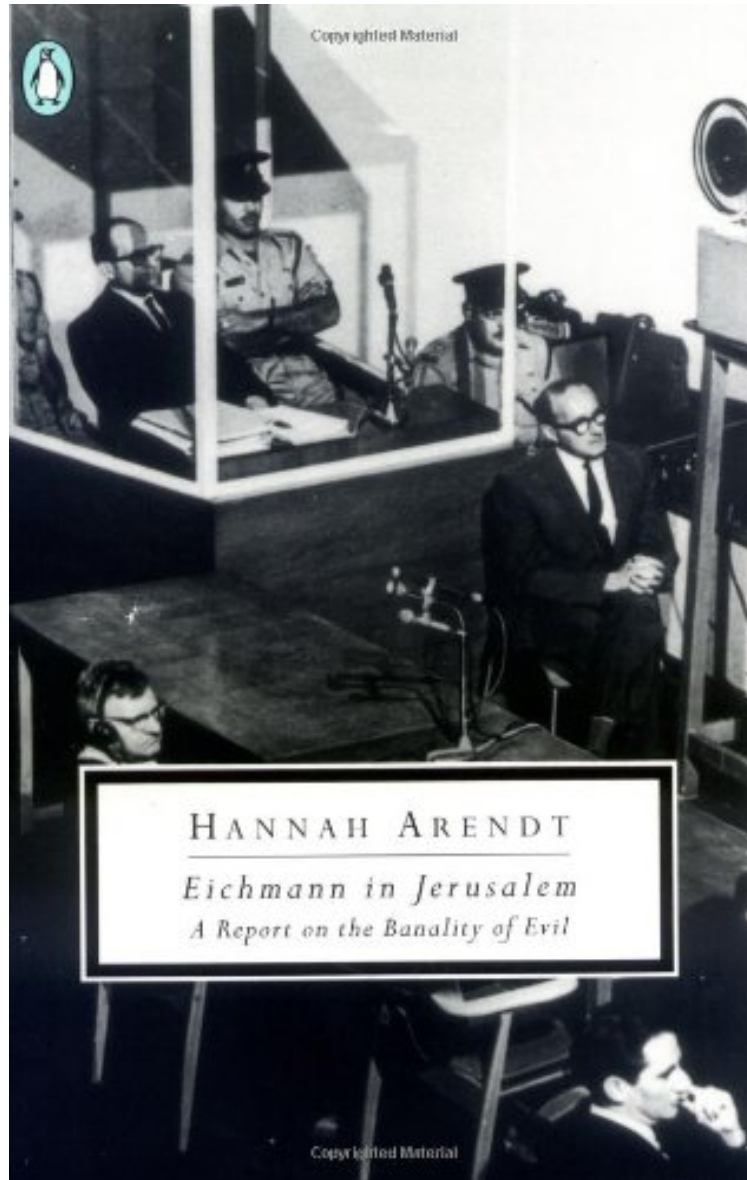


(Download free pdf) Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil

Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil

Hannah Arendt

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Hannah Arendt : Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil:

42 of 45 people found the following review helpful. Betwixt Ignorance and Wisdom is JudgementBy Pretend PersonAt one level, this book is a report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in which is considered the competency of the court to try Eichmann, the appropriateness of the law, the legality of Eichmanns kidnapping in

Argentina, the fairness of the trial, the adequacy of the defense, the tactics of the prosecution, the conduct of judges etc. Nor, as stated by Hannah Arendt herself in the postscript, is this book intended to be about the greatest disaster in the history of the Jewish people, the nature of the Third Reich, a history of German people, a theoretical account of totalitarianism nor a philosophical treatise into the nature of evil. Having said this, there are still important insights into the human condition and the nature of human laws and human judgement in the course of shaping that condition. At another level, this book is the most important non-fiction existentialist work of the era dealing with the issues of conformist culture, technological control, and faceless mindless compliance. I have tried to provide here a narrative summary of these insights as I understand them. Hannah Arendt explains how Himmler was able to twist the logic of morality to assuage the conscious of his handpicked, academically degreed, leaders. The commanders of the Einsatzgruppen were among the intellectual elite of the SS. What this says about the ability of the academically degreed to see through the sophistry, to the evil, is not discussed. So much for education being the path to moral excellence. In any case, Hannah Arendt points out that, for the most part, the members of the SS and the Einsatzgruppen, were not murderers or sadists by nature. I guess that there were just not enough murderers or sadists around to perpetuate such monstrous evils on so gigantic a scale. There was actually a systematic effort to weed out the psychopaths under the understanding that soldiers are not killers and killers do not make good soldiers. This being the case, Himmler's problem was how to overcome the ordinary human feeling of pity that a normal person feels in the presence of physical suffering. Himmler was able to turn this normal instinctual feeling around. Instead of saying to oneself What horrible things I did to people! his men came to instead instantiate the perspective, What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, how heavily the task weights upon my shoulders. That is, pity for the suffering is turned into self-pity, egoism in its most basic and vain form, the failure to put suffering into proper perspective against the greater setting of human history and the cold striking tragedies of the world. The SS men were now the victims for having to witness this suffering in the performance of their sacred duties. From here it was but a small step to hate the Jews for thrusting this unwanted and distasteful work upon upright and just men of duty. The SS men were thus able to stay convinced of their own civilized nature, there was no descent into barbarism under this formulation. What could be more twisted? Hannah Arendt explains that this logic was important for Eichmann because at all times Eichmann was doing his duty in accordance with the law and in doing so he was fulfilling his moral duty while satisfying his psychological need for authority. Eichmann even manages to twist Kantian moral philosophy and deontological ethics to justify his actions and assuage his conscience. Eichmann was narrow minded enough to take his job seriously and avoid the temptation of interpreting, amending, or exceeding his orders. To do so would have been unlawful and Eichmann, so as never to be found acting criminally, always acted in accordance with the law - never understanding that the regime pronouncing the law was itself criminal. Eichmann found himself in a contorted world where orders that were contrary to those issued by the criminal regime were considered to be criminal; a world of legal crimes. Eichmann was unable to recognize the self-canceling nature of criminal laws enacted by a criminal state and make moral judgments for himself. It is in just these sorts of cases where human judgment is paramount; when there are no longer any rules or principles of society or cultural values by which to guide one's judgment. This is when judgment is at its most risky and thus when it is most valuable to us as humans. The judgment of the individual in such circumstances, relying only upon the voice of inner conscious and felt reality of human fidelity, becomes the only safeguard against crimes against humanity. To exercise judgement under conditions of uncertainty is just what it means to be human. Where does this ability to judge based on inner conscious in the face of contrary cultural value and societal rules come from? Apparently, not from education alone given the actions of the Einsatzgruppen. When is the exercise of independent judgment justified and on what basis can it be made? This is the fundamental philosophical question of ethics as pointed out by Hannah Arendt. Most often, the soundness of our individual judgments is found in how well these judgments match up to the rules and expectations of society and the prevailing cultural values. This is how we know that our judgments are correct. Even today, we often mistake social conditioning for ethics. Acting against these guidelines in making a judgement is the risk we take, this is the risk that just is the human condition. However, on her own account, (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*), totalitarianism was a new and unrepresented form of government that came into existence in the twentieth century and was a massive intrusion of criminal violence into the realm of politics (*On Violence*). Further, and again on her own account, how could Eichmann be expected to see his way clear? In (*On Violence*), Hannah Arendt adds bureaucracy to totalitarianism as one of the latest innovations in twentieth century politics. Bureaucracy is the rule of an intricate system of institutions in which no one, neither the best, nor the few, nor the many can be held responsible, it is effective rule by Nobody. Rule by Nobody is the most tyrannical of all since there is no one left to answer for what is being done. Eichmann was a part of state that was an admixture of two unprecedented modes of political rule. We must be honest and ask, how many of us today in the same position as Eichmann would act in the same way and fail to exercise human judgment and make a truly independent moral decision in a set of unprecedented cultural and social challenges such as those presented by totalitarianism? It is in just such an unprecedented environment that consequences of action cannot be foreseen. This is the terrifying reality and banality of evil that we must recognize in ourselves. We must face the reality that Eichmann can be Every-man (Eichmann as Every-man is a conclusion the Hannah Arendt repudiates in the

postscript because this would cast Eichmann as a scapegoat and absolve him of personal guilt and this cannot be the case because he is still guilty of not thinking and not making independent moral judgments). However, I believe that admission of this deep defect in the human condition is the only way to guard against its insidious ability to overtake any of us. Not making this admission is an open invitation to the banality of evil. After all, what are we to make of Martin Heidegger, a philosopher and eminent thinker of prodigious education, intimately known to Hannah Arendt, who flirted with, collaborated with, and joined the Nazi Party? Thinking itself is not a guarantee of good judgment and again education does not guarantee the path to moral excellence. In Eichmann's mind, he was also the victim of a corrupt system, something that he could only see after the fact. Hannah Arendt, with sardonic wit, points out how, in this morally inverted world of the Third Reich, that the temptations to be resisted were the temptations not to murder and not to exploit and that too many Germans learned how to resist temptation. The key to this strategy is in exploiting the ability of the human being to rationalize and hence, the banality, or should we say, the rationality of evil. Owing to cultural failure and thus the inability for cultural values to serve as a standard for individual judgements, any evil can be justified and I believe this is Hannah Arendt's most unsettling insight into the human condition. In the case of the Third Reich, rationalization was based on the ordinariness of death, the exigencies of war, and the demands as well as the expectations of a perverted social construct. Individual judgments were now matched up to these conditions to determine the correctness of the judgments and to determine right from wrong, good from evil. In this case, when human judgment is paramount but when there are no longer any rules or principles of society or cultural values by which to guide one's judgment, how is human judgment possible? How readily can we expect one to think originally and judge independently in a set of never before encountered social and cultural rules with no precedent as represented by totalitarianism? On what criteria is one to make such independent judgments when one is part of an unprecedented set of circumstances? Again, on her own account, (*The Human Condition*), human action becomes more difficult as the bigness of society increases. Action collapses into administration. The bigness of the society crowds out the realm of, and opportunity for, individual action. We thus become administrators, not actors, in the governmental and business bureaucratic machinery that the bigness of society compels. Hannah Arendt does not provide us with a formula for, or guaranteed way in which to make, the human judgments that are required to be made in unprecedented conditions; when there are no authentic social or cultural norms to guide our judgement. There is no sure path to independent individual human action when we are smothered by the imperatives of administrative necessity. There are no sure guarantees in these unexplored territories and there were none for Eichmann as well. Hannah Arendt gives us no such formula for judgment or path to action because there is none to be had, this is the precarious position of the human condition. Hannah Arendt, I believe, tells us that what is in-between wisdom and ignorance is that rarefied quality of a kind called human judgement and that this is all that we have. This judgement, once made, further compels action. Arendt further indites Eichmann for his failure to act. "Arendt's theory of action and her revival of the ancient [Greek] notion of praxis represent one of the most original contributions to twentieth century political thought. ... Moreover, by viewing action as a mode of human togetherness, Arendt is able to develop a conception of participatory democracy which stands in direct contrast to the bureaucratized and elitist forms of politics so characteristic of the modern epoch." (d'Entreves, Maurizio Passerin (2006), "Hannah Arendt", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). Most unsettling, Hannah Arendt also points out that the machinery of mass genocidal murder was not possible without the cooperation of Jewish leaders themselves; Eichmann's SS deportation transport trains to the death camps were filled with people from the lists drawn up by the Jewish helpers. It seems that the complete moral collapse and banality of evil was not the sole domain of the Nazis. Although Hannah Arendt was later sorry that she coined the phrase banality of evil (p. xviii of the Introduction by Amos Elton) I believe that the phrase still has great currency and aptly captures her unsettling insight into the human condition. Genocide and mass murder just is a permanent potential in the human condition, it can happen again and it actually has happened again since WWII on more than one occasion. I am glad she coined the phrase and even feel that we should up the stakes and call it the terrifying banality of evil. What better phrase is there to understand what was for Eichmann a job, just a daily routine and literally the brutal and barbaric death for the people with whom he dealt in course of his bureaucratic job? Eichmann was indeed terrifyingly normal as Arendt points out. A general challenge of the human condition is that we are instinctively conformist, rule making and rule following creatures. It would seem that this capacity is a genetic disposition, a cognitive rigidity, the dark side of which we see played out here. However, normative rule following behavior allows us to build lasting cultural institutions and promotes social cooperation. The object of that social cooperation and institution building is of course the *sine qua non*. Human collective action is neither virtue nor vice, it is the object of the collective action that must be addressed. The problem with justice, so called, is that it is backward looking and retributive. In any case, it is not available to us, only the law is available to us in governing the human condition. If we can realize the banality of evil perhaps we can work toward and someday come to realize the banality of goodness. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A timeless philosophical perspective which has been in some ways ... By Lisa Nel A timeless philosophical perspective which has been in some ways misunderstood by its denouement statement, 'the banality of evil.' What Arendt meant (in my opinion) was not that the evil was banal nor that the perpetrators or conspirators should in any way be exempt or exonerated. What she meant was that the banality is in the fight for justice or to

understand or to in some way seek recompense for that evil. She leaves no doubt in the reader's mind of her convictions: she's as stupefied as the courts and the legislators which had no recourse. What is the recourse? How does one redeem one's self from witnessing a murder or a crime? Confession and even partial admission are too late and thereby irrelevant to the greater morality. Doing jail time or vicariously taking blame doesn't restore justice and can never reprogram a mindset in people extant or remaining to misrepresent their telling of the events. The deed is done. The ultimate 'punishment' lies in the acknowledgement even if not self effacing; for then that person sits with the devil that he himself created. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Banality of evil By LookingpastI went back and forth between four stars and five stars with this book. I had just seen the video Hannah Arendt and at that time couldn't understand what all the fuss was about. Now I get it. After reading this book, I can totally emphasize with those who condemned Arendt for her portrayal of those Jews who negotiated with the Nazis. She was harsh, but did she overstate the case? That I don't know. I was disappointed with Eichmann--I was a young teenager when he was kidnapped and accepted that he was responsible for million of deaths. After reading this book, I have to rethink what it means to be responsible for something as terrible as this. Was he personally responsible? He personally didn't kill anyone (in the sense of shooting someone, for example), but his mindless acceptance of his role in the Nazi beaucracy was responsible for millions of deaths. We who grew up in the aftermath of WWII learned to equate evil with monsters. What Arendt's book reinforced in me was that evil is not necessarily terrible acts done by monsters. No one is denying that evil consists of terrible acts....but what is truly horrifying is that evil can and is done daily by common, ordinary people. Common, ordinary people who stop thinking (as Arendt puts it), who stop seeing themselves as part of a common humanity. People who are content to be wheels in the cogs of a bureaucracy whose nightmare realities are obscured in the mists of double speak and lies. Far from just being about Eichmann, this book is about the nature of evil--and it should be required reading.

This report on the trial of German Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann first appeared as a series of articles in *The New Yorker* in 1963. This edition contains further factual material that came to light after the trial, as well as Arendt's postscript commenting on the controversy that arose over her book.

.com While living in Argentina in 1960, Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped and smuggled to Israel where he was put on trial for crimes against humanity. The *New Yorker* magazine sent Hannah Arendt to cover the trial. While covering the technical aspects of the trial, Arendt also explored the wider themes inherent in the trial, such as the nature of justice, the behavior of the Jewish leadership during the Nazi Rgime, and, most controversially, the nature of Evil itself. Far from being evil incarnate, as the prosecution painted Eichmann, Arendt maintains that he was an average man, a petty bureaucrat interested only in furthering his career, and the evil he did came from the seductive power of the totalitarian state and an unthinking adherence to the Nazi cause. Indeed, Eichmann's only defense during the trial was "I was just following orders." Arendt's analysis of the seductive nature of evil is a disturbing one. We would like to think that anyone who would perpetrate such horror on the world is different from us, and that such atrocities are rarities in our world. But the history of groups such as the Jews, Kurds, Bosnians, and Native Americans, to name but a few, seems to suggest that such evil is all too commonplace. In revealing Eichmann as the pedestrian little man that he was, Arendt shows us that the veneer of civilization is a thin one indeed. If, in recalling the period, one could shut one's eyes to the scenes of brutal massacre and stop one's ears to the screams of horror-stricken women and terrorized children as they saw the tornado of death sweeping toward them, one could almost assume that in some parts of the book the author is being whimsical. -- *The New York Times* Book About the Author Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) was University Professor of political philosophy in the graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research, a visiting professor at several universities including California, Princeton, Columbia, and Chicago, a research director of the Conference on Jewish Relations, the chief editor of Schocken Books, and the executive director of Jewish Cultural Reconstruction in New York City. She was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1952, and an Arts and Letters Grant of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1954. She is also the author of *On Revolution* and *Between Past and Future*, which are available from Penguin Classics along with *The Portable Hannah Arendt*. Amos Elon (1926-2009) was born in Vienna, Austria, and spent most of his adult life in Jerusalem. A frequent essayist, lecture, and critic who was well known for his articles in *The New Yorker* and *The New York of Books*, he is the author of such bestselling works as *The Israelis*, *Flight into Egypt*, *Founder*, *Herzel*, and *The Pity of It All: A Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch*.