nath speaks with them as a group and asks if they feel they were victims

of the Khmer Rouge to which they respond in the affirmative by contending they had no choice but to follow orders and do their job or else they would have been killed.¹⁴⁵ Nath challenges this claim in the next scene by describing the gruesomeness of some of the atrocities committed in S-21 and the diligence with which the guards performed these acts. When the guards respond that they simply did as they were told he retorts in a way that recognizes thoughtlessness to be a central concern: “Your ability to think as a human being, you lost it.”¹⁴⁶ The idea of taking part in genocidal activities despite personal misgivings is discussed as a topic in the film by way of a story told by a former guard who recalls his encounter with one of the female prisoners, Nay Nan. “I had feelings for her,” he explains, “and I felt sorry for her. But at the time she was the enemy.” After growing frustrated at being “full of lust” but not being able to act upon his impulses the guard finishes his story by describing how he was then “full of hatred and ... beat the enemy.”¹⁴⁷

Nath responds to the guards by explaining that he cannot accept excusing cruelty on the basis of needing to follow orders as this means “the end of our world, of justice. There are no more ideals and no more human conscience.”¹⁴⁸ He then asks one of the guards, Huoy, what he was thinking when he took part in the prison’s horrors and his response is that he was “young and hot-blooded” and did not think about what he was doing, and that even today he tries to avoid thinking about what happened because it “gives him headaches.” He also explains that now when he goes out with friends his time at S-21 is the reason why he prefers to get drunk, come home and go to sleep. Nath then pointedly makes the comment that “for me it is not like that. For me, each of our meetings is very painful ... We only talk of this unbearable past, which we can’t escape. I can’t anyway. I’m trying to understand what happened, to make sense of it. I want to understand it.”¹⁴⁹ Nath seems to be making a demand of the guard Huoy that applies both

to his time as a guard in S-21 and in the years since its closure that is akin to a demand Arendt makes in her reflections on the Eichmann trial. “If the ability to tell right from wrong should have anything to do with the ability to think,” Arendt writes, “then we must be able to ‘demand’ its exercise in every sane person no matter how erudite or ignorant, how intelligent or stupid he may prove to be.”¹⁵⁰ The difficulty that Nath encounters with Huoy is that thoughtlessness seems to beget thoughtlessness – that even when Huoy acknowledges that he did not think and is still not thinking about what he did his response is *not* to try and develop a better understanding of a problem by working through its concerns but to repress these concerns with drunkenness and sleep.

In response to the extraordinary acts he committed Huoy reverts to the very common attitude of simply putting what bothers him out of his mind as either not worth, possible or desirable to think about. In other words, despite Huoy clearly recognizing that thoughtlessness is present in his activities involving genocide he does not take this as an occasion to deal with a problem. By contrast, Nath recognizes the thoughtlessness that is prevalent in the general willingness to comply with mass murder but unlike Huoy treats this as an occasion to begin developing an understanding of what being human means. Pahn’s film addresses the concern with “trying to understand what happened” at S-21 through a recreation of its events and Nath’s questioning also recognizes that to appreciate what the guard’s way of life looks like involves working through their understanding of events. The questions Nath asks shows his further concern for universal notions like justice and human conscience and his dedication to moving beyond simply accepting the guards’ claims by challenging their assertion that thoughtlessly complying with an order without considering the implications of its activities for human conduct was the only option available to them while living under the rule of the Khmer Rouge.

Thoughtlessness and Duty

The willingness to take part in genocide despite a distaste for the activities being performed that the former guards at S-21 claim to have adhered to in performing their duties for the Khmer Rouge is a form of understanding that Jose Brunner focuses on in his article *Eichmann's Mind: Psychological, Philosophical and Legal Perspectives*, and its discussion of Eichmann's performance of his duty in the Third Reich. Brunner criticizes Arendt's report on Eichmann from the somewhat unique perspective of focusing not upon her discussion of antisemitism or the conduct of the Jewish councils but upon her comments about the dubious merits of the discipline of psychology. Brunner begins his discussion of Arendt by quoting her claim "that half a dozen psychiatrists had certified [Eichmann] as normal," noting "there is no trace of the evaluation of the six psychiatrists who, according to Arendt, evaluated Eichmann in prison" and that the two mental health experts who were in charge of his evaluation – the husband and wife team of Dr. Shlomo Kulcsar and Dr. Shoshanna Kulcsar – had also refuted Arendt's claim about this matter.¹⁵¹ The core of Brunner's argument against Arendt is that her portrayal of Eichmann as a banal and thoughtless bureaucrat *may* seem diametrically opposed to the view presented by the prosecution lawyer Dr. Hausner that Eichmann is utterly demonic (a view that has also dominated much of the criticism of Arendt's book on the trial), but these two positions are similar in the more fundamental sense of offering a reductionist account of Eichmann as a simple, one-dimensional character. With respect to Arendt Brunner contends that her "understanding was directed exclusively at the diversity of visible and audible phenomena ... It left no room for mental archeology, which seeks the forces active in the dark recesses of the psyche, encoded in external experiences."¹⁵²

According to Brunner, Arendt's phenomenological approach limits her to investigating

only “what can be seen or heard” and this precludes her from considering the influence the subconscious had upon the workings of Eichmann’s conscious mind.¹⁵³ He argues that recognizing this influence would allow Arendt to appreciate the inner conflicts that made Eichmann into a banal, thoughtless bureaucrat. As part of his representation of Arendt’s notion of thoughtlessness Brunner refers to her account of the faculty of thought and her discussion of the two-in-one or the self-dialogue that individuals engage in that provides them with a conscience to evaluate the merits of their actions. Brunner then cites passages from the diary Eichmann kept in prison in which he describes conversing with “an inner ‘I’” and suggests that Eichmann has a version of inner dialogue that has an “uncanny” resemblance to Arendt’s “theory of thinking.”¹⁵⁴ This claim is hard to reconcile with a passage from Arendt that Brunner cites earlier in his article in which she suggests that in conversing with ourselves “we ... must not do anything that would make it impossible for the two-in-one to be friends and live in harmony”¹⁵⁵ while the thoughtless person “will not mind contradicting himself.”¹⁵⁶ Yet Brunner is attempting to demonstrate the complexity and thoughtfulness of Eichmann’s character by mentioning his discussion of the two-in-one and showing the inner anguish and discord he experienced over the way he felt about the actions he committed in the service of the Fuhrer. Fittingly for Eichmann he makes reference to a cliché in order to explain his understanding of what this inner dialogue entails: “To use a familiar saying of my prewar years, if one cherishes ‘*inner* quiet serenity’ more than anything else, then one will do anything to restore order in the inner disarray, or at least try to do so.”¹⁵⁷ Brunner elaborates on Eichmann’s words by suggesting he went along with the Third Reich “out of powerlessness not thoughtlessness” but in Arendt’s formulation the relevance of thinking to moral concerns makes the question of power irrelevant. As noted in the previous chapter the criteria she sets for individuals to determine the merits of their action is the “unwillingness to

live with a murderer – themselves.’¹⁵⁸

Eichmann shows a thoughtless appreciation of thinking that has an “uncanny” resemblance not to Arendt’s explanation but to the way that Duch and the guards at S-21 discuss the relevance of thought to the performance of their duties. Both seem aware they denied thinking about their actions, Eichmann discussing the anguish he felt by not listening to the demands of the two-in-one and Duch and the guards (especially in the way articulated by the guard Huoy) acknowledging their own thoughtlessness and needing to dull the pain that their refusal to think brought upon them. Eichmann’s explanation that he “belonged to those who obeyed externally, who did nothing that would have placed them in conflict with their oath ... But their inner attitude led to a kind of personality split” seems just as answerable to one of the responses Nath makes to the excuses of the guards at S-21 for their going along with the prison’s activities: “I don’t want to hear ‘obedience to Angkar.’ If everything only thinks Angkar, obedience, discipline, carrying out orders or be killed, it’s the end of our world. There are no more ideals and no more human conscience.’¹⁵⁹

Goffman and the Distaste for Duty

Brunner’s article and its focus on the notion of thoughtlessness within Arendt’s work has suggested focusing on the connection between thoughtlessness and the attitude of external obedience to actions that internally individuals consider to be distasteful. One way to develop an appreciation of this attitude as a phenomenon is to consider contexts where this type of external/internal division is maintained other than those involving the practice of genocide. An example of this is the discussion within sociologist Erving Goffman’s work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* and the theory of social action he presents on the basis of his “dramaturgical model.” Goffman uses this model to draw a distinction between the front and

back stage with the front stage representing the region where individuals seek to play the role dictated to them by social convention and the back stage being the region for engaging in the preparations needed to perform the activities on the front stage. The example commonly used to explain Goffman's theory is that of the job interview which involves meeting with the prospective employers (front stage) and the time spent in preparation for the interview (back stage). Goffman suggests that the back stage is also the place where an individual can "interrupt his performance for brief periods of relaxation"¹⁶⁰ and feel more like themselves. He makes this point by citing Simone de Beauvoir's description of women's attitudes towards men versus their attitude towards other women and trumpets her description as offering "a rather vivid picture of this backstage activity." In Beauvoir's account when women are interacting with other women:

What gives value to such relations among women is the truthfulness they imply. Confronting man woman is always play-acting: she lies when she accepts her status as the inessential other ... [These histrionics] require a constant tension: when with her husband, or with her lover, every woman is more or less conscious of the thought: "I am not being myself" ... With other women, a woman is behind the scenes; she is polishing her equipment but not in battle ... she likes this warm easy relaxed atmosphere ... For some women this warm and frivolous intimacy is dearer than the serious pomp of relations with men.¹⁶¹

In certain ways Goffman's account of the divide between the front and back stage (that he uses Beauvoir's description to illustrate) shows an affinity with the internal/external divide discussed by Eichmann and by Duch and the guards at S-21. To be "conscious of the thought 'I am not

being myself” suggests individuals experience a divide on the front stage between the way they act externally and their thoughts internally about what they “truly” believe. Another way of seeing this could be to suggest that the accounts by Eichmann and by Duch and the guards at S-21 do not mention the opportunity for individuals to be “themselves” in the presence of others and in Goffman’s terms these individuals have been left to fully internalize the back stage.

The lack of playfulness in the way Beauvoir describes “not being oneself” seems indicative of bad faith but at least conceivably there are contexts in which an individual can go along with something that they do not fully agree with and the consequences would be fairly innocuous from a moral standpoint: if someone chose to walk to the store with their friends even though they might prefer to jog the distance, for example. The moral implications of the situation discussed by Beauvoir also do not seem as dire as the circumstances associated with maintaining the posture of a divided self as a way to sustain an individual’s involvement in genocidal activities. An observation Goffman makes in another regard about the attitude of those in the front stage towards moral matters is however a bit more troubling than what he has to say about these issues when he is discussing Beauvoir. After Goffman suggests a division between moral and instrumental requirements, or duties performed that are ends in themselves and the “duties such as an employer demands of his employees” that are a means to an end, he then states that:

We find that these two kinds of demands, moral and instrumental, seem to affect in much the same way the individual who must answer to them, and that both moral and instrumental grounds or rationalization are put forth as justifications for most standards that must be maintained. Providing the standard is maintained by sanctions and by a sanctioner of some kind, it will often be of

small moment to the performer whether the standard is justified chiefly on instrumental grounds or moral ones, and whether he is asked to incorporate the standard.¹⁶²

This idea that it will “be of small moment to the performer whether the standard is justified chiefly on instrumental grounds or moral ones” seems to offer a fairly accurate description of the banal and thoughtless way Eichmann performs his duty in the service of the Fuhrer and the way that Duch and the guards at S-21 instrumentally perform their duty in the interests of survival. The passage also has a striking resemblance to Arendt’s observation that under the Third Reich morality was treated as a matter of convention and could be changed like “table manners”¹⁶³: “providing” it would seem “the standard is maintained by sanctions and by a sanctioner of some kind.”

A difficulty with applying Goffman’s characterization of the way morality is treated in the front stage to Eichmann and Duch’s views of moral concerns is that both Eichmann and Duch describe their participation in the Third Reich and the Khmer Rouge (respectively) as not always being a matter of them treating morality instrumentally. Eichmann claims that his initial decision to swear an oath to Hitler reflected his belief in the arguments made by the Nazi party about the injustice of the treaty of Versailles. He suggests when he learned of Hitler’s decision to exterminate the Jews that he “lost all joy in his work” – the same phrase (Arendt notes) he had used to describe a professional disappointment he had suffered while working as a vacuum cleaner salesman.¹⁶⁴ The joy that Eichmann allegedly would have experienced prior to Hitler’s decision to pursue the Final Solution came from his orchestrating the forced emigration of the Jews from Nazi territory and his reaction to both of these policies seems to demonstrate the thought-defying way in which Eichmann shows a complete inability to appreciate the suffering

experienced by others.

Eichmann's version of events might provoke debate over whether it reflects his thoughtlessness or his (poor) attempts to deliberately misrepresent his involvement in the Third Reich. This would mean debating whether to believe if he personally agreed with the Nazi movement but then became disillusioned with this movement and lost his joy in the work he performed for it as time went on *or* that he secretly agreed with its aims all along despite his statements to the contrary. Whether or not he is to be believed Eichmann's contention – that his level of agreement with the policies of the Third Reich changed throughout the different “periods” of his involvement in this movement but that his participation in this movement was sustained by the compulsion he felt morally to fulfill his duty to the Fuhrer – his understanding presents the possibility of a very troubling relation to morality. This is the suggestion that Eichmann's thoughtless relation to morality was provoked not by him treating his involvement in the Third Reich instrumentally but that his moral commitment to the Third Reich is what provoked him to treat his activities thoughtlessly. He viewed the oath he had made to Hitler as a final decision which he believed did not permit him to further reflect upon and develop his understanding of the actions he should pursue in different circumstances.

Duch's account of his involvement in the Khmer Rouge seems to fit more closely with Goffman's description of moral demands being treated instrumentally in the front stage. He describes his initial involvement in this movement as being inspired by his conviction and sincere belief in communism and considered its doctrines to offer the best solution to the troubles and hardships experienced by the Cambodian people. When he grew disillusioned with the movement (as discussed above) his contention is that he continued to perform his duties not out of a sense of a moral obligation to fulfill his oath but in the interests of survival. His way of

understanding the concern for survival was not given further thought nor developed beyond an unquestioned sense that life was preferable to death under the circumstances he faced.

The Universal Understood through the Particular and the Particular Understood through the Universal

An implicit concern throughout this discussion of the banality of evil and the genocide in Cambodia has been the old philosophical problem of understanding the relationship between the universal and the particular. A challenge for comparing different instances of genocide has been to represent genocide and the (universal) content to which its subject matter refers and the content of each (particular) case of genocide in a way that gives both of these considerations their due. A concern for maintaining this balance between the universal and particular has been articulated by Anne Applebaum in her work on the Gulag prison system:

Every one of the twentieth-century's mass tragedies was unique: the Gulag, the Holocaust, the Armenian massacre, the Nanking massacre, the Cultural Revolution, the Cambodian revolution, the Bosnia wars among others. Every one of these events had different historical, philosophical, and cultural origins, every one arose in particular local circumstances that will never be repeated ... This book was not written "so that it will never happen again" as the cliché would have it. This book was written because it will almost certainly happen again ... We need to know why – and each story, each memoir, each document in the history of the Gulag is a piece of the puzzle, a part of the explanation. Without them, we will wake up one day and realize that we do not know who we are.¹⁶⁵

Applebaum makes these comments in her chapter on “Memory” as part of her argument about the importance of remembering the impact of past incidents of genocide upon the current geopolitical landscape. She is making the case that any advantage gained from the practice of genocide cannot be considered an acceptable part of the regular flow of activities within the conduct of realpolitik or else “we become unrecognizable.” Her explanation implicitly incorporates an understanding of the universal and the particular that suggests that each informs the other and that the way to learn more about why genocide occurs is by investigating the set of circumstances in which it has taken place, while more can be known about how to respond in the global arena to a particular set of circumstances if what it involves can be classified as genocide.

Applebaum’s suggestion that further documentation provides more “pieces to the puzzle” for understanding what constitutes genocide seems to be in line with Dunlop’s explanation of what motivated his investigation of Cambodia. His focus is on developing an appreciation of its events by accumulating data that is historically and culturally relevant and he seems to envision that Duch’s testimony (once he is brought into custody) along with the photographs taken by the Khmer Rouge at S-21 are the type of documents that allow for “the facts to speak for themselves.” Dunlop acknowledges that his efforts to demonstrate that the events in Cambodia represent genocide ends in disappointment and his reaction seems to suggest the difficulty is associated not with an inability to acquire sufficient data but with understanding the meaning of these events through documentation alone. His response to the lack of interest in pursuing justice in relation to a genocide well-documented by the data that has been accumulated and his comment “what does this say about us?” suggest that *something* about the activity of genocide is significant to being human and that this significance is part of what makes genocide an important topic to consider.

Through a consideration of Dunlop's involvement in Duch's case in which he implies that justice is a concern of universal significance to being human, the analysis examines Arendt's coverage of the Eichmann trial for its focus on the importance in a legal setting of considering the relevance of the faculty of human thought for appreciating Eichmann's case. The argument considers the possibility of interpreting her observations about Eichmann's thoughtlessness or inability to engage in the activity of thinking as being representative of a pattern of behaviour that could be identified empirically in different instances of genocide. Eichmann and Duch's appearances at trial were then compared on several points that could potentially support this pattern but the more pertinent question in the examination was considered to be the implications of suggesting that thoughtlessness is prevalent in cases of genocide, especially with respect to forming a response to these situations where it is prevalent. These considerations were taken up by the argument in its discussion of the ex-S-21 inmate Van Nath and his interrogation of the guards who had served in the prison. In this exchange Nath challenges the guards' assertion that they had no other choice than to follow orders by stressing the importance of not losing the ability "to think as human beings," and that accepting their explanation would mean the end of "our world, of justice, of human conscience." The remaining part of this chapter will focus on developing an understanding of this concern for what is just that is cited in different ways by Dunlop and Nath and consider in what way an appeal to a universal notion of justice is relevant to consider in a discussion of the particular case of genocide committed in Cambodia. Through this discussion the analysis will work out its understanding of the relation between the universal and the particular and the significance that a consideration of each one has for the other.

One place to begin a discussion of the relation between the universal and particular is to consider the way this notion is understood when it involves sustaining a thoughtless response

towards the practice of genocide. As previously discussed, Eichmann describes his moral commitment to a universally binding duty that is essential for him to perform and that permits him to disregard thinking about the particular circumstances he is dealing with in different situations. Duch also describes having a sense of duty in his initial commitment to the Khmer Rouge and mentions that his indoctrination included being told to learn to be indifferent to the suffering of the party's enemies that he would have tortured and killed.¹⁶⁶ When he grew disillusioned with the movement Duch took a view similar to the one expressed by the guards interviewed in Pahn's film. He described being in circumstances that were beyond his control and left him with no other option than to think about the "essential" thing of doing whatever he needed to do to survive.

This idea of disregarding the particular for the sake of the universal (Eichmann and his duty) or disregarding the universal for the sake of the particular (Duch and his focus on his day-to-day survival) is an understanding that could be addressed by referring to a description Arendt offers of the faculty of judgment. She notes that judging "is the faculty to judge *particulars* without subsuming them under those general rules that can be taught and learned until they grow into habits that can be replaced by other habits or rules"¹⁶⁷ which would seem to challenge the idea of blind obedience to duty. This emphasis on particularity does not exclude judgments from being reliant upon universal notions to make their assessments, which Arendt makes clear in distinguishing judging from thinking:

The faculty of judging particulars (as Kant discovered), the ability to say, "this is wrong," "this is beautiful," etc., is not the same as thinking. Thinking deals with invisibles, with representations of things that are absent; judging always concerns particulars and

things that are close at hand.¹⁶⁸

Identifying a particular case as “wrong” or “beautiful” implies having some understanding of what is “just” or what is “beauty” even if the understanding of these notions is only partially worked out (or only ever could be).

Arendt also argues that particular examples can contribute to an understanding of the universal notions which they exemplify as she observes that: “Most political virtues and vices are thought of in terms of exemplary individuals: Achilles for courage, Solon for insight (wisdom) etc.”¹⁶⁹ This would seem to imply that something could be learned about what the notion of justice means by examining its applicability to Eichmann’s case. One way to appreciate how this applicability has been shown is to consider the judgment that Arendt imagines rendering on behalf of the judges against Eichmann. As part of her explanation she addresses the “banality” of Eichmann’s activities – his claim that he unwillingly took part in the Final Solution – and the difficulty this claim poses for the Western legal tradition which makes its determination of criminality on the basis of intent. She argues that Eichmann’s circumstances are ones that require breaking precedence in a legal system also based upon legal precedence and endorses the idea of finding Eichmann guilty on the basis of the scale of his crimes regardless of his intentions towards them.

Arendt also contends that if the reasons for the judges’ decision to find Eichmann guilty and be executed were explained in a way that included placing more of an emphasis on the acts he committed than upon his intentions, “the justice of what was done in Jerusalem would have emerged to be seen by all.”¹⁷⁰ She adds this emphasis upon acts over intentions when addressing Eichmann in the voice of the judges, and stating 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 thing. 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 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 share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang.¹⁷¹

Arendt undercuts the argument of “just obeying orders” by equating obedience of a policy with actively choosing to support it and suggests that whatever Eichmann’s intentions may have been his support for a policy of mass murder is reason enough for him to be executed. What makes this policy an executable offense seems to parallel the sentiments expressed in her description of the non-participants in the Final Solution. Her suggestion (discussed in the previous chapter) was that these individuals could not live with themselves if they had to live with a self who was a murderer or destroys the notion of the self through a willingness to destroy other selves. This understanding could be thought of as equivalent to the idea in the political arena that members of the human race cannot share the earth with others if this means sharing it with those who are willing to destroy the notion of a human race through a willingness to destroy the other groups who make up this race.

In light of what has been discussed in connection with the examples involving Dunlop and Nath, Arendt’s suggestion that “no one, that is, *no member of the human race*” would tolerate Eichmann’s presence is for this analysis the most significant part of what is stated in this

passage. One way to think of the distinction she is making is that it recognizes that a concern for what being human means can seem irrelevant in response to situations where the banal acceptance of an order to commit mass murder becomes the prevailing understanding. The possibility to pursue an understanding of what is “human” that involves notions that are universally recognized is shown through Dunlop’s example and the concern he has for justice when he perceives that this notion is being ignored, or Nath’s example of asking questions that emphasize the importance of notions like humanity, justice and our world when these notions have been given little to no consideration or Arendt’s example of talking about the importance of maintaining a focus on the notion of justice in a trial where this notion can come in and out of focus. These examples have developed an understanding of justice for this analysis that recognizes the importance of maintaining a sense of concern for what is just in response to situations involving genocide. They have also shown that a concern for what justice involves is neither exclusive to nor excluded from the formal legal process and this realization suggests that a focus on survival in response to what has occurred in Cambodia without concern for what is transpiring with the formal legal process – if indeed this is the primary concern of most Cambodians as Dunlop suggests – is possible to consider as a just response to the conditions being encountered. What would be required to appreciate the “justness” of those who respond in this way would be an examination on a case-by-case basis of what can be learned about justice from each of them. Nath’s questioning of the guards even suggests that a concern for what is just outside of a court setting was not only possible but the needed response for those in their position who were asked to routinely engage in killing and torture. Finally, the discussion of justice has been an example for this analysis to develop its understanding of the relation between the universal and particular. The understanding that a sense of a universal concept is worked out

through the particular cases to which it is applied and that (conversely) the particular can be understood through reference to universals has been shown by the understanding of the notion of justice that has been developed by discussing the examples of Dunlop, Nath and Arendt's investigations of genocidal situations, and by the way in which an understanding of their discussions of genocide have been developed through reference to the notion of justice.

Chapter 4

The Order of Evil(s)

*So perhaps we shall not miss so very much after all, while Josephine, for her part, delivered from earthly afflictions ... will happily lose herself in the countless throng of the heroes of our people, and soon, since we pursue no history, be accorded the heightened relief of being forgotten along with all her brethren.*¹⁷²

– Franz Kafka, “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk”

Introduction

The discussion in the previous chapters of the applicability of the banality of evil to the cases of Rwanda and Cambodia developed a sense of the importance of considering the “good” of an activity as well as a concern for understanding the meaning of notions thought to be of universal significance. The analysis also sought to demonstrate that an understanding of these universal notions is formed by considering the particular cases to which they are applied. This demonstration was pursued by showing that its understanding of what a concern for justice means in relation to the Cambodian genocide was not something known to the analysis in advance but worked out over the course of its investigation of this case. A reoccurring issue throughout this discussion has been to consider the claim of those who suggest they supported the practice of genocide in spite of a personal distaste for the activities involved in its performance. Several versions of this claim have been examined including the suggestions about “just following orders,” the “internal immigrant,” Eichmann’s concern for duty, the idea of the front and back stage in Goffman’s work and the focus on survival described by Duch and the former guards at S-21 that were interviewed in Rithy Panh’s film.

The focus in this chapter on investigating a possible connection between bureaucracy and banal forms of evil will seek to develop an understanding of the way in which social order is constituted such that it sustains and is sustained by a view that considers involvement in genocidal practice to be permitted by the separation of private and public concerns. To begin addressing these considerations the first part of the chapter will focus on the way the problem of not thinking is addressed by Arendt prior to her discussion of this issue in her coverage of the Eichmann trial. In perhaps the most well-known of these earlier writings, *The Human Condition*, she indicates that its focus involves the “thoughtlessness” that plagues our times and which she seeks to respond to by “thinking what we are doing” and examining the way human activity has been understood throughout the Western tradition. A main concern for Arendt in her review of this tradition is the extent to which passivity has been regarded as central to the performance of human activity. Her argument suggests that as passivity has crept into the understanding of human activity it has discouraged concern for what transpires in its affairs, including an interest in discussing either the “good” or “evil” that is done in the public arena. In this situation where matters of “good” and “evil” are essentially “nobody’s business” evil goes unchecked and to better appreciate the impact this can have Arendt devotes part of her discussion to considering the notion of evil. Her understanding of this notion seems to evolve over the course of her writings but ultimately Arendt appears to suggest that banal, criminal and radical forms of evil can all be identified as being a part of the Third Reich’s efforts to carry out the Final Solution.

For the analysis in this chapter and its interest in social order Arendt’s observations suggest a problem to develop concerning the way in which a society can possibly be ordered such that different forms of evil can not only exist together but are compatible with one another in working towards the same ultimate aim of carrying out genocide. What will be suggested in

the discussion is that banal, radical and criminal forms of evil each involve a sense of “banality” through their acceptance of the understanding that what is allowable in public is a constraint upon what is believed privately. The argument then discusses the organized attempt to instill order in society by engaging in an examination of bureaucratic administration as its case to work out an understanding of the extent to which social order is possible for society to impose upon its members. This investigation begins its discussion with a consideration of Weber’s work and its well-known arguments about the “iron cage,” which is an understanding that is seen as comparable to Arendt’s early arguments about ideology and its aim to instill a sense of total domination in the way that society is organized by its governing powers. This view that stresses the potential for total dominance will then be critiqued with reference to a passage from the work of the sociologist Georg Simmel in which he suggests that the “variable requirements of practical social life” typically “clash” with the demands of bureaucratic organization and frustrate its attempts at imposing order.

The final part of the chapter considers the understanding of social order that has been developed through the discussion of bureaucracy and reflects upon the way in which this order is related to the requirements of practical social life that are generated by everyday concerns. This focus sets up the discussion in the concluding chapter of this writing upon the work of Harold Garfinkel and his concern with the sense-making practices of everyday members. A brief note is made of the interlocutors who will be introduced in the discussion of Garfinkel’s work – Plato, Latour and the collaborative writings of Alan Blum and Peter McHugh – which will be incorporated as part of the discussion of Garfinkel’s use of breaching experiments. Garfinkel refers to these experiments as “aid to a sluggish imagination” and with a lack of imagination being noted as part of Arendt’s criticism of Eichmann the work of each of the interlocutors

mentioned are discussed in relation to considering in what way an imaginative understanding of everyday sense-making practices might contribute to an appreciation of what is included and excluded by such practices.

The Desk Murder: Evil as Ideology Versus Evil as Thoughtlessness

Arendt's critique of modernity in *The Human Condition* and its discussion of the dangers of the bureaucratic "rule of nobody" might seem to provide her with a ready-made explanation to account for an Eichmann-like figure emerging within the Third Reich. Although this critique makes no direct references to Nazism and only mentions the word "totalitarianism" in passing on two occasions her close paraphrasing of arguments previously made in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* suggest this subject area was influential in her writing of *The Human Condition*. The case for meshing these arguments with her report on the Jerusalem trial is, however, not entirely clear-cut. In one of the passages where totalitarianism is referenced in *The Human Condition* Arendt endorses the position she takes in her earlier work about the tremendous if not near inescapable impact that ideology has upon those held under its sway. This view is hard to align with her findings from the Eichmann trial considering her remark after covering these proceedings that she felt she had previously overestimated the importance of ideology upon its followers.¹⁷³ But Arendt's stated support in *The Human Condition* for the idea that ideology becomes practically all-encompassing in a totalitarian form of government is quite literally marginal to the main argument of this work and suggests the core concerns of her argument could still be relevant to her discussion of the banality of evil even with her changing appraisal of the importance of ideology.

The decision not to connect her arguments in *The Human Condition* with her observations from the Eichmann trial suggests that either Arendt failed to appreciate the

relevance of her critique of modernity to the banality of evil or that this critique does not adequately account for the phenomenon she observed in Jerusalem. Some indication of the way Arendt sees this matter is suggested by her analysis of the mental faculties of thinking, willing and judging in *The Life of The Mind*. In the introduction to the volume on *Thinking*, Arendt describes her interest in examining the connection between the activity of thinking and the evil¹⁷⁴ that was displayed by Eichmann during his appearance at trial. The other focal point in this introduction is the closely related but separate issue of analyzing the activity of thinking in and of itself which was an issue she had touched upon but left out discussing at length in *The Human Condition*. The way she frames this discussion suggests that *The Life of the Mind* builds upon and continues her critique of modernity in *The Human Condition* and a quick review of its arguments will help to understand the response she offers to the banality of evil in this later work.

The *Vita Activa* from the Perspective of Eternity

Arendt's main concern in *The Human Condition* is to assess the focus of human activity at different stages of Western history. She argues that modernity represents the worst era in this history and that the worst of modernity is represented by the activity that promotes the development of totalitarianism. Her argument has a Heideggerian sensibility to it not only in its pessimistic outlook towards modernity but also in its suggestion that modernity's troubles are associated with a "forgetfulness" on the part of human beings towards what is most important to them. In her explanation this forgetting is in relation to human activity rather than the Heideggerian emphasis upon a neglect of matters that are essential to Being. She pays particular attention to the way a focus on the labouring activity has excluded a concern for both work and action although without this exclusion ever being total or complete. Arendt cites the invention of

the telescope by Galileo as an act of fabrication (which is the hallmark of work) that is a key development for ushering in the modern age and she also makes the general observation that modern scientists “have turned out to be the only ones left who still know how to act and how to act in concert.”¹⁷⁵ She traces the endurance of the scientific community as a community back to the legacy of the Royal Society, which insisted that its members avoid outside influence upon the work they carried out as a group. This independence gave an integrity to this community that granted its members the capacity to perform action that “started something new”¹⁷⁶ in the world as demonstrated in the initiative scientists have shown in devising an understanding of the “unearthly” worlds shown by the telescope and the microscope. The trouble with these activities as far as their political significance is concerned is that this “action of the scientists, since it acts into the natural world from the standpoint of the universe and not into the web of human relationships, lacks the revelatory character of action as well as the ability to produce stories and become historical, which together form the very source from which meaningfulness springs and illuminates human experience.”¹⁷⁷

This view of the world from “the standpoint of the universe” is a key notion for the position Arendt’s argument takes in analyzing the way human activity was appraised and understood in Antiquity. This standpoint originated from a view of the world suggested by contemplation and was used as the standard for assessing the merits of all other forms of human activity. Arendt observes that the “elevation” of contemplation to the position of not only the highest of human activities but an experience that all other human activity is to be measured against has been instrumental for the traditional understanding of human activity that (allegedly) separates the *vita activa* from the *vita contemplativa*, or thought from action.¹⁷⁸ This separation is a move that has lumped together and made indistinguishable to traditional understanding the

activities of labour, work and action. As a consequence the different ways of achieving permanence through each of these activities – through procreation, the creation of enduring objects and the performance of immortal acts – were considered to be merely fleeting attempts in comparison to the eternal objects fixated upon in the act of contemplation that are everlasting and true. Arendt represents the *vita contemplativa* as an “Archimedean point” used to survey and appraise human activity but this position “from up high” has made the objects “below” seem indistinguishable from one another even though they are all within its range of vision.

The confusion with the craftsman’s distinct experience of contemplation that takes place as part of their act of making objects in the world is one case that shows the misunderstanding involved in using the *vita contemplativa* to comprehend the other activities that transpire within the *vita activa*. The craftsman works from an ideal model that they gaze upon in their mind and from the understanding of the tradition of thought the craftsman’s image has been viewed as a step towards achieving the experience of contemplative wonder that is typical of philosophical contemplation. In glimpsing at this model all that is left for the craftsman to do (or not to do) is to “let his arms drop” instead of working to fashion an object after their ideal image but Arendt contends that “contemplation, in this respect, is quite unlike the enraptured state of wonder with which man responds to the miracle of being.”¹⁷⁹ In practice the idea which the craftsman works from is inseparable from the making of the object for which it serves as a model. This point is illustrated by the common notion of an idea being “a source of artistic inspiration,” which would be odd to speak of if this idea inspired an artist to create a poem or a painting without also inspiring them to do the work of making the object. Arendt suggests that the philosopher’s contemplation of the eternal is actually being misunderstood when conflated with artistic contemplation and argues that “the motionlessness which in the state of speechless wonder is no

more than an incidental, unintended result of absorption, becomes now the condition and hence the outstanding characteristic of the *vita contemplativa*.¹⁸⁰ Essentializing the stillness of this experience is also supportive of the view that the movement involved in the conduct of human worldly affairs is unnecessary and to be avoided.

Arendt argues that eventually this Archimedean point would turn back on itself¹⁸¹ and the eternal objects perceived in the state of contemplation come to be viewed as external to the contemplator and (by virtue of its own understanding) were regarded as being part of the external world whose affairs were to be avoided. What would have a tremendous impact on modernity once the experience of contemplation was emptied of its contents and eventually jettisoned from the “*vita activa* itself and hence [from] the range of ordinary human experience”¹⁸² is that the disdain for worldly affairs still remained as a constitutive element of human understanding. The notion of Cartesian doubt is reflective of this development in its considering all objects external to human consciousness to be unreliable as a source of knowledge. It then directed its focus upon explaining scientifically subjects whose material is authored through human activity.¹⁸³ In relation to the world of human affairs this study includes human history explained not in terms of unpredictable acts of human volition but by the unfolding process of predictable historical laws; in the natural world this concerns a study of natural phenomena once they have been constrained by means of human intervention. This intervention involves the use of tools created by human hands such as the telescope and/or by the use of the controls imposed by scientific forms of experimentation.

Passivity and “Thinking What We Are Doing”

What is perhaps surprising about Arendt’s response to the way the perspective suggested by the Archimedean point tumbles through Western history and (alongside other developments)

eventually lands itself into the difficulties presented by modernity is that to work through these difficulties she turns to the activity of thinking. In the *Prologue of The Human Condition* Arendt lays out the aims of her work using terms that are very familiar to her later discussion of the banality of evil in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*:

What I propose in the following is a reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears. This, obviously, is a matter of thought, and thoughtlessness – the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of “truths” which have become trivial and empty – seems to me among the outstanding characteristics of our time. What I propose to do is very simple: it is nothing more than to think what we are doing.¹⁸⁴

Arendt makes the argument for distinguishing between thinking and contemplation and one way she explains the difference between the two is by contrasting the passive state in which objects of contemplation are perceived and the activity of thinking, arguing that “if no other test but the experience of sheer activity were to be applied to the various activities within the *vita activa*, it might well be that thinking as such might surpass them all.”¹⁸⁵ She emphasizes this point in the closing lines of *The Human Condition* by quoting the Roman philosopher Cato’s paradoxical description of the two-in-one or self-dialogue that is involved in the activity of thinking: “Never is he more active than when he does nothing, never is he less alone than when he is by himself.”¹⁸⁶

Arendt considers thinking to be an endangered activity in the modern age where the model for human conduct is statistical regularity and compliance with societal norms. The

contrast between this age which “may end in the deadliest, most sterile passivity history has ever known”¹⁸⁷ and the highly active state of thinking suggests that her criteria for evaluating human activity is the level of activity involved in its performance or the degree to which an activity is active or passive. Of labour, work and action she considers labour to be the most passive activity in that its engagement with the world occurs through meeting the demands of biological existence. Troublingly, the passivity described at the end of the modern age becomes even more extreme than this with technological advancement eliminating the need to perform labouring tasks. This has created a “society of jobholders” whose activities in a sense fall outside of the *vita activa* by lacking even the labouring activity’s minimal engagement with the world and the initiative that it requires for individuals to fulfill the necessities of life. This state of affairs is one that Arendt describes in very gloomy terms:

Laboring is too lofty, too ambitious a word for what we are doing, or think we are doing, in the world we have come to live in. The last stage of the laboring society, the society of jobholders, demands of its members a sheer automatic functioning, as though individual life had actually been submerged in the over-all life process of the species and the only active decision still required of the individual were to let go, so to speak, to abandon his individuality, the still individually sensed pain and trouble of living, and acquiesce in a dazed, “tranquilized,” functional type of behavior.¹⁸⁸

Modernity in this “last stage” takes the view that all of human existence is determined by the labouring activity, but with the need to actually perform labour no longer a concern in the

jobholding society, the focus of activity is directed towards consumption. Human existence then lacks any sense of permanence as the objects of consumption simply vanish after making their appearance in the world without leaving a humanly recognizable trace.¹⁸⁹ The understanding that the demands of the labouring activity unavoidably determine all of human existence also adds the difficulty of making human activity unrecognizable to its own authors as this understanding and its concern with meeting the needs for survival that are predetermined removes the sense of there being any choice about the form human activity will take in its performance.

The Umpire

These concerns with the passivity of the modern age emerge again in Arendt's volume on *Thinking in The Life of the Mind* as part of her discussion of Kafka's short parable *HE*. This parable depicts the struggle of the unknown figure "He" and is used by Arendt as a sketch of the way in which the activity of thinking transpires. "He's" struggle is with two equal and opposing forces, one that pushes him ahead and one that pushes him from behind, and each support "He" in his fight against the other force. The "dream" of He, Kafka explains, is that "he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire of his antagonists in their fight with each other."¹⁹⁰ Arendt interprets the parable as a description of the way human beings insert themselves into the eternal flow of time and break it up into the tenses of past, present and future.¹⁹¹ She speaks approvingly of Kafka's representation of the way this takes place noting that "He" (who she notes is not an anonymous "somebody") fights for his position in time and is not "just a passive object that is inserted into the stream to be tossed about by its waves that go sweeping over his head"¹⁹² but deflects the course of time in a new direction. Arendt also offers a criticism of Kafka's account that is reminiscent of her concerns about the Archimedean point in *The Human Condition* as she is weary of the idea that

“by jumping out of the fighting line ‘He’ jumps out of the world altogether.”¹⁹³ She describes the position of the umpire to be more like “the quiet in the center of a storm which, though totally unlike the storm, still belongs to it.”¹⁹⁴

This position in the centre is the place of thinking in time at the present moment “now” that has as its object of concern the meaning of the events from the past behind it and the future ahead of it, its thoughts being *composed* of these events but without being *determined* by them in their course. The duration of this moment “now” lasts only as long as the thinking activity continues: otherwise time continues to pass along unbroken without a concern for what it means. Of note, Arendt recognizes throughout her discussion of thinking a fundamental indeterminacy that distinguishes it from other productive activities, including even mental ones like reasoning, which aims at arriving at truth. Thinking’s examination of the “never ending affairs of human existence” takes place without ever “arriving at a final solution to their riddles but ready with ever-new answers to the question of what it all may be about.”¹⁹⁵ Although Arendt does not seem to use the phrase “final solution” with any intended irony, the understanding that the meaning of events can be rethought provides a clear contrast to the fatalistic outlook of totalitarian movements and the Nazis’ interest in “*eliminating* the Jewish problem,” as well as Eichmann’s stated refusal to disobey a *Führerbefehl* once he had sworn his oath. The focus on meaning also reflects the importance of speech throughout Arendt’s discussion of human activity, including her remarks in *The Human Condition* about the inability of scientists to speak about the significance of their acting in the world. She attributes this inability to their reliance upon the use of mathematics, which could be thought of as the language of the Archimedean point. Its propositions such as notions like non-Euclidean forms of geometry or even the use of more basic concepts like that of infinity cannot be translated back into terms that are relatable to human

experience. The inability to speak also figures prominently in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in Arendt's observations about Eichmann's heavy reliance on the use of cliché. She considers his use of these meaningless phrases to reflect his thoughtless lack of concern for the significance of his actions.

Judgment and Taste

If thoughtlessness refers to an inability to think of the meaning of things in new ways, the question might be asked about whether this inability also excludes the possibility of *doing* something new. The newness of action seems relevant in accounting for the phenomenon of Nazism considering the obvious impact that WWII had in changing the course of the twentieth century. The central involvement of the Nazi movement in events of historical significance might be seen as presenting a challenge for Arendt's discussion of the faculty of the will, whose greatness she describes in terms of its ability to start something new through the performance of novel deeds.¹⁹⁶ Arendt does however make an important distinction between great and monstrous deeds in her account of the will's capacities¹⁹⁷ and one way to appreciate this account of this faculty is through a comparison to her explanation of thinking. Much in the way that thinking has the ability to begin a train of thought that brings new meaning to events the will has the capacity to begin a new chain of events that extends into the future in unpredictable ways.

The understanding that thinking in the sense of the ability to tell right from wrong is a capacity that Arendt contends is to be demanded of every person of sound mind (as discussed in the previous chapter) also has a certain parallel in her account of the will. Its capacity for freedom is not an acquired power or talent possessed by a select few but is unavoidable for every person who by virtue of being born literally gives birth to a new series of events that are uniquely their own. Individuals are, however, typically reluctant to accept their capacity for freedom. The sense of responsibility this imposes is felt to be especially burdensome in relation to starting a

chain of events whose consequences unfold in an unpredictable way. This implies that individuals are responsible for the occurrence of future events when they cannot possibly foresee the way in which these events will transpire. A resource for dealing with the uneasiness experienced towards the will's capacity for freedom is "another mental faculty, the faculty of Judgment, an analysis of which at least may tell us what is involved in our pleasures and displeasures."¹⁹⁸ Judgment offers a way to deal with the uncertainty of events by presenting the opportunity in reflection to evaluate the merits of a course of action that was, is or is to be willed. This would seem to imply that independent of their degree of impact upon human history the deeds performed by the Nazis could be evaluated on the basis of a judgment about whether they are to be considered great or monstrous. Arendt's appeal to judgment as a way to respond to the unforeseen consequences of willing to do something new is interesting to compare to her discussion of action and the way in which through its own capacity for promise-making and forgiveness this faculty can deal with the uncertainty generated by its ability to start something new. Her response to what Eichmann had done during the Final Solution involved rejecting the idea of forgiveness since in her view Eichmann lacked the thoughtfulness required to show himself as a person and "in granting pardon, it is the person and not the crime that is forgiven; in rootless evil there is no person left to forgive."¹⁹⁹

A difficulty with investigating Arendt's discussion of judgment is that she had just begun writing her volume on this faculty shortly before her death and it remains unfinished, with only an epigraph from Cato having been written into her typewriter. Nevertheless, one important component of her account of this faculty is its association with the sense of taste. As mentioned in the previous chapter she references the Kantian idea about the importance of examples for making judgments, particularly ones that stand out and "exemplify" the notion under

consideration. Arendt mentions Achilles as an example of courage to illustrate the way an example “remains a particular which in its very particularity reveals the generality which otherwise could not be defined.”²⁰⁰ She also describes taste operating negatively by virtue of its capacity to provoke disgust either towards objects considered aesthetically unpleasing or towards activities considered morally repugnant. One instance where distaste could be observed in relation to the activities of those who carried out the Final Solution is Himmler’s reaction during his visit to the small city of Poznań, Poland in which he became physically sick after witnessing the shooting of Jews. Himmler then felt compelled to make his infamous speech to boost the morale of the soldiers serving in the killing squads and overcome the distaste they might be feeling towards their activities by praising them for both their ability to “endure” the act of killing while remaining “decent” and for their part in “a glorious chapter” of history “that has not and will not be spoken of.”²⁰¹ The well-known Arendt scholar Elisabeth Young-Bruehl also recognizes Arendt referencing her understanding of judgment in her analysis of Eichmann’s testimony by noting that he too had been disgusted after witnessing the killing of Jews with his own eyes. Young-Bruehl notes Eichmann’s statement that a key influence upon his decision to be involved in the Final Solution was that “no examples in his environment, no communicated judgment of others, stood in his way”²⁰² since “he could see no one, no one at all, who actively was against the Final Solution.”²⁰³

The instances involving Himmler and Eichmann suggest that judgment was a relevant consideration for the activities they each engaged in during the Final Solution but that their assessments about what they judged to be right or wrong were simply cast aside and ignored. Their willingness to go along with what disgusted them as well as Eichmann’s lack of imagination in not thinking to look to other examples of how to act besides those which he saw

immediately around him could certainly be criticized by others (or themselves) afterwards for the judgments they chose to make in these circumstances. The importance of assessing the merits of what others had done during Nazi rule is something that Arendt considers in need of stressing after witnessing the backlash against her coverage of the Eichmann trial for the way she is “judging others.” This suggests developing an understanding that is receptive to the possibility of making these sorts of judgments after the fact and considers making them to be more than a futile exercise while also recognizing that judgment – even when its sensibilities are present within an individual – offers no guarantee of acting as a deterrent against participating in atrocities in either the case of ourselves or others. Arendt recognizes this to be so in stating that “since this question of judging without being present is usually coupled with the accusation of arrogance, who has ever maintained that by judging a wrong I presuppose that I myself would be incapable of committing it?”²⁰⁴ Her conclusion is not to suggest a form of moral relativism of “anything goes,” but in response to the possibility that each one of us could engage in wrongdoing, focuses on developing a clearer understanding of what judgment involves as a way in which to avoid its pitfalls.

Genocidal Deterrence: The Human Conscience and Thinking

A central concern of Arendt’s discussion of the connection between thoughtlessness and evil is identifying the forms of deterrence that prevented individuals from supporting the Third Reich. The interest in examining this connection that she developed after covering the Eichmann trial involves her considering the possibility of thinking becoming an active form of deterrence against genocidal practices. This may seem counterintuitive on account of her characterization of thinking as an unproductive activity that appears to do nothing.²⁰⁵ A key distinction she makes in her explanation of thinking is between the idea of a conscience that is considered to be an

internalization of laws (moral and legal), which impose an ever-present set of social norms each of us feels commanded to conform to, and the notion of a two-in-one or self-dialogue that we have with ourselves in thinking that alerts me about what we cannot do. Arendt seems to take a Kantian view of the notion of having a conscience that operates as a stand-in for the symbolic order by making an argument that implies obeying what the conscience demands is representative of an instance of moral hegemony. The dictates of the human conscience are understood to be externally imposed upon an individual and they will remain susceptible to the moral weakness of disobeying its dictates no matter how strong the pressure to conform to the expectations of society is exerted upon them by their conscience.

After her coverage of the Eichmann trial Arendt's focus in moral matters is directed more upon the dangers that can be associated with obeying the expectations of society. Initially, her explanation of the human conscience seems to stress the importance of maintaining a sense of moral integrity to avoid misdeeds, even if she is suggesting that this integrity is susceptible to being corrupted by other sources of influence. But this view seems at odds with her characterization of morality as "table manners," which she offers in critique of the way that under Nazi rule the vast majority of individuals readily exchanged one set of "customs" (e.g. thou shalt not kill) for another (thou shalt kill) to suit the times. As part of this critique Arendt observes that it is the members of "respectable society" or those who were the most greatly attached to the previous order who also were the most willing to accept the dictates of a new order.²⁰⁶ This suggests that individuals went along with and supported the Nazi regime not as a matter of the moral weakness of lacking a commitment to what their conscience demands be done to conform to the expectation of society, but from a too-willing adherence to the external pressure to obey what the "conscience" commands. The apparent incongruence of these

explanations could perhaps be reconciled by recognizing that the difficulty in both the case of the moral weakness of disobeying the dictates of conscience and the need for “respectable society” to stay attached to the expectations of society is reflective of moral hegemony and points to the importance of an individual’s sense of right and wrong being self-legislated.

The way in which Arendt addresses the issue of deterrence in relation to the faculty of thinking is by postulating that “if there is anything in thinking that can prevent men from doing evil, it must be some property inherent in the activity itself, regardless of its objects,”²⁰⁷ meaning that thinking can prevent evil even if its object of concern is not necessarily morality. She describes this property by choosing Socrates as an example of an individual who engages in thinking and alludes to his description of a “friend” that awaits him at home and will expect an account of any thoughts he leaves unexamined.²⁰⁸ This is a reference to the two-in-one or the dialogue we can conduct with ourselves that warns us against doing anything that would prevent us from still being ourselves. For instance, if I hold to the idea that murder is not something that people should do but contradict myself by committing murder, then I would no longer be *a* self but a person at war with myself who is composed of different, conflicting notions of the self. The two-in-one informs individuals about not doing what would go against the way they are “self-constituted” and does so in a way that is analogous to the idea that a square cannot be round and still be constituted as a square, with an important difference being that the acts identified in thinking as problematic are not recognized as such through some type of logical necessity. In Arendt’s account thinking has a “liberating” effect on individuals by releasing them from feeling as though they have no other choice than to obey the expectations of society. This opens them up to the possibility of making judgments about the particular set of circumstances they face in a way that reflects what they decide for themselves as unique individuals.

Good and Evil in the Public Realm: Radical Evil and Evil as the Preoccupation of Respectable Society

Arendt's earlier discussion of the two-in-one that appears in the concluding remarks to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* differs in its account of thinking by taking as its target her concerns with ideology and the sense of inevitability to events suggested by its worldview. She argues that the contention of an ideological worldview that preordained categories such as class or race dictate with "iron-clad necessity" the way history unfolds is an understanding that can be combated by thinking and the capacity of this faculty to begin something new. *The Life of The Mind* builds upon this earlier account of thinking in the *Origins* by adding to its capacity for newness a concern with the meaning of irresolvable questions and a concern with refusing to allow the self to commit acts that go against the way the self is constituted. The discussion of meaning and the self reflects a shift in the target of Arendt's focus away from the issues associated with ideology and towards those brought to her attention by the banality of evil.

The difference between these two targets can be gleaned from her brief allusion in *The Human Condition* to the notion of evil, which is mentioned as part of her discussion of the loss of the public realm in the modern age. A presupposition of this discussion is that each of the activities within the *vita activa* is tied to a location. The loss of the public realm is particularly devastating to action as this activity requires others or a "public" to be performed just as the world of objects serves as the location for the performance of work and labour and as the parable from Kafka suggests the location for the activity of thinking is in time.²⁰⁹ She discusses a number of developments that contribute to the loss of the public realm but most significant of these developments to the issue of evil is, ironically, the Christian notion of doing good works. No one is to be a witness to the performance of these works including even the doer of these deeds²¹⁰

themselves who would otherwise risk being corrupted by becoming unduly drawn into the world of human affairs if after acknowledging their performance they take pride in what they have done. This view of human affairs is consistent with the traditional sense of the *vita contemplativa* that reinforces the understanding about the futility of this-worldly concerns. The performance of deeds without a public represents to Arendt a confused notion that fails to appreciate the way human activity is constituted and in her terms these deeds are more like private activities performed with good intentions. To explain the implications that the loss of the public realm has upon the notion of evil Arendt refers to Machiavelli's concerns about the people learning from the Church leaders "to be good and not 'to resist evil' – with the result that 'wicked rulers do as much evil as they please.'"²¹¹

Even though Arendt writes *The Human Condition* under the auspices of her concern for the confusion that "thoughtlessness" brings about in understanding the different activities within the *vita activa*, her comments do not seem to be directed against the difficulties associated with the banality of evil but towards combating "radical evil." Radical evil involves contravening moral norms, but not as a way to avoid doing harm and preserve the integrity of the self, which (as discussed) her argument suggests was the focus of the non-participants in the Final Solution in refusing to go along with the conventions of a society that ordered its members to commit mass murder. In the case of radical evil its concern with contravening moral norms is part of a deliberate attempt to engage in activities that are hurtful to others and/or show no concern for their suffering while eschewing any humanly understandable motives. In comparing these two forms of evil an example of criminal evil could be killing others for financial gain but the killing that occurs in radical evil lacks any sense of utility including even the less tangible interest in satisfying sadistic impulses.

The different set of problems presented by the banality of evil from those suggested by the notion of radical evil are described by Arendt when she summarizes the concerns she has about the implications of the banality of evil for a number of issues that in her view have yet to even be recognized let alone adequately addressed.²¹² She argues that the difficulties in grasping the unacknowledged and troubling implications of the banality of evil are reflected in the basic ways of characterizing what occurred during the Final Solution: “The moral point of the matter is never reached by calling what happened by the name of ‘genocide’ or by counting the many millions of victims: extermination of whole peoples had happened before in antiquity, as well as in modern colonization.”²¹³ This characterization misses the ideological fantasies of the Nazis, whose aspirations had been described by Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* as uniquely constituted and distinguishable from even the colonialist aims of “expansion for expansion’s sake,” which seems to border on futility but without completely abandoning a sense of tangible accomplishment through its concern with conquest. In her explanation, the anti-utilitarian sense to the killing operation of the Nazis is ultimately self-destructive and is representative of the most extreme case of radical evil or of “wicked rulers doing as much evil as they please.” The focus on the scale of the Final Solution not only fails to adequately acknowledge the unique way the “evil” the Nazis engaged in manifested itself in totalitarian objectives that lack humanly discernible motives but most importantly in connection with the banality of evil this focus does not sufficiently consider the implications of these activities taking place within a *legal order*. Radical evil may be an appropriate term to explain the activities of certain individuals at certain times during the Final Solution but what is most troubling to Arendt is that its operations were sustainable primarily through the involvement of individuals who were not “outlaws, monsters, or raving sadists, but ... the most respected members of respectable society” for whom “it was

enough that everything happened according to the ‘will of the Fuhrer,’ which was the law of the land, and in accordance with the ‘word of the Fuhrer,’ which had the force of the law.”²¹⁴

Arendt’s observations about the capitulation of respectable society to the murderous aims of the Third Reich bring her journey through the history of human activity to a gloomy end. This journey may have begun with the tremendous promise of human beings, acting together in concert through “action” to achieve a form of greatness that simply is not available to them on their own, but it concludes in startling contrast with the image of individuals who under Nazi rule are left to think of ways to work up the near superhuman strength of character that is required to confront society’s demand to perform unthinkable atrocities “that ought never to have happened.”²¹⁵ This is the situation Arendt describes for individuals “in the rare moments when the chips are down,”²¹⁶ but to what extent does the banality of evil serve as a model of contemporary human activity for the (not-so-rare) moments when the chips are *not* down? What type of approach can individuals cultivate towards the norms of society and continue to be able to live with themselves?

Habit, Thinking, Conscience and the Example of Deterrence

The warnings issued within the two-in-one require independence from the self to encourage it to rethink what it is considering to do, but actually should not do, which would imply that these warnings are not formed through a method that is within the self’s conscious awareness. A more mundane version of thinking than the extreme case of living in the Third Reich is “thinking over” a tough decision like deciding whether or not to take a job offer in a different city or getting married and having children. In its deliberations over matters involving questions of meaning that in being developed are recognized as being irresolute the self forms a response that is reflective of its idiosyncratic judgments about what examples are “good” to

follow and what matters it finds to be tasteful or distasteful. These types of deliberations typically take time to work through and develop a “better” understanding of the relevant concerns but their extended duration does no more to arrive at an ultimate justification for what is in proper taste or what examples are the most appropriate to follow. The commonly offered suggestion “to sleep on it” and receive the benefit of removing oneself from the immediate situation before making a potentially life-altering decision only further suggests that the process by which these decisions are made is mysteriously buried deep within consciousness.

The interest in developing a method may involve reconsidering the notion of habit, which Arendt refers to derisively when describing the way morality and ethics during the reign of the Third Reich simply degraded into mere mores, habits and customs that could be easily exchanged like “table manners.”²¹⁷ Habits could conceivably be developed in a way that could help the self to more consciously be aware of what activities violate its sense of itself while still allowing individuals to be engaged with their surrounding world. Ideally this could even involve the awareness to recognize when the circumstances may require rethinking the course of action suggested by a certain habit or habits. To enlist Kafka’s parable to help describe the benefit of habit, his parable suggests that the intensity of the thinking activity extends a moment in time, but its cessation of all other activity means at some point it must come to an end to permit an individual to go on with their lives. Habit would have the benefit of dispersing over time the understanding developed in thinking, so this understanding would still be appreciated, but at a lower level of intensity that would permit individuals to carry on with other matters than those of concern to thinking. Habit could perhaps be compared to a preventive medicine such as a vaccine or a homeopathic remedy while thinking is an intervention like emergency surgery that is needed when a healthy regimen or routine is not sufficient to address a sudden medical crisis. Just as

neither one is a cure-all for dealing with the body's ailments so too should thinking and the development of "good" habit not be seen as resolving all the issues associated with dealing with the banality of evil.

An important consideration in relying upon either thinking or habit as a form of deterrence against genocidal practice can perhaps be appreciated by comparison to one of the more fundamental concerns for Arendt in relation to the notion that having a conscience would be a deterrence against wrongdoing. This is the understanding that the trust in its powers rests upon the old metaphysical assumption that human beings are essentially good and only commit harm unintentionally. A problem that she contends was recognized by Socrates and Plato at the beginning of the philosophical tradition is that "only good people are ever bothered by a bad conscience"²¹⁸ and the reign of Third Reich demonstrated that more than enough people did their part to support its murderous agenda without being bothered enough by a conscience to do otherwise. Arendt argues that Socrates' solution to this problem is shown by the optimism of him spending his days in the marketplace engaged in conversation in an effort to persuade others to take up the examined life. By contrast, Plato ascribed to the view that only the "professional thinkers" who chose to take up a life in philosophy would show concern for the examined life, and no amount of persuasion would permit others to "join in" this conversation. His solution to what essentially is a version of the problem of the hermeneutic circle was to use myths and laws *not* in the hopes this would turn towards "the good" the individuals who had closed themselves off from thinking but to simply prevent them from doing harm to others. Arendt's sympathies lie more with Socrates as she takes the Kantian position that thinking in the sense of the ability to tell right from wrong is not restricted to the few "professional thinkers." However, with the experience of the Third Reich in mind, she is left to conclude about the capacity to think "that it

cannot be denied that it is certainly much less frequent than Socrates supposed, although one hopes a bit more frequent than Plato feared.”²¹⁹

The point of mentioning Arendt’s doubts about the essential goodness of human beings is the relevance this has to the suggestion that habit and the two-in-one could serve as a deterrence against committing atrocity. These notions (of habit and the two-in-one) both seem susceptible to the same arguments made against relying upon a conscience being a deterrent in that only those who engage in self-dialogue or have developed good habits will be bothered by the warnings against doing harm, and (again) the number of individuals who heeded these warnings seems to have been very few in the case of the Third Reich. The supposition about the essential goodness of human beings now seems to have been reversed in that just about anyone could contribute to committing a great evil and it seems just about everyone did. Even with this experience in mind a concern for thinking and developing good habits still has its benefits for self-understanding and this concern for the self is what Arendt seems to celebrate as her solution to the problem of evil being willingly accepted, for she concludes that thinking “may indeed prevent catastrophe, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down.”²²⁰ This implies a concern can be maintained upon deterring genocide in both seeking its prevention while also developing a sense of a way in which to respond to situations in which acceptance of the practice of mass murder is the predominant understanding throughout society.

Arendt likens the banality of evil to a “fungus,” and as Jerome Kohn comments, it is unlike radical evil in that lacks a “root” (as the etymology of the term radical suggests) and cannot be “uprooted.”²²¹ The reference to fungus is telling not only for conveying the sense of superficiality of the banality of evil, but also for recognizing the relentlessness and speed of its growth, which prevents it from ever being fully eradicated. This imagery suggests developing

ways of responding to the banal evil that is inevitably in our surroundings; a highly beneficial by-product of this care for the self that might “prevent catastrophe” for ourselves is that perhaps it would serve as an example of the type that Arendt describes when speaking of the faculty of judgment. This is a model of conduct that, like Achilles in the case of courage, could exemplify to others a refusal to accept and go along with banal forms of evil that support committing atrocities and would represent the type of individual who was actively against the Final Solution that Eichmann allegedly did not see an example of during the reign of the Third Reich.²²²

“Sticking Together”: The Banality of Banal, Radical and Criminal Forms of Evil in Coexistence

Arendt is troubled by the implications that the banality of evil has for a number of subjects, although after focusing on the way Eichmann exemplifies its practice individually, one of its implications that she does not seem to consider at length is what this form of evil might look like when put into practice as part of a collective enterprise. Incidentally, her focus on the self might explain why Arendt takes up her discussion of thinking from the *Human Condition* in *The Life of the Mind* but does not return to the critique of modernity of this earlier work, even though Eichmann’s activities in the Third Reich appear to have the imprint of modern bureaucracy all over them.²²³ One of the few statements Arendt makes regarding the way that the banality of evil is implemented as a daily practice is suggested by her explanation of what mobilized the European populace under Nazi control to take part in the Final Solution. In an essay written after her coverage of the Eichmann trial she refers to her earlier work on totalitarianism and notes its arguments about the political maneuvering of the Nazi leadership that involved starting the war to create a state of emergency to justify taking the extreme measures necessary to achieve the “grand” aims of their ideological worldview. The banal form

of evil exemplified by Eichmann as a top Nazi official involved in the organization of the Final Solution suggests to Arendt that despite their support for the Nazi administration the populace was not overly concerned with following political developments and viewed them more as government affairs only of concern to professional politicians. The population “simply” went along with the government’s killing business and “although these mass murderers acted consistently with a racist or anti-Semitic, or at any rate demographic ideology, the murderers and their direct accomplices more often than not did not believe in these ideological justifications.”²²⁴ The key concern for mobilizing the populace was the Nazi leadership’s control of the socially accepted order that now made killing the rule instead of its opposite.

Interestingly, when Arendt later writes about the lesser known “Frankfurt trial” that had as its defendants former guards and officials who served at Auschwitz, she challenges the understanding that the individuals who should be held most accountable for the Final Solution were those succumbing to a banal form of evil. The reports of the atrocities committed by these defendants as well as the attitude they continued to display during the trial of closing ranks against anyone who looked unfavourably upon their former activities were unanticipated developments that changed Arendt’s overall understanding of the evils committed within the Third Reich. She compares the figures of Eichmann and these defendants to distinguish between two different forms of evil in operation during the Third Reich:

In the trial of Adolf Eichmann, desk murderer par excellence, the court declared that “the degree of responsibility increases as we draw further away from the man who uses the fatal instruments with his own hands.” Having followed the proceedings in Jerusalem, one was more than inclined to agree with this opinion.

The Frankfurt trial, which in many respects reads like a much-needed supplement to the Jerusalem trial, will cause many to doubt what they had thought was self-evident. What stands revealed in these trials is not only the complicated issue of personal responsibility but naked criminal guilt; and the faces of those who did their best, or rather their worst, to obey criminal orders are still very different from those who within a legal criminal system did not so much obey orders as do with their doomed victims as they pleased.²²⁵

The added responsibility she gives to “raw criminality” shows a change to her view of Nazism that differs from the understanding that “these deeds were not committed by outlaws, monsters, or raving sadists but by the most respected members of respectable society.” This was a view of Nazism that considered the banality of evil to be the dominant sense to the activities of its followers and the totalitarian fantasy world was a sideshow whose actual contents were of little concern to the populace. The portrayal centred around the notion of the banality of evil was one that had already replaced Arendt’s original view in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that was built upon arguments concerning the near inescapable domination of the Nazis’ ideological worldview that through its aim to eradicate all forms of human existence represented a form of radical evil. The traditional conception of evil as a form of criminal conduct had been acknowledged as part of what went on in the Third Reich in both the account that raises the possibility of radical evil and in the account that centred around the notion of the banality of evil, but in each case it was considered to be of only marginal significance. Arendt’s concern with minimizing the significance of criminality in her account of Nazism was to avoid cheap explanations that would

attribute the rise of Nazism to aberrational behaviour. But the trial of the Auschwitz defendants demonstrated clearly to her that the Third Reich made a place for individuals responsible for criminal conduct over and above their support for a social order that made killing its law.

The importance of radical, banal and criminal forms of evil has shifted in each iteration of Arendt's account of Nazism but the form of her argument remains unchanged in the sense that these "evils" are all in operation together under the umbrella of the same murderous order. But what, if any, connection do the different types of wrongdoing at work in this order share with one another? And what allows these evils to co-exist or "supplement" each other, especially considering the distaste that the "desk murderers" Eichmann and Himmler showed for the killing once they got up close and personal to it and considering the distaste for desk work that undoubtedly was shown by a number of the executioners who physically carried out the killings? Although Arendt does not suggest a commonality, her discussion of the Frankfurt trial may be used to argue that the notion of criminality displayed by its defendants may actually represent a case of banal evil. The haughty and shameless attitude of the defendants that so irked and dismayed Arendt reflected, in her view, the German public's lack of appetite for putting ex-Nazis on trial. Importantly, public opinion took the lead in setting this attitude, since in their pretrial interviews a number of the defendants were willing to "admit" they had turned bad under the influence of the "animal-like" Galician Jews from Eastern Europe but in open session denied even the small share of guilt implied by this offensive and self-serving testimony. Arendt comments on the defendants' decision to change their testimony by remarking "that behind them one can sense public opinion" and that "almost every one of them would rather admit that he is a liar than risk having his neighbours read in the newspapers that he does not belong among the Germans who 'stick together.'"²²⁶

The outlook of those who engaged in criminality during the Final Solution and relished the opportunity to engage in the activities it involved might initially appear to be the mirror opposite of the banal form of evil of those who make the claim of being an unwilling supporter of a policy of mass murder. In spite of this appearance, the way these forms of evil mirror one another seem to suggest their image of social order shares the understanding that the range of activity possible to engage in is determined by the conventional understanding endorsed by this order, which either happens to suit their tastes or not. The idea that this order is not a given set of constraints but can be collaborated with to develop an understanding of the matters it addresses is not considered in the case of either banal or criminal forms of evil. What this form of collaboration might entail will be a focus of the discussion for the concluding chapter of this writing.

What might be added to the considerations at this point of the inability or refusal to collaborate is its connection to radical evil whose principal of non-utility might appear to buck any form of conventional understanding and distinguish its understanding from that of either banal or criminal forms of evil. This is noted in Arendt's description in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* of the Nazis' activities, which were representative of a radical form of evil, and its observation that the Nazi leadership sought to manipulate the norms and conventions of society to push them aside and usher in a new order of their design. This is an approach that took the form of pursuing power in Germany through "ballots not bullets" and, once in power, expanding the German empire through signing and then breaking international agreements. The banal sense to this "bucking of convention" that the Nazis engaged in can be recognized in that the understanding that social order is a constraint upon the range of activity possible to engage in is not brought into question. In response to this sense of constraint the focus of the Nazis was

upon gaining control of the institutions in society charged with administering what society demands of its members for the purposes of changing these demands to suit their personal tastes. Like criminal and banal forms of evil, radical evil recognizes the possibility for a difference between personal belief and what is held conventionally, and in their different ways each also accepts that convention imposes its understanding on personal belief. As an aside, the appeal of Nazi ideology to Eichmann could be recognized not just as a matter of the content of this ideology but also in its presentation of a worldview that has no discernible interest in collaboration or developing an understanding that begins but does not necessarily end with the way the matter is addressed by convention.

The inability to imagine a world beyond the opinion of one's neighbours – or the compliance with social norms seemingly above all other considerations that is indicative of the banality of evil – once again appears as definitive for the everyday understanding of those who gave their support to the Third Reich. This point seems to be reinforced by Arendt in a response she gave to the confusion surrounding her use of the phrase banality of evil that she attempts to clear up by telling a story involving Ernst Junger, a well-known German soldier and war chronicler. Junger apparently caught sight of starving prisoners eating pigs' food and referred to them as "subhuman," but Arendt suggests that his remark was not "demonic" or inspired by a murderous ideology seeking to purify the world of subhuman races: it shows instead "simply the reluctance to imagine what the other person is experiencing."²²⁷ Would it not be fair to suggest that "behind" Junger's concern for a sense of decorum "one can sense public opinion" that blocks him from developing an understanding that would recognize that for those who are starving ignoring convention by not turning their nose up at pigs' food represents an appropriate

response? (I.e. he would acknowledge that this “pigs’ food” had been converted into “much needed human sustenance”).

This idea that public opinion weighed heavily on the minds of the defendants at the Frankfurt trial may seem to ignore the more obvious explanation that they were facing the reality of being on trial and their denials were simply a case of them “clamming up” on the stand on the advice of their lawyers. This objection does not refute the possibility of these defendants foregoing what was recommended to them by legal convention and taking responsibility for their past atrocities. Arendt suggests that this possibility was actually exercised at the trial by the defendant Dr. Franz Lucas,²²⁸ a physician at Auschwitz who “had always been ‘ostracized by his comrades’”²²⁹ for the concern he had shown for the well-being of the inmates. According to Arendt his responses on the witness stand continued to set him apart from his “comrades” as he sought to downplay the favourable testimony he received from former inmates and the suggestion that this cleared him of wrongdoing. In the case of the other remaining defendants their denials did little to prevent Arendt from arguing convincingly that their cruelty and enthusiasm for killing went over and above their legal obligations to the Third Reich. What also may be added to Arendt’s assessment of their conduct is that to achieve the “heights” of their horrific infamy the former camp guards and officials stood on the shoulders of the Nazi legal order that in part composed the public perception of social norms during the Third Reich.

The Orders of Evil during the Genocides in Europe, Rwanda and Cambodia

The importance of the legal order is also discussed by Christopher Browning in his well-known study *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. Browning touts both a multilayered portrayal of the “ordinary Germans” assembled into the death squad that was the focus of his study and a multi-causal explanation of what motivated

support for the Final Solution within the Third Reich as a whole. Browning's description of the death squad members suggests that some were eager killers, some sought to avoid participating in the killings whenever possible, others grew more or less enthusiastic for them over time or oscillated between enthusiasm and reluctance and only in the case of one lone individual was there an outright refusal to participate in the shootings. These findings seem comparable to Arendt's description of the Auschwitz guards and officials who exhibited "raw criminality", changing moods and (depending on the assessment of Dr. Lucas²³⁰) those that demonstrate either a refusal to participate in the killings or less enthusiasm for them over time. Browning also identifies the group that comprised the majority of the participants within the death squad as those that "did not think what they were doing was wrong or immoral, because the killing was sanctioned by legitimate authority"²³¹ and this description seems to echo Arendt's characterization of the banal evil of the desk murderers.

In terms of Browning's multi-causal explanation of motivation of the European populace as a whole for the Final Solution, his argument emphasizes that a variety of factors such as racism, the exceptional circumstances of war, conformity, the diminishing sense of personal responsibility within bureaucracy and the pressure exerted by the legitimizing authority of government all contributed to the support the Third Reich received. In his view this demonstrates that "modern governments that wish to commit mass murder will seldom fail in their efforts for being unable to induce 'ordinary men' to become their 'willing executioners.'"²³² Browning is emphasizing that mass murder can readily occur and what might also be noted from his account is that through the control of a legal order and of other forms of social convention the various "causes" that he names (and possibly others) can be triggered in a way that will fulfill a government's horrendous "wishes."

In their examination of the Rwandan genocide both Jean Hatzfeld and Alison Des Forges identify varying levels of enthusiasm among its participants that are reflective of the findings of Browning and Arendt. Des Forges systematically lists the different participants involved in the genocide in a lengthy and detailed categorization of their involvement²³³ while the interviews conducted by Hatzfeld are far less systematic as he mentions these sorts of details at different points throughout his interviewees' responses. In the group of rural farmers that are the focus of Hatzfeld's study their account of events suggest that these individuals were either enthusiastic killers from the start or grew more or less enthusiastic for them over time. Individuals who were more reluctant participants in the killings were observed by members of the group interviewed by Hatzfeld but they did not claim that this type of reluctance was representative of their own attitude. Over the course of his interviews Hatzfeld seeks to establish the degree to which the members of the group welcomed the killing operations prior to their occurrence, but with his investigation reliant mostly on the accounts of events provided by the former killers, the issue is not easily determined. A number of Hatzfeld's respondents do suggest that independent of their individual attitudes towards the killings these activities did not start on a genocidal scale until they became legally authorized:

*When the genocide came from Kigali, taking us by surprise, I never flinched. I thought, if the authorities opted for this choice, there's no reason to sidestep the issue;*²³⁴

...

*After listing the influential people, the authorities announced the families should die, too, and all neighbours as well. These detailed killings took us by surprise, if I may say so;*²³⁵

...

*The higher-ups in Kigali had planned it all behind blank faces,*²³⁶

and:

*If the organizers did not show up, it wouldn't have occurred to the farmers to begin the work.*²³⁷

One of the Tutsi targeted in the killings, “Innocent,” tells the story of “a very nice councillor named Servilien Kambali,” a Hutu who had done much to protect the Tutsis during previous smaller-scale massacres that had occurred in his region. When Kambali tried to stop the genocidal killings in 1994 he was harshly warned by his superiors that he would not be permitted to stand in the way and upon hearing this quickly took a lead role in the killing operations.²³⁸ Anti-Tutsi sentiment was very much in the air prior to the genocide and the Hutu extremist government mobilized members of this ethnic group, who had shown varying levels of enthusiasm for genocide, to serve as the perpetrators of the killings. The government’s control of the legal order seems to have been enough for the killing to be accepted as a social norm by a segment of the Rwandan populace of sufficient size for the genocide to occur.

By contrast the majority of the Cambodian populace prior to the country’s genocide reportedly had little appetite for violent conflict after the devastating impact on the country from years of civil war and from the war that had spread into the region from neighbouring Vietnam. The support that the Khmer Rouge enjoyed within Cambodia was derived in part from its stated goals as a communist party to work on behalf of the interests of the poor by ending corruption and bringing peace to the region, as well as from the endorsement it had received from the reigning monarch Prince Sihanouk who encouraged people to run to the “maquis” (the “forests,” where the Khmer Rouge’s forces were located)²³⁹ and join the fight against the American-backed

coup that had deposed him. From its first days in power the Khmer Rouge began killing the citizens of Cambodia en masse and even the involvement of the guards at S-21 who committed some of the regime's worst atrocities has been explained as a matter of having been forced to engage in these activities.

This is a view supported by Cambodian scholars Meng-Try Ea and Sorya Sim who note in their work *Victims and Perpetrators?: Testimony of Young Khmer Rouge Comrades* that a number of these guards were children as young as 12 years old²⁴⁰ when they were separated from their families and brought to S-21. While serving at the prison they faced the very real possibility of being tortured and killed if they disobeyed the orders of the regime as they witnessed this very thing happen to a number of their colleagues.²⁴¹ Van Nath, the former inmate of S-21 featured in Rithy Panh's film on the prison, challenges any claims to victimhood by the guards that he meets with (some of whom were above the age of eighteen and clearly do not meet the legal definition of a child soldier) by asking them: "If you are victims then what does that make the executed prisoners?"²⁴² The answer Nath receives from one guard is that they obeyed the orders out of fear for their lives and Nath is clearly not satisfied with this response and increasingly pushes back against it as the film progresses (as discussed in the previous chapter).

A different understanding of the activities at S-21 than those of Ea and Sim and Nath that may also appear to align with a focus on the banality of evil is presented by Christopher L. Atkinson in his article "Reflections on Administrative Evil, Belief, and Justification in Khmer Rouge Cambodia." Atkinson acknowledges the influence upon the guards of being threatened with a cruel death and (in certain cases) being underage at the time of their assignment at S-21 but considers the bureaucratic structure of the prison to have been the real danger that simply made use of these vulnerabilities. He refers to the comparison of bureaucracy to a sharp blade

that is simply a benign tool that can be put either to good or evil ends and counters this notion by suggesting that this image of bureaucracy as a sharp blade also conveys the susceptibility of this form of organization to providing support for large-scale, violent atrocities. This murderous potential has been borne out by the abysmal track record that bureaucratic organizations have in terms of being involved with genocidal events.²⁴³ Atkinson is troubled by the assumption that public administration is inherently seeking to “do good” in the world and suggests that bureaucratic structures either allow a concern for what is right to be suspended or they are conducive to justifying even the most extreme forms of evil to achieve some perceived higher good as an end, as the reign of the Khmer Rouge demonstrates. He considers the danger posed by bureaucracy to be so great that he warns that “we may become powerless to stop it”²⁴⁴ and calls for administrative officials to accept that they are not shielded from responsibility for the activities they take part in as part of a bureaucratic organization. Human agency is the hope he pits against bureaucratic power but Atkinson also suggests that this capacity could be fully extinguished by such power: “Systems function, machine-like, thoughtlessly and blamelessly oblivious to consequences with humanity crushed underneath, and society powerless to stop them. Then as now, do we blame our systems or ourselves?”²⁴⁵

The degree to which Atkinson is optimistic about human agency being “the hope” against bureaucracy seems uncertain as his skepticism about this form of organization follows from his survey of the various strategies that bureaucratic structures employ to nullify an individual’s sense of their capacity to make decisions of their own volition. His discussion of these strategies touches upon the minutia of bureaucratic operations without Atkinson recognizing the way in which this discussion is also suggestive of the possibility to counter these attempts to stifle the exercise of human agency. Atkinson concludes that “the principal motivating factor for most of

the Cambodian people was the threat of death – The need for self-preservation was generally sufficient to make citizens obey the commands they were given.”²⁴⁶ Van Nath’s dialogic exchange with the former guards demonstrates a way to move past this generalization about the connection between self-preservation and obedience by refusing to treat the guards’ claims about having to follow orders out of fear for their lives as a concluding statement about the available responses to some of the most extreme forms of pressures that bureaucracy can exert on individuals. Nath approaches their claims with the understanding that they represent a starting point for a discussion concerned with analyzing the ways in which to respond to this type of pressure.

In connection with the influence that self-preservation can exert upon compliance with murderous orders Atkinson also cites Eric Hoffer’s work on mass movements to send the warning that “it may not even be necessary for people to be ‘true believers’”²⁴⁷ to take part in the atrocities being pursued by a bureaucratic organization. This idea of paying lip service to the party line is also suggested by two of the guards in Rithy Panh’s film, who recite the biographies they were asked to write by the Khmer Rouge authorities describing their reasons for joining its cause, and their comments on these biographies provide an indication of the way that they could sustain a view that permitted them to take part in activities for the government that they did not necessary agree with but felt compelled to perform.²⁴⁸ Both guards in the film explain that even the “personal” information they provided in telling their life story did not reflect their true concerns but represented their interest in self-preservation and the need to please party authorities.²⁴⁹ A crucial concern of the double life they quite knowingly lived in the service of the Khmer Rouge seems to be the repeated references the guards make to the legality of their activities. They debate both with Nath and among themselves the extent to which their personal

views and desires matched with the official party line, even admitting that there were occasions where individuals exceeded in their cruelty what was expected of them from the authorities. The concern they show for the lawfulness of their activities suggests a way in which these guards maintained a connection to their *personal* understanding of the matters they faced that seems to prevent them from ever becoming fully disassociated from the life they lived *officially*. One of the guards, Huoy, states that “today when I think about it, it was against the law”²⁵⁰ and this suggestion that he assesses the activities he was involved with under the Khmer Rouge on the basis of their legality has implications for the responsibility he takes for them. He seems to consider himself divorced from the responsibility of performing these activities through his adherence to a legal order but at the same time he also preserves a sense of agency by participating in this order as this (supposedly) represents a “responsible” way of allowing himself the opportunity to pursue his personal self-interest of trying to survive.

The Eichmann and Frankfurt trials have shown that survival was not at issue for the defendants when they took part in the Final Solution. Eichmann claimed that his concern for the legality of his activities that compelled him to accept the Nazi government’s agenda was motivated by a sense of duty that he felt personally to do the “honourable thing” of maintaining the oath he had sworn to Hitler. The Frankfurt trials suggest that the guards at Auschwitz were concerned with social norms including the legality of their activities. These activities and their understanding of them seem to suggest that these guards happily took advantage of the convention to commit mass murder but only after public opinion had formed around these conventions in a way that allowed them to get away with pursuing their personal interest of engaging in a brutal form of violent criminality. In the case of private citizens who were not directly involved in implementing the Final Solution, examples can be cited that indicate that

support for the Nazi government's activities was also not necessarily linked to a concern with survival. In an interview with Elizabeth Kalhammer, who worked as a maid for Adolf Hitler at his residence at Berghof from 1943-1945, Kalhammer was asked (at the age of 92) what she would tell her younger 19-year-old self about taking a job for the Fuhrer now that she knew of the Holocaust and other atrocities committed by the Nazi government. Kalhammer, who personally encountered starving prisoners after their liberation from the Mauthausen death camp and even helped to feed a young boy succumbing to starvation, explains that she is unsure if she would have done things differently: "There are two sides to that, if I am being honest. I was young at the time. You must understand that there was a certain pride to it. If I'm being honest." She describes the special privileges she enjoyed during the Third Reich and admiration that came with being in the personal service of Hitler, summing up her experiences by remarking that "It was beautiful too ... But that doesn't mean that I was proud about the other things"²⁵¹ – the phrase "other things" being a gloss for these atrocities committed by the Third Reich.

Kalhammer claims she "knew nothing"²⁵² of the atrocities committed by the Nazis even though her recollections of the war years include seeing the "horrible" things that were done to the "beautiful shops" on *Kristallnacht*. Her overall lack of interest in the political developments of the Nazi era seems to express an attitude towards public affairs that is of concern to Arendt in her critique of modernity and its discussion of the impact that the Christian notion of "good works" has had upon the already strained understanding of public life within this era. The suggestion of this notion that private citizens should not be concerned about their appearance in the public realm "with the result that 'wicked rulers do as much evil as they please'" within this space seems relevant to consider as a forerunner to Kalhammer's view that she is untroubled by her involvement with the Nazis even after being in the personal service of Adolf Hitler.

The scope of Arendt's critique would suggest that this separation of public activities from matters of "personal" interest that are pursued privately is representative of an understanding that prevails in societies that are not necessarily engaged in the practice of genocide. This understanding is recognized as being alive and well in postwar Germany by Elke Grenzer in her critique of a Holocaust education program set up for children at the beginning of the 2000s on the site of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Grenzer refers both to the various tactics the program uses to have the children "relive" the experiences of the inmates at the death camps and its attempts to balance the gravity of the subject matter it addresses against the concern of wanting to make a summer camp for kids still be fun. The program's efforts at reproducing the past quickly morph into a simple repetition of some of its unaddressed tensions as Grenzer notes that its "advertised aim to 'increase learner confidence and bring over an experience of success and still be enjoyable despite difficult contents'" unwittingly "joins pleasure and pain in a manner that is analogous to Eichmann's disjointed discovery of an 'inner life.'"²⁵³ Kalhammer's reminiscing about the "beauty" she experienced during the Third Reich could also be considered an example of joining pleasure and pain in a thoughtless way when discussing the practice of genocide. She demonstrates this by the way she separates herself from the pain of acknowledging her notable involvement in the Nazi regime and treating its horrors as something that does not concern her since these horrors had no direct concern to her professional duties and were not activities with which she personally agreed. This understanding allowed her to accept cordoning off her personal impression of her time in the service of Hitler and derive pleasure from her participation in the regime. As Grenzer's argument suggests, the same understanding could easily be considered to be at work with the idea of Eichmann having an "inner life" that rebelled against the outward performance of his duty but marks a difference and clearly a very

significant difference between distancing himself from duties directly involved in the killing and Kalhammer distancing herself from her duties in the service of this regime as a maid.

The understanding that personal belief can be separate from the intent of the activities performed out of an interest to be in compliance with the conventional order of society presupposes that this order can be imposed upon the members of society by some means. The remaining part of this chapter will examine the imposition of this order through the means of bureaucratic administration as a case to consider the extent to which the imposition of this order can occur.

Bureaucratic Domination and its “Clash with the Variable Requirements of Practical Social Life”

Arendt's inspiration for her much-debated assertion that Eichmann's frame of reference for supporting the Final Solution was a concern for banalities and not the grand designs of an ideology is perhaps hinted at in a line in *The Human Condition* when she is discussing Max Weber's famous thesis on the connection between Protestantism and capitalism. Arendt observes that “the greatness of Max Weber's discovery about the origins of capitalism lay precisely in his demonstration that enormous, strictly mundane activity is possible without any care for or enjoyment of the world whatever, an activity whose deepest motivation, on the contrary, is worry and care about the self.”²⁵⁴ The care shown by Eichmann (and Kalhammer) is less for the self than for self-interest but the idea of a connection between mundane concerns and greatness seems comparable to Arendt's proposal that unremarkable individuals were the authors of the monstrous deeds committed by the Third Reich. Weber's work is also helpful in its examination of bureaucracy through his observation that its best practices involve striving to make the separation of public activity from personal interests pursued privately a routine matter of its

operations. “Bureaucracy develops,” Weber explains, “the more perfectly the more it is ‘dehumanized,’ the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation.”²⁵⁵

Weber leaves room in his explanation of modern bureaucracy for personal interests to make an appearance in the public sphere in a rebellion against the abstract rationality and rigid formalism that he argues is characteristic of this form of organization. A demand of the protest against bureaucratic domination is the need to examine on a case-by-case basis if certain matters require individual consideration rather than automatically being assigned standardized treatment. The two avenues he identifies as allowing for a consideration of personal interest are the remnants of traditional social institutions and the representatives of public opinion such as populist leaders and the press.²⁵⁶ An important difference between these holdouts against bureaucratic administration is that traditional institutions are themselves still dependent upon a certain amount of formalism, namely persuading its officials to be “moved by personal sympathy and favor, by grace and gratitude”²⁵⁷ in an individual case while the expression of public opinion (as a pure type) is unfettered by either tradition or bureaucratic forms of regulation.

Throughout his discussion of modern bureaucracy Weber is concerned with describing the tension between the domineering tendencies of bureaucratic regulation and the democratic impulses such as the expression of public opinion that push back against this form of domination. He suggests that the masses who are the targets of bureaucratic regulation are also aware of the material comforts that its administration affords them and this can compromise their protests against its influence and control.²⁵⁸ His observation seems applicable to Kalhammer’s description of the special privileges she received in Hitler’s service or the “privilege” to survive granted to the S-21 guards living under the rule of the Khmer Rouge. Weber is also troubled by

what he regards as the sham promise of bureaucratic regulation to raise the standing of the masses by leveling social differences and eliminating the advantages received through tradition or any other means besides its rational procedures. These procedures lead only to a “leveling of the governed”²⁵⁹ or a loss of status for the masses targeted by bureaucratic regulation relative to the position enjoyed by those in charge of its administration. Weber’s description of society could perhaps be likened to the image of a textured script, like braille, that once its bumps and grooves are leveled out loses all meaning that it formerly held and returns to being nothing more than a blank sheet that can be inscribed upon without impediment to meeting the goals of bureaucratic administration. A flattening out of the social landscape into a smooth but indistinguishable mass seems conducive for bringing together elements that would have once been at odds with one another in their goals and objectives, such as office functionaries and “raw criminals,” and organize them into complementary parts within a genocidal enterprise, where as brothers-in-arms they transform into desk murderers and camp officials. Weber even makes the point that if through conflict a state is conquered and their former enemy takes charge of the bureaucratic machinery then the change in regime does not necessarily interrupt its bureaucratic personnel from continuing their operations in the service of the new administration. This suggests that the idea that moral codes can easily and even typically be exchanged like “table manners” also complies with Weber’s explanation of bureaucratic organizations.²⁶⁰

What seems most concerning to Weber about the protests against bureaucratic domination is the way that these protests have involved an appeal to notions of equality and the establishment of objective social institutions to express their interest in pursuing a more democratic society. These are notions that in his view unwittingly perpetuate the principles of bureaucratic rationality and further strengthen the position of those in charge of its administration

over its subjects.²⁶¹ This idea that the grip of bureaucratic organization has become inescapable – Weber’s proverbial iron cage – is suggestive of a parallel to Arendt’s description of the radical evil of a totalitarian regime in that each of these accounts prioritizes the struggle *against* the domination of a governing power. In her coverage of the Eichmann trial, as Arendt shifted her focus away from totalitarian domination towards the significance of banal evil, she recognized that the responses of the different European countries under Nazi rule to the demand to enact the Final Solution varied from compliance, to partial compliance and flat-out refusal. This recognizes that a governing power that seeks to dominate all aspects of social life does not receive automatic and unavoidable compliance from its subjects and must struggle to impose the solutions that it is offering to matters of concern to the populace. This is a struggle observed by Weber’s contemporary and colleague Georg Simmel in his description of the resistance to the typical way bureaucracy responds to the everyday concerns of those who are the subject of its regulations.

The bureaucratic body, a formal organization for exercising an extended administration, constitutes in itself a scheme which frequently clashes with the variable requirements of practical social life. This, on the one hand, because the departmental work of the bureaucratic system is not adjusted with reference to very individual and complicated cases, which none the less must be disposed of by means of the bureaucratic machinery ... In this respect we might compare bureaucratic with logical schematism. The latter bears about the same relation to knowledge of reality in general that the former bears to civic administration. Each is a tool

and a form, indispensable in connection with the content which it is called to order, but the whole meaning and purpose of each lie in this content. When logic poses, however, as independent knowledge, and, without reference to the real content of which it is a mere form, presumes to construct of itself a separate intelligence, it makes for itself a world which usually presents marked contrasts with the real universe.²⁶²

The suggestion in Simmel's account that the default response to Weber's (alleged) bureaucratic "iron cage" is for its expectations to simply "clash" with the subjects of its administration also seems to parallel Arendt recognizing that the orders to commit mass murder by the Nazi totalitarian regime had been received differently within the different geographic regions where Eichmann worked to implement the Final Solution. For instance, in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* Arendt argues that even those who were aware of the absurdity of classifying all of society under Nazi control in terms of Aryans and non-Aryans had no choice but to accept the very real consequences of this designation. However, in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* she describes the way that this policy in the hands of Mussolini's government gave the appearance of being treated like a "typically Italian joke."²⁶³ Part of this "joke" included making exemptions for both the Jews who were members of the Fascist party and their relatives and by making this stipulation it in effect protected nearly all of the Jews in the country. This is not to imply in citing this example that the response to the rule of a bureaucratic form of administration that is enacting a policy of genocide always or even normally ends in defiance, let alone in triumphant forms of protest. Even in Italy, once the German authorities seized control over the country's administration, more than half of the nation's 50,000 Jews were put into camps within Italian

borders, of which 7,500 were eventually sent to Auschwitz.²⁶⁴ However, with incalculable features such as “Italian humanity” confronting the Nazi administration, the “marked contrast to the real universe” (Simmel) of its bureaucratic policy can *potentially* be exposed for the way its aims of countering the Jewish world conspiracy “raised a problem that fortunately did not exist”²⁶⁵ (Arendt) and this example shows that for a time the objectives of this policy could essentially be ignored.

Conclusion

The interest in social order in this chapter considers the understanding that the conventions associated with this order constrain personal belief through its determination of the range of activities that are possible to be engaged in publicly. The argument suggests that this way of orienting to social order can be traced to the understanding that being passive is central to the way human activity has traditionally been understood. This sense of human activity has encouraged a withdrawal of concern from human affairs including a concern for what the notions of “good” and “evil” mean in the conduct of these affairs. The analysis then seeks to work out an understanding of what the notion of evil means in discussing the practice of genocide and suggests that the banality of evil involves this separation of private and public concerns in a way that can appear as either a radical, criminal or banal form of evil. The imposition of social order through bureaucratic administration was discussed as a case to examine the extent to which this order is possible to impose. Through the discussion of this case, which began with a consideration of the idea of total domination, the analysis develops the understanding that the concerns of everyday practice can potentially encourage the idea of collaborating with what is demanded by the conventions of the social order rather than seeing these demands as necessarily imposing constraints. The analysis also seeks to demonstrate its concern with an orientation to

social order that seeks to collaborate with the demands of its conventions by working out its understanding of convention through its discussion of these demands. This is an understanding of convention that recognizes that everyday concerns have the potential to suggest that what convention demands is not the sole determinant of the range of activities that are possible to perform.

The concluding chapter of this work will continue this focus on an orientation to social order that seeks to collaborate with its demands by considering the demands that Simmel's observation seems to suggest everyday concerns place on this order through the "variable requirements of practical social life." The response to these requirements by bureaucratic forms of administration in its effort to organize society in accordance with the conventions of the social order seems relevant to mention considering Arendt's comments about Eichmann who, in a position of a bureaucratic administrator in charge of organizing the Final Solution, demonstrated a "remoteness from reality." Arendt attributes his remoteness to his "lack of imagination"²⁶⁶ and what could be added to her account to further appreciate the implication of its description for the notion of the banality of evil is to recognize the banality of evil as a particular species of the more general concept of "bad faith." This concept is discussed in the opening chapter of this work and makes reference to the way members in society treat as given and unchanging the reality that they have a hand in producing.

Berger's account of this Sartrean concept discusses its implication for the way individuals understand themselves with respect to their capacity to act freely. The examples he cites to illustrate this concept include:

The waiter who shuffles through his appointed rounds in a cafe is in "bad faith," insofar as he pretends to himself that the waiter role

constitutes his real existence, that, if only for the hours he is hired, he *is* the waiter. The woman who lets her body be seduced step by step while continuing to carry on an innocent conversation is in “bad faith,” insofar as she pretends that what is happening to her body is not under her control.²⁶⁷

These examples could be characterized as being representative of a “bad faith” in which impact is restricted to the individual who adapts the understanding that the conventions of society determine the range of activities possible to perform. Other examples that Berger mentions show the way that bad faith accepts doing harm to others:

The terrorist who kills and excuses himself by saying that he had no choice because the party ordered him to kill is in “bad faith,” because he pretends his existence is necessarily linked with the party, while in fact this linkage is the consequence of his own choice ... Men are responsible for their actions. They are in “bad faith” when they attribute to iron necessity what they themselves are choosing to do. Even the law itself, the master fortress of “bad faith,” has begun to take cognizance of this fact in its dealings with Nazi war criminals.²⁶⁸

An understanding that totalizes the expectations of the social order and lacks the imagination to think of possibilities beyond what is expected by its conventions seems conducive to the banal evil that does not consider the impact of the activities being performed upon the well-being of others.

One resource for understanding the way in which imagination concerns everyday practice is to consider the main thrust of Harold Garfinkel's work, which seems to have a pulse on this problem considering the method he employs is focused upon developing a better understanding of everyday practice. This involves his idea of conducting breaching experiments, which he refers to as "aides to a sluggish imagination."²⁶⁹ Once Garfinkel had described everyday practice in a way he considered to be adequate he remained committed to reproducing its understanding without attempting to further develop its notions. This aspect of Garfinkel's approach will be departed from on the supposition that conventional understanding represents a starting point and not an end point to collaborate and form an understanding of the matters it addresses.

The case to be considered as a way to further appreciate the significance of imagination to everyday practice will be the Socratic dialogue *Gorgias* that was one of Arendt's focuses in her writings after her coverage of the Eichmann trial. With Garfinkel's work in mind this dialogue will be read as Socrates' version of a breaching experiment that seeks to intervene into the everyday ways of understanding what is just. The discussion of this dialogue will also include Bruno Latour as an additional interlocutor and use his work to represent a response that has been articulated within modern sociology that, contra Arendt, disputes Socrates' arguments against Gorgias and Calicles. Latour argues for an examination of social conventions that is unfettered by the concern for what is "good" or "bad" about them and that would focus upon more fully understanding and expanding their influence without this further commentary on their merits. The response that will be made to this argument that suggests confining understanding to what is conventionally held to will be to consider the writing of Alan Blum and Peter McHugh and its discussion of the distinction between principle and rule. This discussion will be used to guide the understanding of what is involved in an orientation to social order that collaborates

with the concerns it addresses. The final component of this discussion will be to use Arendt's work to suggest the possibility to respond in this collaboration to banal forms of evil through each of the human faculties named within the *vita activa*, with particular attention upon those discussed in the *Life of the Mind*.

Chapter 5

A Concern for the “Good” in the Banality of Evil

*I forget to pray for the angels,
and the angels forget to pray for us.²⁷⁰*
– Leonard Cohen, “So Long Marianne”

Introduction

An underlying concern of this writing has been to consider the decision to pursue and/or comply with mass murder. In developing a sense of the banality of evil this decision has been recognized as involving a separation of what is believed privately from the activities performed in public. The case studies examined of the genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia and of the administration of modern bureaucracy have each shown, in their different ways, the problematic way that dividing private and public affairs can be associated with the desirability of “being considered one of those who stick together.” An implication of this argument has *not* been to suggest rejecting conventionality in all of its forms but to develop a sense of a way in which to collaborate with the demands of what is conventionally expected as part of understanding the “good” of an activity being performed. An understanding of what this form of collaboration entails is not claimed to be known in an absolute sense but an indication of what it entails might be recognized through the discussion of examples, from each of these case studies, of individuals who show a concern for matters that are significant to being human, including a concern for justice and the ability to think about the “good” of performing an activity. The remarks in Fujii’s study of Rwanda made by “Gustave” about the importance of friendship in steering people in the right direction through good advice suggests he recognized the impact that the notions of others

can have upon him while also maintaining a sense that this influence can be reflected upon and evaluated to consider its merits. Van Nath's almost therapeutic intervention upon the understanding of the former guards at the S-21 prison in Cambodia, which Pahn's film documents, involves Nath working through the guards' understanding of their duties and through this consideration suggesting that thinking and showing a concern for what is just was still a possibility for them. This concern would have made clear alternative ways of responding to the expectations of their position other than taking part in mass murder and torture. In discussing the administration of modern bureaucracy Arendt's notion of the umpire as someone who like "the quiet in the center of a storm which, though totally unlike the storm, still belongs to it" provides an image of the practice of judgment that involves considering the particularities of a situation to determine the "rightness" of the activities engaged in while also recognizing the folly of maintaining "that by judging a wrong I presuppose that I myself would be incapable of committing it."

In this chapter these issues of desirability, a concern for the "good" and involvement in collective life will be further considered through a discussion of the notion of citizenship in Plato's *Gorgias* as well as in the commentary on this work provided in writings by Bruno Latour and Jeff Kochan. This discussion will build upon the understanding suggested by Simmel and Garfinkel's work that conventionality provides solutions, however imperfect, to problems that could be worked out endlessly and whose indeterminacy bubbles beneath the surface of the settled conventions associated with everyday concerns. The argument will then return its focus upon the method of Analysis that this writing has sought to provide a demonstration of throughout its discussion to consider Blum and McHugh's distinction between rules and principles that (in part) provides a way to address the problematic sense in Garfinkel's work that

conventionality dictates the available responses to intractable problems. The concluding section of this chapter will consider the affinity between the work of Arendt and Blum and McHugh but suggests that to more fully appreciate the way that different forms of human activity could each respond to the banality of evil Blum and McHugh's work could benefit from the distinction Arendt makes between thinking and other forms mental life. This distinction is seen as important to avoid mechanically recommending that reflecting endlessly on an activity through thinking about its significance is the *only* available response to performance, though without denying that engaging in this form of reflection is always a possibility. This appreciation of judging the relevance of each of the different human faculties for responding to the performance of an activity is an understanding the argument will seek to demonstrate by recognizing that its own concern for the significance of human activity has been worked out through discussing the way in which this concern has been shown in each of the case studies that have been examined. The concluding remarks of this chapter will consider the problem developed in relation to the banality of evil through this discussion of the human faculty. This concerns the problem of the way in which to exercise judgment in relation to social order while recognizing the indeterminacy involved in the determinations made by this faculty.

A Socratic Intervention upon the Acceptance of Wrongdoing as Commonplace

The discussion of the banality of evil has suggested the importance of recognizing convention for understanding the widespread acceptance of mass murder during the genocides in Rwanda and Cambodia. In each case the support for this practice in terms of its legality and in terms of public opinion has encouraged those in agreement with the killings, has gained compliance from those who are either not overly concerned with their occurrence or may even object to them happening and has demonstrated the marginality of those who would not agree to

go along with the killings regardless of what convention dictated. A striking feature of the banality of evil is the contrasts it presents with the traditional understanding of evil that suggests that in its greatest incarnations evil occurs through the dedication of remarkable but terrible individuals to devising elaborate and single-minded plans that either deliberately bring about tremendous misery and devastation or show little concern if others suffer such a fate. The significance of convention in the cases of genocide where millions are killed suggests many of its proponents have no special demonic gifts and simply shuffle their way into supporting these occurrences when circumstances blow them in the direction where the opportunity to take part in its events happens to present itself, events that represent some of the worst evils committed in human history.

For Hannah Arendt, Plato's *Gorgias* is one of the reference points she uses to grapple with the implications of the Third Reich for understanding the banality of evil in relation to the way in which the notion of evil has been discussed within the Western tradition. She introduces the dialogue as part of her discussion of the "moral collapse of Europe" or the mainstream acceptance of mass murder in Nazi Germany that she identifies in her discussion of the banality of evil. Socrates' well-known assertion in the *Gorgias* that it is better to suffer a wrong than to commit it is presented by Arendt as a way to challenge the claim that those who gave their support to the Nazi regime had no other choice than to do so. The controversy surrounding Arendt's coverage of Eichmann's trial in which strong support was given to the argument that others cannot make judgments about what ought to have been done without themselves having lived under Nazi rule²⁷¹ only further amplified her concerns about the standing of morality in contemporary times. This controversy had also been illustrative of a difference between classical and modern ways of understanding "moral weakness" that is highlighted by Arendt in her

examination of the faculty of the will. Socrates argues that his opponents are ignorant in *choosing* a course of action that denies pursuing what they themselves consider to be “right” but this sense of agency is lost in the arguments made by Arendt’s opponents in the Eichmann controversy through the suggestion that individuals simply went along with what they were forced to do against their will. In spite of this difference the suggestion that doing wrong is worse than suffering it would still have been a provocative statement for a classical audience and it will be examined as a notion that potentially could interrupt the thoughtlessness of the banality of evil and the lack of imagination that is involved in refusing to consider other possibilities beyond what is dictated by convention in response to the fundamentally irresolute question of what way to act is “best.”

Elenchus: The Banal as an Opener for Thinking

A contemporary criticism of the *Gorgias* that seemingly would dismiss the suggestion of using Socrates’ statement to intervene in a beneficial way is the challenge Bruno Latour issues in his article “Socrates’ and Callicles’ Settlement – or the Invention of the Impossible Body Politic” to the ready acceptance of the dialogue’s arguments. Latour contends that the traditional framing of the dialogue as a question of might versus right pays too close attention to the bickering between Socrates and his opponents – Protagoras, Polus and Callicles – and fails to recognize the deeper, highly elitist assumption they all share concerning the need of the governed to be managed and controlled. Their differences concern the means to accomplish this type of dominance, which is to occur either by the abstract theorizing of Socrates that legislates obedience to an all-too-pure form of morality or the use of force wielded by those in power that each of Socrates’ three opponents propose and is championed by Callicles to its most extreme conclusions. Latour argues that each of the two sides in this debate give no consideration to

consulting with the constituency over which the governing powers (either through persuasion or force) are to make their proclamations.

In response to Latour's argument, Jeff Kochan contends in his article "Rescuing the *Gorgias* from Latour" that Socrates is in no way endorsing or practicing an abstract form of theorizing and this can be shown by examining the way in which the Socratic method of *elenchus* arrives at the understanding that it is better to suffer wrong than commit it. Latour argues that Socrates treats his statement as an absolute truth but Kochan suggests this is a failure to recognize Socrates' understanding of friendship as consisting of the notion of "geometric equality." His examination begins and ends with an opinion – that it is better to suffer wrong than commit it – but this opinion becomes more "thoughtful" through the practice of *elenchus*. This thoughtfulness is achieved not by Socrates exerting additional brain power in private deliberation but by the "friendship"²⁷² of those he meets who are willing to engage him in conversation on the subjects of his concern.²⁷³ His understanding of this examined opinion then becomes more multi-perspectival and is reflected in Socrates' description of the way it (as well as the other opinions he considers to be true) have been "confirmed" for him:

All I am saying is what I always say: I myself don't know the facts of these matters, but I've never met anyone, including the people here today, who could disagree with what I'm saying and still avoid making himself ridiculous.²⁷⁴

The statement that it is better to suffer wrong than commit it could be thought of as a placeholder that reminds Socrates of his past conversations about the subject it addresses. Kochan's account of the Socratic method stands in striking opposition to Arendt's characterization of Eichmann in that Eichmann's opinions take the form of thoughtless clichés and "even when he did succeed in

constructing a sentence of his own, he repeated it until it became a cliché.”²⁷⁵ Her description illustrates the “method” by which Eichmann shows no ability to imagine things from the perspective of others as his thoughts are a series of well-repeated sayings that echo in his head that he has re-examined with no one, including himself.

Latour and Garfinkel and the Integrity of Everyday Ways of Making Sense of the World

Kochan’s counter-criticism challenges Latour’s suggestion that the Socratic method involves detached theorizing that is not attentive to the particulars of the circumstances it addresses and also illustrates that Kochan is in agreement with Latour about the importance of theorizing that is attentive to a consideration of these particulars. Latour’s description of a new science and a new conception of the social are not discussed by Kochan but in his description of these subjects Latour more fully explains his alternative to Socratic theorizing. In response to his concerns with the concentration of power into the hands of the few Latour envisions a far more expansive notion of the body politic that includes non-human entities and grants to them a sense of agency. The suggestion is intriguing but seems as though it would benefit from the distinctions Arendt makes about the different capacities within the human condition, particularly with regard to the notion of action. Action is an activity that occurs not from necessity but is freely chosen to be engaged in and can be distinguished from the influence that the non-human world indisputably exerts on political matters through (for example) the stability that work provides by creating a world to conduct human affairs or the sustenance provided by the labouring activity that attends to the biological necessities of life so that the possibility exists to freely choose to take part in politics.

In other writings Latour cites Harold Garfinkel as an important influence upon his work,²⁷⁶ especially with regard to the emphasis that Garfinkel places on analyzing the sense-

making abilities of everyday members “without thought of correctives or irony.”²⁷⁷ Latour’s praise of ethnomethodology on this point seems to be somewhat at odds with his way of reading the *Gorgias*, if Schutz’s distinction between first and second order explanations is taken into consideration. Garfinkel cautions against the sense making practices of everyday members being accounted for by social scientists through their use of second order explanations, which is an explanation that fails to acknowledge the social scientist’s reliance upon their own sense making practices to explain the sense making practices they are analyzing in the social world. An example of this type of second order explanation could be a Marxist interpretation of the experiences of workers in a shipyard that refers to notions of class, false consciousness and alienation. Ethnomethodology suggests that when these terms are introduced by the social scientist and not the workers in the study then the analysis is overlooking the sense making practices that constitute the part of the social world they have chosen to direct their focus. These sense making practices that transpire within first order explanations are precisely what ethnomethodology considers to be the social sciences’ object of study. Latour’s charges of elitism against Socrates in the *Gorgias*, as well as the terminology he uses in Actor Network Theory (nodes, *etc.*) to account for phenomenon in the social world would seem to indicate that Latour is issuing the types of correctives offered by second order explanations that Garfinkel cautions an analyst against making.

In his praise of Garfinkel Latour also mention the breaching experiments used in ethnomethodology for the way this method puts these sense-making practices on display by “transform[ing] even mundane encounters into controversies.”²⁷⁸ In discussing the banality of evil, a trouble with Garfinkel’s way of making trouble is that the aim of replicating everyday ways of making sense of the world “without corrective or irony” does not seem to show concern

for what else may be possible in the situations where adopting these sense making practices may be deemed inappropriate. However, Garfinkel's discussion of the difference between "the attitudes of daily life and scientific theorizing" that he bases on the account of this subject given by Alfred Schutz suggests his appreciation of these everyday sense making practices may involve more complexity than that of being in compliance with their understanding. In terms that sound as though they would very much win Latour's approval Garfinkel suggests that "the vision of the ideal scientist" is a hindrance to understanding the everyday ways of making sense of the world that are organized by a different set of parameters. His argument is a challenge to the standard ways of conducting investigations in the social sciences and to make his case he highlights the disregard scientific rationality shows for the norms of social conduct that they purport to comprehend more fully. For instance, the differences that Garfinkel recognizes include the everyday attitude that objects are as they appear and the scientist's interest in discovering what is behind appearances. He also mentions the everyday understanding that individuals have a vested interest in the events they take part in and possess an interpretive frame to appreciate their significance and that this attitude stands in contrast to the objectivity that scientists seek to maintain towards the events of concern to their investigation, which they strive to avoid judging in advance.²⁷⁹ The understanding that scientific theorizing generates is described as being artificial but it also may be seen as presenting an alternative to the everyday orientation to the world in which "a correctly used proposition is one for whose use the user specifically expects to be socially supported and by the use of which he furnishes evidence of his bona fide collectivity status."²⁸⁰

Garfinkel's recognition of the difference between scientific and everyday explanations suggests that the reflexive turn in ethnomethodology is open to appreciating the integrity of

different ways of making sense of the social world, especially one as neglected as the taken-for-granted understanding of everyday members. Ethnomethodology might even record in its studies the sense making practices of those who have refused to go along with the practice of genocide, as well as those who chose to comply with its perpetration of mass killing. A difficulty with its approach seems to lie in its inability to discriminate between the merits of these two ways of making sense of the world, which seems not unlike the trouble identified by the genocide resistor “Gustave” in Rwanda when he mentions his need to avoid those that will encourage him to take up bad ways. His explanation seems to imply he had few resources of his own to resist the temptation posed by the influence to adopt the practices of those around him, though Gustave at least took care to note and emulate those he felt would steer him towards doing good.

As for the difference between science and everyday understanding Garfinkel’s explanation makes clear that he opposes the suggestion that the everyday attitude could either viably or ought to reorganize itself in the ways that science prescribes. In a footnote Garfinkel refers to the differences between scientific theorizing and the everyday attitude as being a manifestation of the dynamic that Weber describes in his discussion of the incompatibility of the formal, means-end rationality adhered to by the scientific perspective and the substantive, value-oriented rationality that is reflective of the everyday attitude.²⁸¹ A difference in these two accounts is that Garfinkel’s criticisms seem to suggest that the imposition of the scientific perspective upon the way the everyday attitude organizes itself will simply end in futility, while Weber’s concern is the domination of formal rationality that he likens to an iron cage against which resistance is increasingly becoming a futile exercise. After posing the question about what permits those who adopt a scientific perspective to “make substantial claims for a living upon those to whom the attitude is foreign and in many cases repugnant,”²⁸² Garfinkel then concludes

his discussion by reiterating that any attempt to impose a model of conduct devised by scientific theorizing upon daily life will be met with recalcitrance and only serve to “magnify the senseless character of a behavioral environment and multiply the disorganized features of the systems of interaction.”²⁸³

The phrase “breaching experiments” implies that Garfinkel is not rejecting (social) science but is concerned with making the experimenter more consciously aware of the differences between their form of rationality and the everyday attitude. Experiments that (for example) violate the social norms associated with maintaining personal space between speakers in casual conversation expose not only the way that the everyday attitude constructs these norms but challenges the assertion that the set of norms that science ascribes to are a “more rational” way of organizing social life. In considering the banality of evil and the concerns it suggests with regards to the unthinking compliance to social norms, recognizing the integrity and coherence of the everyday attitude seems like an indispensable first step for appreciating the appeal involved in following convention. This moves past the attempts to dismiss the ideology of Nazism, Hutu Power or the Khmer Rouge as irrational nonsense or to explain them in terms of some form of abnormal psychological affliction that medicalizes their “condition.” It also adjusts for what is perhaps Arendt’s willingness to too readily disregard the use of clichés, a view that is suggested by the comments she makes about her personal language use in an interview with Gunter Gaus. She explains that despite being fluent in oral and written French and being able to write fluently in English she communicates as much as possible in her native tongue where her knowledge of poetic works allows her to respond to the difficulty posed by the situation “in language where one cliché chases another.”²⁸⁴ In comparison to Arendt, the sense that an analysis might begin with everyday usage is certainly more evident in Kochan’s description of *elenchus*

and its reference to Socrates starting his inquiries with an opinion he had repeated to many people, and seems to offer a potential model for addressing the thoughtless relation to convention indicative of the banality of evil.

The Lack of Certainty in Avoiding Wrongdoing

The focus in the *Gorgias* upon rhetoric is distinguished from sophistry in a way that shows a difference both between these two subjects and between Socrates and his interlocutors. While each of the participants in the conversation shares a distaste for sophistry, Socrates clearly would not agree with the others in considering a discipline intended for a common Athenian audience beneath him or its focus on the “good” as a needless interference upon rhetoric’s professed ability to allow its students to gain power over others. The distaste Socrates describes having for sophistry concerns the way it engages in contradiction. He sees a difficulty in the sophists’ demanding of a fee to teach virtue as their students, if they have become virtuous from what they have learned, will insist on repaying their teachers out of gratitude for the lessons they have received.²⁸⁵ This discussion of the influence that a teacher has upon their pupils begins to address the main concern of the dialogue with Socrates challenging Callicles’ suggestion that those who ignore trying to become morally “better” are “better off” (in some ill-defined way²⁸⁶) by asking who has been made “better” by practicing rhetoric. The prominent rhetoricians that Callicles cites are dismissed by Socrates for either having been executed or exiled by the Athenian populace and as an alternative Socrates mentions Aristeides who was not a rhetorician but considered to be a good leader for the city of Athens.

Although not mentioned in the dialogue, Aristeides was (oddly enough) also forced into exile by the Athenians,²⁸⁷ but the greater irony of the discussion is that Socrates was of course put to death by the Athenian people. Plato seems to have Socrates offer a posthumous defence of

himself²⁸⁸ (of sorts) through his answer to Callicles' suggestion that the only reason Socrates maintains those who are morally "better" are also better off when facing exile or death is that he never imagines he could be in this type of situation.²⁸⁹ In his response Socrates likens the rhetoricians who justify escaping the verdict of the "corrupt" political body they once led as statesmen to being no less absurdly hypocritical than the sophists who sue in court their "corrupt" former pupils that have cheated them out of the fees they owe them once they have already made them "virtuous."²⁹⁰ He also argues that "no man fears the mere act of dying, except he who be utterly irrational"²⁹¹ and ends the discussion by telling a fable "that he believes to be true"²⁹² about the price to be paid in the afterlife for wrongdoing.

One problematic aspect of Socrates' argument concerns the extent to which statesmen can ensure their guidance will "better" their followers. Socrates suggest that if he were called upon to defend himself in court that he would fare badly at winning the favour of the jury and compares himself to a doctor who has to explain to children why his painful remedies are more beneficial to them than the delicious food a cook makes for them to eat.²⁹³ This argument would seem to suggest that Socrates wants to have it both ways and is hard to reconcile with his earlier suggestion that evaluating statesmen is like evaluating a herdsman who

would be considered a bad one ... if he took over animals that did not kick or butt or bite, and in the result they were found to be doing these things out of sheer wildness. Or do you not consider any keeper of any animal whatever a bad one, if he turns out the creature he received tame so much wilder than he found it?²⁹⁴

Two objections that could be raised in defence of Socrates are that the Athenian populace was by no means "tame" (in the non-pejorative sense of the term suggested by his analogy) when he

began dialoguing with them and, also, he is a citizen of Athens and not a statesman in charge of ruling the city.

In the case of the first of these objections the argument Socrates makes involving the herdsmen is part of his dismissal of Callicles' suggestion that Pericles can be named as an example of a great orator and leader of Athens. Socrates notes that during his tenure:

Pericles was popular at first, and the Athenians passed no degrading sentences upon him so long as they were “worse”; but as soon as they had been made honourable and upright by him, at the end of our Pericles' life they convicted him of embezzlement, and all but condemned him to death, clearly because they thought him a rogue.²⁹⁵

This argument will later set up Socrates' comparison between the hypocrisy of statesmen and sophists who complain about the ill-treatment they receive from their followers who they also claim to have made “better.” He suggests that this represents a poorly thought out effort by each to defend themselves against harm – to their wallet in the case of the sophists or to their wallet and body in the case of the statesmen – and Socrates quite nobly did not show a concern for either of these things when facing execution. In his defence at court Socrates cautions his fellow citizens of Athens that they “will not so easily find another like me”²⁹⁶ and explains that he is concerned about the harm that will be done to them if he is put to death. With this being the case the argument he makes against Pericles would then seem to also apply to himself. If he is claiming the Athenians who were “worse” grew “better” in some way from the many years of conversations they had with Socrates why then at the end of his life when “they had been made honourable and upright” would they decide to convict him of corrupting the youth and preaching

false gods?²⁹⁷ The other objection that notes that Socrates did not hold a position of leadership in Athens and so did not exert its accompanying level of influence is certainly true in a literal sense but is undercut by Socrates' claim in the *Gorgias* that he considers himself to be "one of the few, not to say the only one, who attempts the true art of statesmanship."²⁹⁸

The answers to these objections do not challenge Socrates' assertion that "to suffer harm is better than choosing to do it" or its importance as a form of guidance to consider in response to wrongdoing. This guidance is not a guarantee against wrongdoing being committed, which the dialogue seems to acknowledge by conducting a contentious debate that works out the merits of its advice by making reference to both reasoned argument and the telling of a myth to further persuade its listeners. The stipulation to avoid "choosing" to do wrong suggests that even those who have been persuaded by the advice given by this phrase will experience difficulty in following its guidance and leaves open the possibility to recognize that knowledge of what will avoid wrongdoing is fundamentally uncertain and never known in an absolute sense. The case might even be made that Plato recognizes the perplexity involved in preventing wrong from being committed by presenting Socrates' struggles with convincing Callicles and in the irony of having him suggest that the leaders of Athens that were sentenced to execution by the city's citizens cannot claim to have been beneficial to the city. This interpretation of the *Gorgias* would take its cue from the arguments that suggest that the *Republic* was a satirical look at the way to design a state that would create another Socrates but in this case the unpredictability is associated with the prevention of wrongdoing.

A sense of fundamental uncertainty that the Socratic dialogues seem to acknowledge by their aporetic character is perhaps also being recognized in Garfinkel's work through its reference (quoted above) to the way in which the imposition of scientific rationality on the

everyday attitude will “magnify the senseless character of a behavioral environment.” His suggestion that science is not introducing this problematic would seem to indicate that the senselessness had to have been present in the first place for it to be further magnified. The ethnomethodological approach Garfinkel pioneers concerns itself with the technical problem of how everyday members respond to this senselessness and “make sense” of the world. What this consideration of the *Gorgias* adds to the discussion is that a focus on avoiding wrongdoing provides a way in which to respond to this uncertainty that must be continually worked out as the Socratic method of *elenchus* seems to imply. This Socratic model of a citizen who dialogues with their fellow citizens about their sense of wrongdoing also seems to show an affinity with Arendt’s demand that everyone be able to think and that this thinking involves judging the particulars of a situation that in certain cases will involve avoiding being a part of committing a “catastrophe.”

The universality of thinking is also acknowledged in Blum and McHugh’s work through their acceptance of Garfinkel’s collapsing of the theorist/member distinction but the difference in their work is that theorizing is more fully articulated and preserved as a particular perspective on everyday understanding, which involves reflecting upon the “good” of its practices.

Ethnomethodology is fortunately unlike scientific explanations in that its discussion of the reflexivity of accounts acknowledges that everyday understanding is ordered by its own sense making practices. But unfortunately, unlike the Socratic notion of *elenchus* ethnomethodology is not concerned with working through the implications of these sense making practices and considering the merits of whether their performance should occur. In the next section Blum and McHugh’s work will be discussed for the way that they suggest that this concern for the “good”

is recognized in thinking and which is explained in their work with reference to a distinction they make between rules and principles.

The Need to Theorize Distinguished from All Ways of Pursuing a Concern for the “Good”

In *Self-Reflection in the Arts and Sciences*, Alan Blum and Peter McHugh challenge the notion suggested by Garfinkel and others of a social actor limited by the possibilities presented by convention in forming a response to what cannot be known in an absolute sense. The argument they make centres on a distinction between rules and principles and looks reflexively at the theoretical inquirer to suggest that a principled theorist is not exclusively preoccupied with minding the rules and conventions of theoretical investigation in a competent fashion. Blum and McHugh argue for the need of the theorist to demonstrate a concern for the principle by which they elect to pursue theorizing and that this principle be recognized as necessary.²⁹⁹ This necessity is implied by the decision to theorize as opposed to doing other things but is an activity that is distinguished from “doing other things” in its having the potential to inquire about the “good” of what it does. As an illustration of where this interest has been shown to be lacking, Max Weber suggests in *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that the practitioners of modern capitalism curiously demonstrate a great deal of apathy towards being able to account for their pursuit of economic interests. Weber mentions this issue in part to defend the counterintuitive suggestion of his thesis that a religious ethic animates the capitalists’ money-making activities when for these individuals “the thought of the pious boredom of paradise has little appeal.”³⁰⁰ “If you ask them what the meaning is of their restless activity,” Weber proposes:

They would perhaps give the answer, if they knew any at all: “to provide for my children and grandchildren.” But more often and,

since that motive is not peculiar to them, but was just as effective for the traditionalist, more correctly, simply: that business with its continuous activity has become a necessary part of their lives.³⁰¹

The necessity that Weber is referring to involves a thoughtless acceptance of what is conventional and not representative of the principle that Blum and McHugh suggest that a theorist is acting upon when reflecting upon the “good” of their activities.

Contrary to what may be implied by this example, the notion of a principled theorist is not restricted to those who make their profession as thinkers nor denied to other professions (such as those in the field of business). Blum and McHugh emphasize that the theorist begins *in medias res*, in the middle of things, and gains their “status” as a theorist not from any form of specialized training but by being a social actor who is accountable for the “good” of what they do in the world. This contrasts with the idea of making detached pronouncements about the current state of affairs and arguing (for instance) about the need to bring about a more perfect end envisioned by reason. Blum and McHugh suggest that the theorist’s concern for the “good” is made without a claim to knowing what the “good” is in an absolute sense:

The great insight of theorizing is to affirm our need to live enjoyably with this irony: That the absolute character of the “ultimate truth” is denied by its dependency upon discourse and by the need to be grasped and expressed, and that the absolute character of discourse (of the speaker of the ego) is denied by its being *en medias res*.³⁰²

Blum and McHugh further explain that as a feature of being in *medias res*, the theorist, by working out their (limited) understanding of the ultimate truth, show themselves in the

particularity of the circumstances in which they fashion their understanding. Their argument later affirms the mutual need between ultimate truth and articulation but with a greater emphasis upon the issue of this need: “That the ultimate truth needs discourse *and* is absolute points to a source of irony in my recognition that I am needed by the ultimate truth as much as it is needed by me.”³⁰³

To illustrate this point about the importance of recognizing the need to use language to express truth in a limited way Blum and McHugh take up the issue that the notion of detachment offers a very fitting description of an ironic theorist who sneers at the world for the ways in which it is lacking relative to what is “true.” They cite as an example the formula “I know that I do not know,”³⁰⁴ although their explanation argues against the suggestion that Socrates, in working with this understanding, is engaged in a detached form of theorizing. The charge seems to more aptly describes the Cynics of ancient Greece, whose most well-known proponent, Diogenes, Plato once referred to as “Socrates gone mad” for his flouting of convention. This includes the stunt he performed of carrying a lamp in the marketplace during the day claiming to be looking for an honest man and his description of himself as a cosmopolitan and “citizen of the world” (i.e. he is from everywhere so he is also from nowhere in the world).

Blum and McHugh contend that the theorist who is concerned with the principle that accounts for the “good” of theorizing experiences a sense of enjoyment from recognizing the irony of absolute knowledge deferring to discourse to actualize its need to be expressed when the notions expressed in discourse are only capable of offering partial representations of what is true. An illustration of what this form of enjoyment might look like in practice is suggested by Keith Doubt in his use of Blum and McHugh’s work to analyze the writings of nationally known Bosnian poet Mak Dizdar. Dizdar refers to Circe’s transformation of Odysseus’ men into swine

and Doubt suggests that in this condition the men, though still alive, had lost their identity as human by existing in silence and losing their relation to discourse.³⁰⁵ The contrast is with Odysseus who takes care not to lose his powers of speech and who, Dizdar writes, “even the Gods envy” for they envy “those who are most wise, and most sinful.”³⁰⁶ Doubt asks: “Why, though, would gods envy humans who are utterly wise and utterly mistaken?” He answers through explaining Odysseus’ understanding of the situation:

Odysseus is grasped by the ultimate’s need to be grasped and expressed. The neediness of the gods grips Odysseus; it defines him, it affirms who he is absolutely. The irony amazes Odysseus. The gods are subject to the need to be grasped and expressed, and this knowledge makes Odysseus wise.³⁰⁷

Doubt’s interpretation of Dizdar’s work is that by lifting the spell to make his men human again Odysseus distinguishes himself as someone who recognizes that discourse, in its flawed way, is needed to articulate the absolute principle about the “good” of what he is doing.

The closing lines of Blum and McHugh’s work further considers the issue of need and proposes that “if it is perfectly clear to us that the notion and our relation to it need to be demonstrated and made explicit, it is just as certain that the need to demonstrate this very need for demonstration is a necessity that stands fast for us, a conviction we inherit with (and as) the need to glimpse the ultimate truth as subject.”³⁰⁸ In Doubt’s example, Odysseus’ experience of the need to articulate what is ultimate “affirms who he is absolutely,” but where does his need for this type of affirmation arise? To respond to this concern Blum and McHugh pose a question: “Can we say that life makes a claim that needs to be worked out and recollected?”³⁰⁹ Their suggestion is not that this need is a naturally occurring phenomenon but that the conditions for

theorizing are not set by the whims of theorist electing to theorize. This need takes form as that which conditions theorizing and involves choice in the way in which the theorist elects to respond to the need to articulate the “good” of their activities (and, as previously stated, show themselves in their response). Blum further develops an understanding of the need of the theorist to demonstrate their need to theorize in his later work that moves from the terms of the ironic theorist concerned with the principle of theorizing to a discussion of impasse analysis.³¹⁰ The notion of an impasse understood in its literal or etymological sense of “that which cannot be passed” signifies that the need to demonstrate the need for demonstration does not originate from a theorist’s choosing to present such a need but that a condition for theorizing is to perpetually work out responses to irresolute problems that are unavoidably a part of what is experienced in life.

In Arendt’s writing the need to theorize is recognized as being an ever-present possibility that accompanies (social) life through the capacity of theorizing to reflect upon the recourse to rules and conventions. She observes that: “If what you were doing consisted in applying general rules of conduct to particular cases as they arise in ordinary life, you will find yourself paralyzed because no such rules can withstand the wind of thought.”³¹¹ Her argument parallels Blum and McHugh’s in defending Socrates and Socratic irony against the charge of engaging in a detached form of theorizing that sneers at reality by her suggestion that nihilism represents a danger inherent to thinking and the cynicism of some Socrates’ followers only represents their decision to arrest the thinking process at the point where it demonstrates problematic aspects of convention.³¹² A contribution Arendt makes to understanding the need to demonstrate the need for demonstration is to consider this matter in terms of the human faculties, in this case the faculty of thought in its quest for meaning. This seems to answer some of the difficulties that

Blum and McHugh experience in accounting for the origin of theorizing by their looking outside of the capacity to theorize. They recognize that theorizing is conditioned by denying that the impulse to theorize lies solely upon the whim of the theorist but they also refer to these conditions as being in “life” – that is, something that is not inherent to but outside of the activity of theorizing to which the theorist responds. As Blum more explicitly suggests in his later work, the events of life collide with one another in such a way that its participants cannot avoid experiencing an impasse in their attempts to respond to fundamentally irresolute problems. In Arendt’s account the understanding that the meaning of things is never-ending is inherent to the faculty of thought and life appears in this way only when its events are viewed from the perspective of the thinking activity. This understanding permits her explanation to recognize the possible appearance of someone like Eichmann who never experiences an impasse or a concern for the meaning of things or what he is doing as a reflection of his inability to think. In recognizing the possibility to think she also seems to acknowledge the limits of this faculty by suggesting that endless reflection, though conceivable, is not humanly possible and to avoid the “paralysis” brought upon by the “wind of thought” would seem to call upon the faculty of judgment. Judgment in this sense maintains a concern for the “good” of an activity with the understanding that this concern need not necessarily be pursued through thinking and its focus upon reflecting on the significance of an activity.

Arendt’s reference to the human faculties suggests that Blum and McHugh’s explanation represents a faithful account of the activity of thinking as a phenomenon, but their account has also become a bit too faithful in its estimation of the scope of this phenomenon. If the Western tradition initially places too great an emphasis upon contemplation to assess the relative merit of the other human faculties, Blum and McHugh seem to totalize the thinking experience to suggest

that life is synonymous with its never-ending concern for the meaning of things and that this concern gets masked by convention and other considerations that do not address the irresolute character of working out the “good” of an activity. If the experience of an impasse is “fundamental” in the sense of not only being unresolvable but also unavoidable then responding to this experience would be no less necessary and unavoidable. These responses will include theorizing, or thinking, as well as exercising other human faculties and then, unless the decision to think is followed mechanically, responding in a way that involves exercising the other human faculties would not necessarily be representative of a failure to theorize. Arendt suggests that the thinking activity’s quest for meaning becomes humanly possible by exercising judgment and her argument provides an indication of the importance of the other human faculties for ensuring the possibility that the experience of an impasse, which is inherent to the thinking activity, is prevented from becoming totally “impassable” or avoids reaching the point where it becomes fully incapacitating.

Working with this understanding of thinking that considers its place among the other human faculties, what can be said about the thoughtless compliance with convention that is indicative of the banality of evil?

The Banality of Evil as it Relates to Each of the Human Faculties and to the *What of Theorizing*

In comments fitting to her suggestion that morality is being treated like table manners, Arendt argues that little comfort should be taken from the “success” of the de-Nazification in post-war Germany as this was just a repeat of the process that brought about the country’s Nazification.³¹³ Each instance is a case of the old system of values and customs being thoughtlessly exchanged for the new one currently being enforced by convention and in Nazi

Germany this thoughtlessness manifested itself into a banal form of evil. Perhaps another way to recognize the occurrence of the banality of evil as a phenomenon is to consider the reports from Rwanda stating that in the years afterwards visitors to the sites of major massacres carried out during the genocide would hear under their feet the crunch of bones from the unburied dead.³¹⁴ This imagery might bring to mind a crowd that in response to some form of excitement tramples on and kills its own members under the movement of its collective weight. As a rule this type of killing is an impersonal act committed against “anonymous” targets who are unknown even to those who land the fatal blows. The individuals who stop and think and refuse to go along with the dangerous movements of the crowd would seem to be taking personal responsibility for what they do, but in the event of widespread compliance to a murderous order that is representative of the banality of the evil, if the focus of an individual is to ensure they avoid taking part of wrongdoing is this really the “best” response available to them?

In discussing Socrates’ statement that to suffer wrongdoing is better than to commit it Arendt argues that this

Moral truth ... has nothing whatsoever to do with action. Politically speaking – that is, from the viewpoint of the community or of the world we live in – it is irresponsible; its standard is the self and not the world, neither its improvement or change.³¹⁵

She also adds that “the political concern is not whether the act of striking somebody unjustly or of being struck unjustly is more disgraceful. The concern is exclusively with having a world in which such acts do not occur.”³¹⁶ This is consistent with the view she presents in her essay “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” which she concludes by saying of the activity of thinking

that it “may prevent catastrophes, at least for myself, in the rare moments when the chips are down.”³¹⁷

If thinking is lacking in worldliness, the faculty of the will and its concern with “beginning” presents a difficulty of its own for the aspirations to create “a world in which wrongdoing does not occur.” In Arendt’s account the will shrinks from its capacity to freely choose to begin something new, even in the case of the founders of the American Republic who she suggests are representative of one of the most ambitious attempts to begin a new form of government but ended up “ransacking the archives of antiquity” and “did not rebel against antiquity when they discovered ... that salvation always comes from the past, that the ancestors were *maiores*, the ‘greater ones’ by definition.”³¹⁸ In relation to the apparent “un-willingness” (so to speak) of the will to recognize its own capacity for freedom Arendt proposes that “this impasse, if such it is, cannot be opened or solved except by an appeal to another mental faculty, no less mysterious than the faculty of beginning, the faculty of judgment, an analysis of which at least may tell us what is involved in our pleasures and displeasures.”³¹⁹ Judgment presents the possibility to be freed from the weight of history in deciding the way in which to do things, a suggestion that Arendt recognizes in Cato’s statement that “the victorious cause pleased the Gods, but the defeated one pleases Cato.”³²⁰ The fatalism that judgment denies to history seems no less important than this faculty’s capacity to be freed from accepting that things must be done exclusively in the way that convention proposes. The discovery of the faculty of willing seems to be viewed with suspicion by Arendt, especially the suggestion of performing an activity “against one’s will.” This is a suggestion that seems to encourage more fully exploring the idea that what is believed privately excuses the public performance of activities considered to be distasteful.

In examining these different human faculties for a way in which to create a world where wrongdoing does not occur, what seems important to acknowledge is that knowledge about what would avoid wrongdoing, including the form of compliance involved in the banality of evil, is not possible to obtain in an absolute sense for either oneself or for others. This fundamental and unavoidable lack of understanding was recognized when discussing the difficulties that Socrates seems to run into when suggesting that he is of benefit to the city but his involvement in it ended with their decision to execute him. The sense that absolute knowledge is not possible to attain is not an invitation to fatalism and accepting the understanding that if genocide occurred in history then this is the way things always will and must be. If absurdity lies in the suggestion that a world can be created that will predictably ensure that this form of killing does not occur, then also absurd is the suggestion that nothing can or should be done to at least attempt to create such a world.

From what has been argued this effort will call upon the exercise of the full range of human faculties that may include the need to perform labour and survive under the extreme conditions in a death camp, the need to perform work that will document the occurrence of genocide and suggest ways of working out a response to its happening and the need to perform actions that lead to a new form of collective activity that aims to go against the practice of genocide. It will also include the exercise of imagination that breaches convention by suggesting a version of a social actor who not only follows Garfinkel's suggestion that "a correctly used proposition is one for whose use the user specifically expects to be socially supported and by the use of which he furnishes evidence of his bona fide collectivity status"³²¹ but will possibly consider Socrates' advice to Polus that he "should rather choose to have my lyre, or some chorus that I might provide for the public, out of tune and discordant, or to have any number of people

disagreeing with me and contradicting me, than that I should have internal discord and contradiction in my own single self.”³²² It will also involve exercising the will to freely chose do things in ways they have not been done before if this avoids accepting the practice of genocide. And finally, it will involve exercising the judgment that is needed to decide on a case-by-case basis which of the faculties should be called upon to avoid complying with the practice of genocide. This is to suggest that considering the ways in which the practice of genocide relates to the banality of evil is part of working out a fuller sense of the possibilities made available by the different human faculties and perhaps may also contribute to understanding what is meant by referring to a collective that involves formulating a notion of humanity. These considerations might also help to appreciate that the recommendation about the need *to* theorize includes a recommendation about *what to* theorize. The banality of evil understood as thoughtlessness implies that it is of concern to theorizing in that thoughtlessness represents a denial of the possibility to exercise the judgment that is required to recognize the need to engage in the activity of thinking. This discussion of the banality of evil has tried to demonstrate this notion of judgment that recognizes the way in which the banality of evil touches upon the need to theorize – as any subject, if theorized, is possible to work out in the way in which it is relevant to theorizing – through developing in this discussion an understanding of judgment that is concerned with the “good” of an activity pursued either by the reflection upon the significance of an activity in thinking or by the exercise of other faculties.

Endnotes

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- ³ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 287-288.
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- ⁷ Mike F. Keen. "No One's Above Suspicion: Talcott Parsons Under Surveillance," *The American Sociologist* 24, no. 3-4 (1993), 37, https://journals-scholarsportal-info.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/pdf/00031232/v24i3-4/37_noastpus.xml.
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- ¹⁰ Ibid., 3.3.
- ¹¹ Ibid., 4.4.
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- ¹³ Ibid., 5.6.
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- ¹⁵ Peter McHugh, "A Resignation" in *Dianoia* 2, no. 2 (1992).
- ¹⁶ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 289-290.
- ¹⁷ Kieran Bonner, "Arendt, Role Theory and the Ethical Evaluation of Action," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 24, no. 2, (2016): 201.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 214.
- ¹⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," in *Existentialism from Dostoyevsky to Sartre*, edited by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridan Publishing Company, 1989). <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm>.
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- ²¹ "Catch-22 Why Italy is Great," YouTube Video, October 2, 2011, 4:08, from *Catch-22*, directed by Mike Nichols, (United States: Paramount Pictures, 1970), posted by "Maylar," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WeVWupFBkA8>.
- ²² Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 47-48.
- ²³ Ibid., 106.
- ²⁴ Bonner, "Arendt, Role Theory and the Ethical Evaluation of Action," 218-219.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 217.
- ²⁶ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, vi.
- ²⁷ Dale Wasserman, Joe Dorion, and Mitch Leigh, *Man de la Mancha* (Toronto: Random House of Canada Ltd., 1966), 61.
- ²⁸ Bonner, Kieran. "Truth Testing in the Gorgias: Empiricism vs. Dialectic" (unpublished), 16.
- ²⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 137.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 46.
- ³¹ Ibid., 21.
- ³² Ibid., 136.
- ³³ Ibid., 136.
- ³⁴ Ibid., 136-137.
- ³⁵ Ibid., 94-95.
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- ³⁸ Edmund Burke, *On Taste*, accessed July 5, 2018, <https://www.bartleby.com/24/1/1.html>.

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- ³⁹ Rwanda's history is recounted in a number of texts that have studied its genocide; the sources for this discussion of its history are primarily Alison DesForges' *Leave None to Tell Story: Genocide in Rwanda* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1999), Scott Straus' *The Order of Genocide: Race Power War in Rwanda*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2006), and Romeo Dallaire's *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (Toronto: Random House of Canada Ltd., 2003).
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- ⁴² Pierre Bettez Gravel, *Remera: A Community in Eastern Ruanda* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 166.
- ⁴³ Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 35.
- ⁴⁴ Susan Thompson, *Whispering Truth to Power: Everyday Resistance to Reconciliation in Postgenocide Rwanda* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 3-4.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.
- ⁴⁶ John Arundel Barnes, "Class and Committees in a Norwegian Island Parish," *Human Relations* 7, no. 1 (1954): 50, https://journals-scholarsportal-info.proxy.lib.uwaterloo.ca/pdf/00187267/v07i0001/39_cacianip.xml.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.
- ⁴⁸ Bruno Latour, "On Actor Network Theory. A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications," *Finn Olsen, Philosophia* 25, no. 3-4 (1996): 1-7. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/P-67%20ACTOR-NETWORK.pdf>.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁵⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 211.
- ⁵⁶ Latour, "On Actor Network Theory. A Few Clarifications Plus More Than a Few Complications," 13-14.
- ⁵⁷ Martin Plaut, "Rwanda Report Raises Issues of Motive," *BBC News*, August 5, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7544267.stm>.
- ⁵⁸ Bonner, "Truth Testing in the Gorgias: Empiricism vs. Dialectic", 9.
- ⁵⁹ "Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire," 22:34-23:17 and 52:34-53:36.
- ⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt, "On Hannah Arendt" in Hannah Arendt, *Thinking Without Banisters*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2018), 448.
- ⁶¹ DesForges, 261-262.
- ⁶² Jean Hatzfeld, *Machete Season: The Killers in Rwanda Speak* (New York: Picador, 2003), 237.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 237-238.
- ⁶⁴ Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power and War in Rwanda* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 5.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.
- ⁶⁷ Hatzfeld, 239.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 243-244. Primus is a Belgian beer prized as the premium brew in Rwanda; *urwagwa* is a home-brewed banana beer that is widely consumed but considered to be of lesser quality.
- ⁷⁰ See *Ibid.* and the Chapter on "Field Work," 60-65.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 60.
- ⁷² Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under a Dictatorship," in Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited by Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 43.
- ⁷³ Hannah Arendt, "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy," in *Responsibility and Judgment*, 74.
- ⁷⁴ Under Belgian colonial rule Rwanda-Urundi was one political entity that later separated into the modern-day countries of Rwanda and Burundi once each nation gained their independence. The population of both countries is comprised mostly of a Hutu majority and a Tutsi minority with political control of the two countries following opposite patterns: the Tutsi initially controlled Burundi after independence but since the 1990s it has been led

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- mostly by the Hutu.
- ⁷⁵ Stephen Rwembeho, “Kagera River Cursed by Mugesera Apocalypse Hypothesis,” *The New Times: Rwanda’s Leading Daily*, November 8, 2009, <https://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/read/80241>.
- ⁷⁶ Lyons and Straus, *Intimate Enemy*.
- ⁷⁷ Lyons and Straus, *Intimate Enemy*, 47.
- ⁷⁸ Hatzfeld, *Machete Season*, 216.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁸⁰ Fujii, *Webs of Violence*, 169.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 167.
- ⁸² Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 44.
- ⁸³ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 279.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.
- ⁸⁵ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre* (quoted in Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 27).
- ⁸⁶ Craig Etcheson, *The Rise and Demise of Democratic Kampuchea* (Boulder, CO: Pinter, 1984), 99.
- ⁸⁷ Thierry Cruvellier *The Master of Confessions: The Making of a Khmer Rouge Torturer* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2014), 51–52.
- ⁸⁸ *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell*, directed by Rithy Panh, Catherine Dussart Productions, 2011, DVD: 109:33–109:38.
- ⁸⁹ “Yad Vashem Shoah Resource Centre, “Heydrich, Reinhard,” accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%206366.pdf.
- ⁹⁰ Nic Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner: The Story of Comrade Duch and the Khmer Rouge* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 295.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 296.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 296.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 296.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 296.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 316.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 317.
- ⁹⁸ Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*.
- ⁹⁹ Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil*, 349 and 515.
- ¹⁰⁰ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 317.
- ¹⁰¹ Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 118.
- ¹⁰² Hannah Arendt, “Letter to Mary McCarthy,” in *Between Friends: The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, 1949–1975*, edited by Carol Brightman (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 147.
- ¹⁰³ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 1994), 354 and 356.
- ¹⁰⁴ The standard sociological concept that could be used to explain this phenomenon is W.I. Thomas’ notion of the definition of the situation: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” (W.I. Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas, *The Child in America: Behaviour Problems and Programs* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc.), 1928.)
- ¹⁰⁵ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 352.
- ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 353.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 348.
- ¹⁰⁸ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 110–111.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.
- ¹¹⁰ Corey Robin, “The Trials of Hannah Arendt,” *The Nation*, June 1, 2015, <https://www.thenation.com/article/trials-hannah-arendt/>.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹² Steven Aschheim, “‘Eichmann before Jerusalem’ by Bettina Stanglenth,” *The New York Times*, September 4, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/07/books/review/eichmann-before-jerusalem-by-bettina-stanglenth.html?_r=0.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴ The understanding implied by the title *Eichmann Before Jerusalem* is this sense (à la Goffman) that what is expressed privately (in undisclosed interviews) is for some reason a truer representation of what Eichmann believes than what he is willing to state publicly in open court.
- ¹¹⁵ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 18.

- ¹¹⁶ Quoted in Charly Wilder, “Goebbel’s Secretary Struggles with Her Responsibility,” *The New York Times*, July 5, 2016. In this same article it is noted that Pomsel accounts for her willingness to work for Goebbels by suggesting that she was too “‘superficial’ to grasp what was going on around her.” Eichmann: “It is always easy for others to talk after the fact. But what would *they themselves* have done in such a situation?” (Jose Brunner, “Eichmann’s Mind: Psychological, Philosophical and Legal Perspectives,” *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 1, no. 2 [2000]: 459–460).
- ¹¹⁷ See for example Primo Levi’s notion of a grey zone in *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage International, 1989).
- ¹¹⁸ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 18. She offers a version of this argument in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: “Thus, some American literati have professed their naive belief that temptation and coercion are really the same thing, that no one can be asked to resist temptation. (If someone puts a pistol to your heart and orders you to shoot your best friend, then you simply must shoot him. Or, as it was argued – some years ago in connection with the quiz program scandal in which a university teacher had hoaxed the public – when so much money is at stake, who could possibly resist?)” (Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 295).
- ¹¹⁹ Arendt commented upon her work in *Eichmann* by suggesting in a later essay that “I had given a factual account of the trial, and even the book’s subtitle, *A Report on the Banality of Evil*, seemed to me so glaringly borne out by the facts of the case that I felt it needed no further explanation” *Responsibility and Judgment*, 8).
- ¹²⁰ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 252.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 287.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, 287.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, 252.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 287.
- ¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 252.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 288.
- ¹²⁷ This is noted in Dunlop’s commentary on Duch’s psychological assessment: “Perhaps most interesting of all, his imagination was, it read, ‘limited in scope, as is his ability to put himself in other people’s shoes’” (*Ibid.*, 320). See “Ms. Françoise Sironi-Guilbaud,” Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, accessed May 26, 2016, <https://www.eccc.gov.kh/en/witness-expert-civil-party/ms-francoise-sironi-guilbaud>. Sironi-Guilbaud conducted the psychological assessment of Duch and her testimony is summarized as concluding that Duch displays “disempathy and alexithymia.” The traits exhibited in alexithymia include “difficulty in distinguishing and appreciating the emotions of others” (Kory Floyd, *Just the Facts: Interpersonal Communication, 2nd Edition, Study Guide* [Content Technologies, Inc., 2014], https://books.google.ca/books?id=GdMxAgAAQBAJ&pg=PT144&lpg=PT144&dq=alexithymics+have+difficulty+in+distinguishing+and+appreciating+the+emotions+of+others&source=bl&ots=NSTofLDqyu&sig=aByO-Ls3d69qyJDMXJnofx4HeGY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwif8ZOz17jSAhVhxoMKHeqnD_0Q6AEIQzAI#v=onepage&q=alexithymics%20have%20difficulty%20in%20distinguishing%20and%20appreciating%20the%20emotions%20of%20others&f=false.)
- ¹²⁸ Cruvellier, *The Master of Confessions*, 207.
- ¹²⁹ “Eichmann remembered the turning points in his own career rather well, but that did not necessarily coincide with the turning points in the story of the extermination of the Jewish extermination or, as a matter of fact the turning points in history. (He always had trouble remembering the exact date of the outbreak of war with Russia).” Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 53.
- ¹³⁰ Cruvellier, *The Master of Confessions*, 161.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 53.
- ¹³² Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 242.
- ¹³³ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 273.
- ¹³⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 34 and 239.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 108–109.
- ¹³⁶ Cruvellier seeks to build this case throughout his coverage of Duch’s trial by noting Duch’s refusal on most occasions to admit to accusations of wrongdoing if they were not sufficiently corroborated by other evidence as well as his general disdain for the prosecution who he viewed as amateurish in their ability to construct arguments to effectively examine him. See for example Cruvellier, *The Master of Confessions*, 37.
- ¹³⁷ For example, *Ibid.*, 80–81 and 102–103.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 313.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 317.
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 318.

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- ¹⁴¹ Yad Vashem Shoah Resource Centre, “From a Speech by Himmler Before Senior SS Officers in Poznań, October 4, 1943,” accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%204029.pdf.
- ¹⁴² Brigitte Hamann, *Hitlers Edeljude – Das Leben des Armenarztes Eduard Bloch*, quoted in “Hitler’s Favourite Jew: The Strange Case of Dr. Eduard Bloch,” *The Truth Seeker*, October 2, 2011, <http://www.thetruthseeker.co.uk/?p=35156>.
- ¹⁴³ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 46–47.
- ¹⁴⁴ Dunlop, *The Lost Executioner*, 375–376.
- ¹⁴⁵ *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, directed Rithy Panh, Arte France, 2005, DVD: 25:50–28:07.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 28:08–31:55.
- ¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 117:30–118:09.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 127:55–128:03.
- ¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 129:33–131:04.
- ¹⁵⁰ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 164.
- ¹⁵¹ Brunner, “Eichmann’s Mind,” 443. Brunner begins his article by listing the seven different psychological tests that Eichmann was administered in prison and possibly Arendt had these in mind when she made her comment.
- ¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 444.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 444.
- ¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 459.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 445.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 446.
- ¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 459.
- ¹⁵⁸ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 44.
- ¹⁵⁹ *S-21 – Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, 127:43–128:01. Angkar is the name of the Khmer kingdom revered by Cambodians and appropriated by the Khmer Rouge government during their rule.
- ¹⁶⁰ Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1956), 70.
- ¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 67.
- ¹⁶³ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 43. See also Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” *Responsibility and Judgment*, 50.
- ¹⁶⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 31.
- ¹⁶⁵ Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History* (Toronto: Random House of Canada Ltd, 2003), 576–577.
- ¹⁶⁶ A slogan commonly used by the Khmer Rouge stated this attitude plainly in relation to all of the country’s citizens: “To destroy you is no loss, to keep you is no gain.”
- ¹⁶⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 1978), 188–189.
- ¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.
- ¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.
- ¹⁷⁰ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 279.
- ¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 279.
- ¹⁷² Franz Kafka, “Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk,” in *Franz Kafka: The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 116.
- ¹⁷³ Hannah Arendt, “Eichmann was Outrageously Stupid” in *Hannah Arendt: The Last Interview and Other Conversations* (Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, [1964] 2013), 45, quoted in Robin, “Trials.”
- ¹⁷⁴ The notion of “evil” shares the structure of its opposite the “good” in the sense that what is meant by these terms is fundamentally ambiguous but nonetheless of importance to try and work through and understand. In a number of cases the question of who is evil or engaged in wrongdoing is difficult to assess and figures like Hitler, Eichmann and other top Nazi officials may seem to exemplify evil – in some form – but this does not provide ultimate clarification for the term and its meaning. The interest in this writing is to ask if evil makes its appearance in the activities of the Nazis then to what extent can it be understood and what are its implications for other forms of human conduct?
- ¹⁷⁵ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 324.
- ¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.
- ¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 324.
- ¹⁷⁸ Contemplation in Arendt’s view is part of the *vita activa* as are the other mental activities that she discusses in *The Life of the Mind*, thinking, willing and judging. As she explains in *The Human Condition*: “I do not intend to attempt an exhaustive analysis of the *vita activa*, whose articulations have been curiously neglected by a tradition

which considered it chiefly from the standpoint of the *vita contemplativa*, but to try to determine with some measure of assurance their political significance” (78). Her discussion of willing that Arendt argues was unknown to Antiquity also suggests the possibility for the emergence of new ways of “articulating” human activity within the *vita activa*.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 303.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 303.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 248. Arendt quotes Kafka on this point: “He found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself; it seems that he was permitted to find it only under this condition.” She uses this quotation to introduce her chapter on the “*Vita Activa* and the Modern Age” that begins with a section on *World Alienation*.

¹⁸² Ibid., 304.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 298.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 325.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 325.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 322.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 322.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 134.

¹⁹⁰ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 202.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 203.

¹⁹² Ibid., 207.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 207.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 209.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 209–210.

¹⁹⁶ See Arendt’s discussion of the American Revolution at the end of her volume on *Willing* in *The Life of the Mind* (Ibid., 206–217), especially her discussion of the American founding fathers founding a new nation and of what Marxism holds to founding of a new order of society:

To be sure, there is something puzzling in the fact that men of action, whose sole intent and purpose was to change the whole structure of the future world and create a *novus ordo seclorum* ... should have to go to that distant past of antiquity. They looked for a paradigm for a new form of government in their own “enlightened” age and were hardly aware of the fact that they were looking backward. More puzzling, I think, than their actual ransacking of the archives of antiquity is that they did not rebel against antiquity when they discovered that the final and certainly profoundly Roman answer of “ancient prudence” was that salvation always comes from the past, that the ancestors were maiores, the “greater ones” by definition. It is striking, besides, that the notion of the future – precisely a future pregnant with final salvation – bringing back a kind of initial Golden Age, should have become popular at a time when Progress had come to be the dominant concept to explain the movement of History. And the most striking example of the resilience of that very old dream is of course Marx’s fantasy of a classless and warless “realm of freedom” as prefigured in “original communism,” a realm that has a more than superficial resemblance to Saturn’s aboriginal Italic rule, when no laws “fettered [men] to justice” (Ibid., 215).

¹⁹⁷ As a side note, the notion of fame is a frequent point of interest in Arendt’s writings. In the *Origins of Totalitarianism* one of the appeals of ideology is that it provides its followers with the opportunity to achieve infamy, in the *Human Condition* the goal of action is immortality through the performance of great deeds and even in her essay on her late friend Walter, Arendt begins her account of his life by describing the elusiveness of posthumous fame.

¹⁹⁸ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 217.

¹⁹⁹ Arendt, “Some Questions in Moral Philosophy,” *Responsibility and Judgment*, 95.

²⁰⁰ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 272. Arendt’s explanation of examples is perhaps interesting to compare to the notion of Socratic ignorance and its resistance to knowledge claims about the virtues of courage, justice etc. In response to the movement of the dialogues towards the perplexity of not knowing the meaning of these terms, Plato makes reference to myths that formulate an understanding that is recognized as being incomplete. The reliance upon example to formulate an understanding for notions “which otherwise could not be defined” seems not unlike this Platonic response.

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- ²⁰¹ This is a phrase that seems in line with the notion of “good works” and the understanding that these should aim at being performed in the public realm without being witnessed by anyone (see note 208 below).
- ²⁰² Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, “Reflections on the Life of the Mind,” *Political Theory* 10, no. 2 (1982): 296.
- ²⁰³ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 116.
- ²⁰⁴ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 19.
- ²⁰⁵ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 192. “Thinking as such does society little good ... It does not create values; it will not find out, once and for all, what ‘the good’ is; it does not confirm but, rather, dissolves accepted rules of conduct. And it has no political relevance unless special emergencies arise.”
- ²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.
- ²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.
- ²⁰⁹ The Kantian influence is again noticeable on Arendt in this explanation as he represents space and time (respectively) as fundamental components of the way human beings experience the external and internal world.
- ²¹⁰ Arendt chooses the well-known phrase from the New Testament of “let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Matt. 6:3) to sum up the attitude involved in the performance of good works (*The Human Condition*, 74).
- ²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 78.
- ²¹² Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 55–56.
- ²¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.
- ²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42–43.
- ²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.
- ²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.
- ²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 161.
- ²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 94.
- ²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 189.
- ²²¹ “Arendt saw that the banality of evil is potentially far greater in extent – indeed limitless – than the growth of evil from a ‘root.’ A root can be uprooted, which is what she meant to do when she spoke of ‘destroying’ totalitarianism, but the evil perpetrated by an Eichmann can spread over the face of the earth like a ‘fungus’ precisely because it has no root.” (Jerome Kohn, “Evil: The Crime Against Humanity,” *The Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress*, last modified June 15, 2001, <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendhtml/essayc7.html>).
- ²²² Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 116.
- ²²³ In an interview Arendt acknowledges the relevance that her observations about Eichmann have in relation to the bureaucratic worldview by commenting on the response to her report on the trial that “This controversy was partly caused by the fact that I attacked the bureaucracy, and if you attack a bureaucracy, you have got to be prepared that this bureaucracy will defend itself, will attack you, will try to make you impossible and everything which goes with it” (Hannah Arendt, “Interview with Roger Errera,” in *Thinking Without a Banister*, ed. Jerome Kohn [New York: Schocken Books, 2018], 565).
- ²²⁴ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 43.
- ²²⁵ *Ibid.*, “Auschwitz on Trial,” *Responsibility and Judgment*, 241.
- ²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.
- ²²⁷ Arendt, “Outrageously Stupid,” 48.
- ²²⁸ Other accounts suggest a less favourable view of Lucas than Arendt’s portrayal, including the suggestions that he allowed selections of prisoners for the gas chambers that he could have prevented and that his testimony tended to focus only on the periods at the camps where he sought to help the inmates. See Hermann Langbein, *People in Auschwitz* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 357–358.
- ²²⁹ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 248.
- ²³⁰ See the explanation in footnote 228 above.
- ²³¹ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 215–216.
- ²³² *Ibid.*, 223.
- ²³³ Des Forges, *Leave None to Tell the Story*, 261–262.
- ²³⁴ Haztfeld, *Machete Season*, 177.
- ²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 179.
- ²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

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- ²³⁷ Ibid., 182.
- ²³⁸ Ibid., 180–181.
- ²³⁹ Dy, Khamboly. *A History of Democratic Kampuchea (1975–1979)* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2007), 10, http://www.d.dccam.org/Projects/Genocide/DK_Book/DK_History--EN.pdf.
- ²⁴⁰ For a discussion of the recent debate over the culpability of child soldiers, see Darija Markovic, “Child Soldiers: Victims or War Criminals? Criminal Responsibility and Prosecution of Child Soldiers Under International Criminal Law,” Regional Academy of the United Nations, last modified December 14, 2015, available at: http://www.ra-un.org/uploads/4/7/5/4/47544571/child_soldiers_-_victims_or_war_criminals.pdf. Markovic’s report notes the reluctance of the international community to address some of the difficult but fundamental issues associated with child soldiers, including the appropriate age limit for holding children responsible for their wartime activities: “Looking into international documents, none of them state that children should not be prosecuted, but simply prohibit recruitment and use of children in armed forces or armed groups, in most cases, below the age of 15. Cleverly, the international criminal law has distanced itself from prosecuting children and left this option to national legislatures, in which age threshold for criminal responsibility goes from as young as six years old” (5).
- ²⁴¹ Meng-Try Ea and Sorya Sim, *Victims and Perpetrators? Testimony of Young Khmer Rouge Comrades* (Phnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2001), 7 and 9, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.139.5319&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.
- ²⁴² *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, 27:12–27:17.
- ²⁴³ Christopher L. Atkinson, “Reflections on Administrative Evil, Belief, and Justification in Khmer Rouge Cambodia,” *Sage Open* 3, no. 2 (2013): section on the “Subversion of the Universal Ethical,” <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013491951>.
- ²⁴⁴ Ibid., Introduction.
- ²⁴⁵ Ibid., Conclusion.
- ²⁴⁶ Ibid., The Prison as a Bureaucracy of Death.
- ²⁴⁷ Ibid., Subversion of the Universal Ethical.
- ²⁴⁸ The understanding of the argument being presented here is that to be compelled to participate in activities on the threat of losing one’s life is not a response that takes place “naturally” in some automatic fashion but is worked out and made sense of in the situation. The particular way in which this response is worked out in the case of the guards at S-21 is the focus of this argument.
- ²⁴⁹ *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, 42:22–46:20.
- ²⁵⁰ Ibid., 130:05–130:09.
- ²⁵¹ Elizabeth Kalhammer, “Former Maid to Adolf Hitler Interview,” interview by Antonia Yamin, Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, December 14, 2016, YouTube video, 13:38–14:46, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqBiu45onyY>.
- ²⁵² In a separate interview Joseph Goebbels’ former secretary Brunhilde Pomsel also makes the claim that she “knew nothing.” (“Joseph Goebbels’ 105-year-old Secretary: ‘No One Believes Me Now, But I Knew Nothing,’” interview by Kate Connolly, *The Guardian*, August 15, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/15/brunhilde-pomsel-nazi-joseph-goebbels-propaganda-machine>.) It is also an argument that Bill Clinton seems to echo when he visited Rwanda shortly after the end of his presidency: “All over the world there were people like me sitting in office day, after day, after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth, and the speed, with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror.” This claim by Clinton has, however, been disputed on factual grounds by a number of commentators. (See: “Shake Hands with the Devil: The Journey of Romeo Dallaire,” 114:30-115:30).
- ²⁵³ Elke Grenzer, “Jewish Victims and German Youth at the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp,” in *Spectacular Death: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Morality and (Un)representability*, ed. Tristanne Connolly, (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2011), 154.
- ²⁵⁴ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 254.
- ²⁵⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 975.
- ²⁵⁶ Ibid., 980.
- ²⁵⁷ Ibid., 975.
- ²⁵⁸ Ibid., 988.
- ²⁵⁹ Ibid., 985.
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid., 988-989.
- ²⁶¹ Ibid., 979-980.

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- ²⁶² Georg Simmel, “The Persistence of Social Groups,” *American Journal of Sociology* 3, no. 5 (1898): 695–696.
- ²⁶³ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 177.
- ²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.
- ²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 178.
- ²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 287.
- ²⁶⁷ Peter Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanist Perspective* (Open Road Media, 2011), 143, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/waterloo/reader.action?docID=1804755&query=>.
- ²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 143–144.
- ²⁶⁹ Harold Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 38.
- ²⁷⁰ Leonard Cohen, “So Long, Marianne,” *Songs of Leonard Cohen* (Columbia: 1967).
- ²⁷¹ This idea that judgments cannot be made about others “without knowing what it is like to live in their times” seems to be in line with the understanding that Arendt observes with Eichmann that he could not imagine what it was like to be in someone else’s shoes.
- ²⁷² Despite the contentiousness of their exchange Socrates repeatedly refers to Callicles as his friend throughout their discussion.
- ²⁷³ Jeff Kochan, “Rescuing the *Gorgias* from Latour,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 36, no. 4 (2006): 411.
- ²⁷⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, in *Plato in Twelve Volumes, Vol. 3*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 509a.
- ²⁷⁵ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 27.
- ²⁷⁶ “It would be fairly accurate to describe ANT [actor network theory] as being half Garfinkel and half Greimas: it has simply coupled two of the most interesting intellectual movements on both sides of the Atlantic” (Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 54, footnote 54. Latour’s admiration for Algirdas Julien Greimas relates to his interest in the field of semiotics and its focus upon “text qua text” (*Ibid.*, 122, footnote 171).
- ²⁷⁷ Garfinkel, *Ethnomethodology*, 9.
- ²⁷⁸ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29.
- ²⁷⁹ See Garfinkel, *Ethnomethodology*, 272–277.
- ²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 281. Garfinkel’s concerns about the independence of the scientific perspective from following the constraints of the everyday attitude might recall Arendt’s comments (discussed in the previous chapter) about scientists being one of the few groups in the modern age still capable of action, though they lack the speech to comprehend and articulate the significance of these actions. An important difference between their concerns, aside from Arendt’s focus upon distinguishing “action” from other forms of collective activity (e.g. the conformity required for the performance of anonymous labour in an assembly line), is that she is wary of the unintended consequences of what scientists are doing. Oddly enough her warnings are far more dire than Garfinkel’s criticisms of science and the way it intentionally seeks to make changes to the everyday attitude.
- ²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 281.
- ²⁸² *Ibid.*, 282.
- ²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 283.
- ²⁸⁴ Hannah Arendt, “Zur Person,” interview by Gunter Gaus, *Zur Person*, 1964, YouTube Video, 39:15-39:18, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dsoImQfVsO4>.
- ²⁸⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 520e.
- ²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 488b.
- ²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 524a.
- ²⁸⁸ Socrates names “corrupting the younger men” (522b) as one of the charges that could “hypothetically” have him be placed on trial, suggesting that Plato does have Socrates’ actual trial in mind.
- ²⁸⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521c.
- ²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 519b–519d.
- ²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 522e.
- ²⁹² *Ibid.*, 524c.
- ²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 521e.
- ²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 516a–516b.
- ²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 515e–516a.
- ²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Apology, 31e.
- ²⁹⁷ Arendt also recognizes that Socrates claims to be of benefit to Athens although her tone is more sympathetic: “Though Socrates denies that thinking corrupts, he does not pretend that it improves anybody either. It rouses you

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- from sleep, and this seems to be a great Good for the city” (*The Life of the Mind*, 178).
- ²⁹⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521d.
- ²⁹⁹ Alan Blum and Peter McHugh. *Self-Reflection in the Arts and Sciences* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1984), 146.
- ³⁰⁰ Max Weber, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001), 32.
- ³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 32.
- ³⁰² Blum and McHugh, *Self-Reflection*, 144.
- ³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 148.
- ³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.
- ³⁰⁵ Keith Doubt, “The Greek Spirit in the Poetry of Mak Dizdar,” *Spirit of Bosnia* 4, no. 1 (2009).
<http://www.spiritofbosnia.org/volume-4-no-1-2009-january/the-greek-spirit-in-the-poetry-of-mak-dizdar/>.
- ³⁰⁶ Dizdar, quoted in *Ibid.*
- ³⁰⁷ Doubt, “Greek Spirit.”
- ³⁰⁸ Blum and McHugh, *Self-Reflection*, 151.
- ³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 151.
- ³¹⁰ Arendt, “Some Questions of Moral Philosophy,” 79.
- ³¹¹ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 175.
- ³¹² *Ibid.*, 176.
- ³¹³ *Ibid.*, 178.
- ³¹⁴ See, for instance, Philip Gourevitch, “The Beautiful Land of Death,” *The Guardian*, December 2, 1999,
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/1999/dec/02/guardianfirstbookaward1999.gurardianfirstbookaward>.
- ³¹⁵ Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, 79.
- ³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.
- ³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” *Responsibility and Judgment*, 189.
- ³¹⁸ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 215.
- ³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.
- ³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 216.
- ³²¹ Garfinkel, 281.
- ³²² Plato, *Gorgias*, 482b–482c.

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