

HANNAH ARENDT ON EICHMANN

A Study in the Perversity of Brilliance

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ONE OF THE many ironies surrounding Hannah Arendt's book on the Eichmann trial* is involved in the fact that it should have been serialized in the *New Yorker* so short a time after the appearance in the same magazine of James Baldwin's essay on the Black Muslims. A Negro on the Negroes, a Jew on the Jews, each telling a tale of the horrors that have been visited upon his people and of how these horrors were borne; and each exhorting the prosperous, the secure, the ignorant to understand that these horrors are relevant to them. The two stories have much in common and they are both, in their essentials, as old as humankind itself—so old and so familiar that it takes a teller of extraordinary eloquence, or else of extraordinary cleverness, to make them come alive again. Baldwin is all eloquence; there is nothing clever in the way he tells the story of the Negro in America. On the one side are the powerless victims, on the other the powerful oppressors; the only sin of the victims is their powerlessness, the only guilt is the guilt of the oppressors. Now, this black-and-white account, with the traditional symbolisms reversed, is not the kind of picture that seems persuasive to the sophisticated modern sensibility—the sensibility that has been trained by Dostoevski and Freud, by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, by Eliot and Yeats, to see moral ambiguity everywhere, to be bored by melodrama, to distrust the idea of innocence, to be skeptical of rhetorical appeals to Justice. And indeed, not even Baldwin's eloquence, which forced many of his readers to *listen* for once, could overcome the dissatisfaction many others felt at the moral simplicity of the story as he told

it. For as he told it, the story did not answer to their sense of reality; it was an uninteresting story and a sentimental one.

Precisely the reverse is true of Hannah Arendt's telling of the story of how six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis. If Baldwin is all eloquence and no cleverness, Miss Arendt is all cleverness and no eloquence; and if Baldwin brings his story unexpectedly to life through the bold tactic of heightening and playing exquisitely on every bit of melodrama it contains, Miss Arendt with an equally surprising boldness rids her story of melodrama altogether and heavily underlines every trace of moral ambiguity she can wring out of it. What she has done, in other words, is translate this story for the first time into the kind of terms that can appeal to the sophisticated modern sensibility. Thus, in place of the monstrous Nazi, she gives us the "banal" Nazi; in place of the Jew as virtuous martyr, she gives us the Jew as accomplice in evil; and in place of the confrontation between guilt and innocence, she gives us the "collaboration" of criminal and victim. The story as she tells it is complex, unsentimental, riddled with paradox and ambiguity. It has all the appearance of "ruthless honesty," and all the marks of profundity—have we not been instructed that complexity, paradox, and ambiguity are the sign manifest of profundity?—and, in addition, it carries with it all the authority of Miss Arendt's classic work on *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Anyone schooled in the modern in literature and philosophy would be bound to consider it a much better story than the usual melodramatic version—which, as it happens, was more or less the one relied upon by the prosecution at the Eichmann trial, and which Miss Arendt uses to great effect in highlighting the superior interest of her own

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* *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Viking, 275 pp., \$5.50.

version. But if this version of hers can from one point of view be considered more interesting, can it by the same token be considered truer, or more illuminating, or more revealing of the general situation of man in the 20th century? Is the gain she achieves in literary interest a matter of titillation, or is it a gain to the understanding?

Let us be clear about these questions: they cannot be answered by scholarship. To the extent that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* parades as history, its factual accuracy is of course open to critical examination. But it would be unwise to take the scholarly pretensions of the book at face value. This is in no sense a work of objective historical research aimed at determining "the way things really were." Except in her critique of the trial itself, which she attended, Miss Arendt's sources are for the most part secondary ones (she relies especially on Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*), and her manipulation of evidence is at all times visibly tendentious. Nevertheless, a distorted or exaggerated picture drawn in the service of a suggestive thesis can occasionally bring us closer to the essential truth than a carefully qualified and meticulously documented study—provided that the thesis accords reasonably well with the evidence. The point to begin with, then, is Miss Arendt's thesis, and the problem to settle is whether it justifies the distortions of perspective it creates and the cavalier treatment of evidence it impels.

ACCORDING TO Miss Arendt, the Nazis, in order to carry out their genocidal plan against the Jews, needed Jewish cooperation and in fact received it "to a truly extraordinary degree." This cooperation took the form of "administrative and police work," and it was extended by "the highly assimilated Jewish communities of Central and Western Europe" no less abundantly than by "the Yiddish-speaking masses of the East." In Amsterdam as in Warsaw, in Berlin as in Budapest, Miss Arendt writes,

Jewish officials could be trusted to compile the lists of persons and of their property, to secure money from the deportees to defray the expenses of their deportation and extermination, to keep track of vacated apartments, to supply police forces to help seize Jews and get them on trains, until, as a last gesture, they handed over the assets of the Jewish community in good order for final confiscation.

All this has long been known. What is new is Miss Arendt's assertion that if the Jews (or rather, their leaders) had not cooperated in this fashion,

"there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people."

So much for the Jews. As for the Nazis, carrying out the policy of genocide required neither that they be monsters nor pathological Jew-haters. On the contrary: since the murder of Jews was dictated by the law of the state, and since selfless loyalty to the law was regarded by the Germans under Hitler as the highest of virtues, it even called for a certain idealism to do what Eichmann and his cohorts did. Miss Arendt in this connection quotes the famous remark attributed to Himmler: "To have stuck it out and, apart from exceptions caused by human weakness, to have remained decent, that is what has made us hard." Eichmann, then, was telling the truth when he denied having been an anti-Semite: he did his duty to the best of his ability, and he would have performed with equal zeal even if he had loved the Jews. Thus also, the Israeli prosecutor Gideon Hausner was absurdly off the point in portraying Eichmann as a brute and a sadist and a fiend: Eichmann was in actual fact a banal personality, a nonentity whose evil deeds flowed not from anything in his own character, but rather from his position in the Nazi system.

This system is, of course, known as totalitarianism, and it is totalitarianism that brings the two halves of Miss Arendt's thesis together. Long ago, David Rousset, Bruno Bettelheim, and Miss Arendt herself taught us that securing the complicity of the victim is one of the distinguishing ambitions of totalitarian states, and her tale of Jewish complicity here is offered (at least on the surface) as yet another illustration of this point. Long ago, too, she and her colleagues taught us that totalitarian states aim at the destruction of common-sense reality and the creation of a new reality moulded to the lineaments of the official ideology, and her conception of Eichmann as an ordinary man whose conscience was made to function "the other way around" is similarly set forth in illustration of the more general point. Obviously, though, this ordinary man could not have been turned into so great and devoted a perpetrator of evil if the system had not been so tightly closed—if, that is to say, there had been voices to protest or gestures of resistance. Such voices as existed, however, were in Miss Arendt's judgment pathetically small and thin, and such gestures of resistance as were displayed she finds relatively insignificant. Not only did "good society everywhere" accept the Final Solution with "zeal

and eagerness," but the Jews themselves acquiesced and even cooperated—as we have seen—"to a truly extraordinary degree." Here, then, is the finishing touch to Miss Arendt's reading of the Final Solution, and the explanation she gives for dwelling on Jewish complicity: this chapter of the story, she says, "offers the most striking insight into the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society—not only in Germany but in almost all countries, not only among the persecutors but also among the victims."

AN INTERESTING version of the story, no doubt about that. But let us look at it a little more closely. Assuming for the moment that Jewish leadership did in fact cooperate with the Nazis "to a truly extraordinary degree" (the degree is the point under contention), why did the Nazis *want* their cooperation? A reader of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* might have expected Miss Arendt to reply that they wanted it for its own sake. And indeed, she does quote David Rousset to this effect in dealing with the "cruel and silly question," as she calls it, that Hausner kept putting to his witnesses at the trial ("Fifteen thousand people were standing there and hundreds of guards facing you—why didn't you revolt and charge and attack?"). The passage from Rousset is crucial and worth quoting again:

The triumph of the S.S. demands that the tortured victim allow himself to be led to the noose without protesting, that he renounce and abandon himself to the point of ceasing to affirm his identity. And it is not for nothing. It is not gratuitously, out of sheer sadism, that the S.S. men desire his defeat. They know that the system which succeeds in destroying its victim before he mounts the scaffold . . . is incomparably the best for keeping a whole people in slavery. In submission. Nothing is more terrible than these processions of human beings going like dummies to their deaths.

Yet when Miss Arendt arrives a hundred pages later at the matter of "Jewish help in administrative and police work," considerations of a strictly mundane and thoroughly utilitarian nature suddenly enter as the decisive ones. The Nazis wanted Jewish help, for without it, "there would have been either complete chaos or an impossibly severe drain on German manpower."

Coming from Miss Arendt, this is surprising—"to a truly extraordinary degree," we might say. It is surprising because one of the major points she makes in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* is that the Nazi will to murder every Jew in Europe

was so powerful that resources badly needed at the front in 1944 and early 1945 were tied up so that the ovens of Auschwitz could be kept working at full capacity. Certainly it was more *convenient* for Eichmann that the Jews took some of the burdens upon themselves that would otherwise have fallen to him. But to contend that such burdens would have put enough strain on German resources to force the Nazis to ease off on the Jews is ridiculous by Miss Arendt's own account.

For by her own account, the Nazis were determined at almost any cost to "cleanse" Europe of the Jews; nothing in their program had higher priority. But was there no possibility of stopping them? Miss Arendt now argues that there was. Whenever they encountered determined opposition, she says, they backed down, and she cites France, Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, and (most glorious of them all) Denmark, where the Nazis succeeded in deporting only a comparatively small proportion of the resident Jews. In Holland, Rumania, Hungary, Poland, and the Ukraine, on the other hand, the slaughter was near complete. Looking at all these countries, one can readily agree that the determining factor in the number of Jews murdered was the amount of resistance (either active or passive) offered to the Final Solution. The important question to be decided, however, is: resistance by *whom*? Miss Arendt knows, of course, that it was the attitude of the local populace that made the main difference—where they were willing to cooperate in the rounding up and deportation of Jews, most Jews were deported, and where they were unwilling to cooperate, fewer Jews were deported. But since Miss Arendt wishes us to believe that the Nazis could never have killed as many as six million Jews without Jewish help, she tries very hard to convey the impression that what the Jews themselves did in any given country mattered significantly too. And it is here that she becomes most visibly tendentious in her manipulation of the facts. In explaining, for example, why not a single Belgian Jew was ever deported (though thousands of stateless Jews living in Belgium were), she tells us how the Belgian police and the Belgian railwaymen quietly sabotaged deportation operations, and then adds: "Moreover, among those who had fled were all the more important Jewish leaders . . . so that there was no Jewish Council to register the Jews—one of the vital prerequisites for their seizure." But there *was* a Jewish Council in Belgium. There was also one in France, and Miss Arendt simply neglects to mention it. Quite right, too, for the U.G.I.F. made no more difference to the situa-

tion in France than the *Association des Juifs en Belgique* made to the situation in Belgium, or than any other *Judenrat* made to the situation in any other country.

So far as the *Judenräte* were concerned, the chief difference between Western countries like Belgium and France on the one hand, and the Eastern territories on the other, was that the Germans did not set up ghettos in the West. The reason is suggested in Léon Poliakov's account of the role of the French *Judenrat*: "In France you never had a situation where Jews were systematically presiding over the deportation of other Jews. [For] the attitude of the French population, which strenuously opposed the policy of segregation and isolation of the Jews, made such degradation impossible" (my italics). In any case, the Nazis may indeed have backed down somewhat when they encountered opposition from the Danish king or the Italian army or the Bulgarian people, but even there only somewhat. (Hilberg: "The increasing recalcitrance of the French administration . . . finally resulted in a German decision to employ all the available forces of the Security Police for an all-out drive against the remaining Jews.") As for Jewish opposition, all it ever did was bring out more German troops. Certainly the Nazis showed little concern over the drain on their manpower when the Warsaw Ghetto revolted.

BUT not only is Miss Arendt wholly unwarranted in emphasizing Jewish cooperation as a significant factor in the number of victims claimed by the Final Solution; the irony is that her insistence on doing so also involves her in making the same assumption about the Nazis that lay behind Jewish cooperation itself. This assumption was that the Nazis were rational beings and that their aims must therefore be limited and subject to negotiation. When one of the most notorious of the Jewish leaders—Jacob Gens of Vilna—declared that "with a hundred victims I save a thousand people, with a thousand ten thousand," he was saying precisely what the heads of all the major European governments had said earlier about Hitler. "Herr Hitler," as the London *Times* always referred to him in the 30's, was after all a statesman; he had grievances, some of them legitimate; if a few of these grievances were satisfied, his anger would be "appeased," and war could be averted. As many historians have pointed out, the policy of appeasement was not in itself foolish or evil; it was a perfectly traditional diplomatic tactic, and its foolishness in this case lay in the fact

that it was being applied to an aggressor who was *not* politically prudential and whose aims were *not* of the traditionally limited kind. The mistake of the appeasers, in other words, stemmed from their failure to recognize the unprecedented and revolutionary character of the Nazi regime.* Almost every Jewish leader in Europe made the same mistake regarding the intentions of the Nazis toward them and their people—a mistake that the Nazis incidentally did everything they could to encourage.

If, then, we ask why Jewish leadership cooperated with the Nazis, the answer would seem to be that they were following a policy of appeasement, and that there was nothing in the least "extraordinary" about this. That, however, is not the answer we get from Miss Arendt; her answer is more interesting and complicated and paradoxical. A distinction must be made, she argues, between the Jewish masses and the Jewish leaders. It was "cruel and silly" of Hausner to ask why the masses went passively to their deaths, "for no non-Jewish group or people had behaved differently." But it is apparently compassionate and intelligent to ask much the same question of the Jewish leaders, even though no non-Jewish leaders had behaved differently. In any event, having raised the issue, Miss Arendt finds herself afflicted for the only time in the book with an attack of speculative diffidence and tells us nothing—literally nothing—about why so many Jewish leaders should have cooperated in the destruction of their own people and (since hardly any of them managed to survive) in their own ruin as well. "Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis." *In one way or another, for one reason or another.* Period. ". . . we can still sense how they enjoyed their new power. . . . We know how the Jewish officials felt when they became instruments of murder. . . . We know the physiognomies of the Jewish leaders during the Nazi period very well." Do we, now? Then pray, Miss Arendt, what did they look like? Give her exactly thirteen lines—four and a bit each for the incredible Chaim Rumkowski of Lodz, the many-sided Leo Baeck

* Even Anthony Eden was guilty of this failure, for his opposition to appeasement was based on the idea that Hitler could only be stopped by an intensive rearmament program on the part of the democracies. Deterrence, however, would almost certainly not have worked to prevent World War II, for Hitler *wanted* war, which he saw as a consummation. If the democracies had rearmed earlier, the war would have been won more easily, perhaps, but that is another matter.

of Berlin, and the tortured Adam Czerniakow of Warsaw—and her picture is complete. And why not? The Jews in Miss Arendt's interesting and complicated and paradoxical and ruthlessly honest version of the story are a people curiously without psychology (except of the darker sort, leading to self-destruction), and a people curiously without a history (except of the disabling sort, leading to hopeless inadequacy). When they act—whether it be going to their death, or running a country, or prosecuting a trial—a mere glance at them is enough to produce a confident judgment. And again, why not, when the judgment will almost invariably be adverse?

For what is Miss Arendt really saying when she tells us that “if the Jewish people had . . . been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.” Why, she is saying that if the Jews had not been Jews, the Nazis would not have been able to kill so many of them—which is a difficult proposition to dispute. I do not think I am being unfair to Miss Arendt here. Consider: the Jews of Europe, even where they were “highly assimilated,” were an organized people, and in most cases a centrally organized people. This was a fact of their condition no less surely than sovereign nationhood was a fact of the French condition. Yet I doubt that Miss Arendt would ever take it into her head to declare that if the French people had not been organized into a nation-state, they could never have been sold out to the Nazis by Pétain and Laval. Throughout this book, Miss Arendt is very nasty about Zionists and Zionism, but the only sense one can glean from her argument is a grain of retroactive Zionist sense. The Jews, she is implying, should have known that anti-Semitism rendered their position in the Diaspora untenable, and they should therefore either have set up a state of their own or renounced their communal existence altogether. She does not explain how such renunciation could have saved them from the Nuremberg laws. Nor does she tell us why the slaughter of Jews in occupied Russia should have been so complete even though there was no central Jewish leadership or communal organization in the Soviet Union.

But it is unnecessary to pursue the absurdities of Miss Arendt's argument on this issue, just as it is unnecessary to enter once again into the endless moral debate over the behavior of the Jewish leaders—the endless round of apology and recrimination. They did what they did, they were what

they were, and each was a different man. None of it mattered in the slightest to the final result. Murderers with the power to murder descended upon a defenseless people and murdered a large part of it. What else is there to say?

IN STARK contrast to the Jews, whose behavior in Miss Arendt's version of the story self-evidently explains and condemns itself, the Nazis—or anyway Adolf Eichmann—need the most careful and the most imaginative attention before they can be intelligently judged. The irony here is of course obvious, and even the Eichmann trial to some extent fell victim to it. As Harold Rosenberg put it in these pages two years ago:

Why should this self-styled nobody who had hurled into silence so many of the subtlest and most humane intellects of Europe have been permitted to elaborate on each trait of his character, his opinions on all sorts of matters, including Kant's categorical imperative, and his conception of himself as Pontius Pilate and as a “romantic,” his reaction to his wife's reading the Bible, his drinking of mare's milk and *schnapps*? One question would have sufficed to complete the formulation of his culpability: “Weren't you the head of Sec. IV B4 of RSHA charged with the extermination of the Jews of Europe, and did you not carry out the function assigned to you to the best of your ability?”

This, in Rosenberg's view, was the main defect of the trial, and it flowed from Gideon Hausner's persistent efforts to prove that Eichmann was subjectively vicious, as well as a perpetrator of objectively criminal deeds. Miss Arendt also disapproves of these efforts by Hausner, but her complaint is against Hausner's particular conception of Eichmann's character and not against the opportunity he gave him to speak. Far from being offended at the idea that *this self-styled nobody who had hurled into silence so many of the subtlest and most humane intellects of Europe* should have been permitted to discourse himself at such great length, Miss Arendt helps the discourse along, develops it, refines it, and in the end virtually justifies it. By this I do not mean that she defends Eichmann, as some of her critics have stupidly charged: she does nothing of the kind anywhere in her book, and she says plainly in the closing chapter that he was guilty of participation in mass murder and deserved to hang. What she does do, however, is accept Eichmann's account of himself and of his role in the Final Solution as largely true. In some sense, he *was* an “idealist”; in some sense, he was *not* an anti-Semite; and the degree of his responsibility for the murder of the six million,

while sufficient to hang him, *was* relatively insignificant, and certainly nowhere near what the prosecution claimed. By building Eichmann up into a fiendish Jew-hater and a major Nazi figure, Miss Arendt believes, the prosecution missed the whole point of his crimes, of the system which made them possible, and of the lessons to be drawn for the future.

Taking Eichmann pretty much at his own word, then (except when his own word conflicts with her reading of his character), Miss Arendt treats us to a genuinely brilliant portrait of the mind of a middle-echelon Nazi and, by extension, of the world that produced him and gave him the power to do the things he did. And around this theme of Eichmann's "banality" other themes gather: the almost universal complicity of Christian Europe, and especially of the German people, in Nazism (for in diminishing Eichmann's personal responsibility for the Final Solution, she enlarges the area of European responsibility in general); and the almost total consequent unwillingness of the Federal Republic to prosecute and mete out adequate punishment to Nazi war criminals still at large and in many cases flourishing (Miss Arendt, it should be noted, presents perhaps the most severe indictment of Adenauer's Germany that has yet been seen this side of the Iron Curtain, and whatever comfort the book may bring to the Germans in some respects, it is bound in the main to infuriate them).

The brilliance of Miss Arendt's treatment of Eichmann could hardly be disputed by any disinterested reader. But at the same time, there could hardly be a more telling example than this section of her book of the intellectual perversity that can result from the pursuit of brilliance by a mind infatuated with its own agility and bent on generating dazzle. The man around the corner who makes ugly cracks about the Jews is an anti-Semite, but not Adolf Eichmann who sent several million Jews to their death: *that* would be uninteresting and would tell us nothing about the Nature of Totalitarianism. Similarly, the behavior of the Jewish leaders under the Nazis was "extraordinary," but Adolf Eichmann was ordinary, even unto banality; otherwise, he tells us nothing about the Nature of Totalitarianism. Did he have no conscience? Of course he had a conscience, the conscience of an inverted Kantian idealist; otherwise he tells us nothing about the Nature of Totalitarianism. But what about his famous statement that he would die happy because he had sent five million "enemies of the Reich" to their graves? "Sheer rodomontade," sheer braggery—

to believe it is to learn nothing about the Nature of Totalitarianism. And his decision to carry on with the deportations from Hungary in direct defiance of Himmler's order that they be stopped? A perfect example of the very idealism that teaches us so much about the Nature of Totalitarianism.

No. It finally refuses to wash; it finally violates everything we know about the Nature of Man, and therefore the Nature of Totalitarianism must go hang. For uninteresting though it may be to say so, no person could have joined the Nazi party, let alone the S.S., who was not at the very least a *vicious* anti-Semite; to believe otherwise is to learn nothing about the nature of anti-Semitism. Uninteresting though it may be to say so, no person of conscience could have participated knowingly in mass murder: to believe otherwise is to learn nothing about the nature of conscience. And uninteresting though it may be to say so, no banality of a man could have done so hugely evil a job so well; to believe otherwise is to learn nothing about the nature of evil. Was Hausner right, then, in repeatedly calling Eichmann a liar? Yes, he was right, however successfully Eichmann may have deceived himself by then, and however "sincere" he may have thought his testimony was.

AND THE Nature of Totalitarianism? What Miss Arendt's book on the Eichmann trial teaches us about the Nature of Totalitarianism is that the time has come to re-examine the whole concept. Apart from the many other weaknesses it has revealed since the days when it was first developed to distinguish between the "simple" dictatorships of the pre-modern era and the ideologically inspired revolutionary regimes of Stalin and Hitler, the theory of totalitarianism has always been limited in its usefulness by the quasi-metaphysical and rather Germanic terms in which it was originally conceived. For what the theory aimed at describing was a fixed essence, not a phenomenon in flux, and the only changes it saw as possible within the totalitarian structure were those leading toward a more perfect realization of the totalitarian idea itself. (One consequence of this—and it speaks worlds about the limitations of the theory in general—was that many students of Soviet society refused for a long time to credit the significance of the liberalizing tendencies that were so obviously becoming manifest under Khrushchev: once a totalitarian state always a totalitarian state, unless, of course, it could be overthrown by force.)

But since the perfect totalitarian state did not

yet exist, how did the theorists of totalitarianism know what it would look like in a fully realized condition? The answer is that they knew from the Nazi concentration camps, which, as they rightly understood, had in part been set up to serve as models and as "laboratories" for experimenting with techniques of absolute domination. Here was where totalitarianism stood nakedly revealed; here was its essential meaning; here was what the system was really all about.

So far, so good. The trouble began with a tendency to speak of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia as though they had already attained to the perfection of vast concentration camps, and as though the Nazis in their style and the Communists in theirs had already been transformed into the new men of the transvalued totalitarian future. Yet on the basis of a somewhat more optimistic view of human nature than is implicit in the theory of totalitarianism (which substitutes for the naïve liberal idea of the infinite perfectibility of man the equally naïve idea of the infinite malleability of man), one may be permitted to doubt that the whole world could under any circumstances ever be made over into a concentration camp. As it is, Soviet Russia seems to be moving in the other direction. And so far as the Third Reich is concerned, it lasted for less than thirteen years and conquered only a small section of the globe, with the result that: (1) Nazi Germany never had a chance to seal itself off completely from outside influences; and (2) the people who participated actively in Nazism *knew* they were being criminal by the standards under which they themselves had been raised and that also still reigned supreme in the "decadent" culture of the West.

This is why it is finally impossible to accept Miss Arendt's conception of Eichmann's role and character. Eichmann was not living in the ideal Nazi future, but in the imperfect Nazi present, and while we can agree with Miss Arendt that, as a mere lieutenant-colonel, he probably did not enjoy the importance that the Israeli indictment attributed to him, neither can he have been quite so banal as she makes him out to be. After all, there *was* enough opposition to the Final Solution to have persuaded him that not everyone looked upon the murdering of Jews as a fine and noble occupation, and after all, he *was* a first-generation Nazi and an important enough one to have been trusted with a large measure of administrative responsibility for a top-priority item in the Nazi program. Now, if we are not to lose our own minds in the act of trying to penetrate

into the psychology of the Nazi mind, we must be very careful to keep it clear that this item of the Nazi program—the "cleansing" of Europe, and ultimately the whole world, of Jews—was literally insane. It is one thing to hate Jews, but it is quite another to contemplate the wholesale slaughter of Jews; it is one thing to believe that no nation-state can be healthy when it contains "alien" elements, but it is quite another to decide upon the murder of eleven million people (the estimated target of the Final Solution) as a means of achieving ethnic homogeneity. Ponder the difference between the Germans and the Rumanians in this connection. The Rumanians were the worst anti-Semites in Europe and were delighted to join in the butchering of Jews, until they discovered that there was money to be made from the saving of Jews, whereupon they began saving Jews: this is pathological anti-Semitism bounded by rational limits. The Germans, on the other hand, regarded the Jews, whom they had rendered utterly helpless with a stroke of the pen, as dangerous enemies, and they were so convinced of the necessity to do away with these enemies that they were willing to let the war effort suffer rather than let up: this is pathological anti-Semitism bounded by no rational limits. Insanity, in short.

IT is in this insanity, I believe, and not in the pedestrian character of Adolf Eichmann, that whatever banality attaches to the evil of the Final Solution must be sought. And because Hitler and his cohorts were madmen on the Jewish question, there is probably little of general relevance we can learn from the Final Solution beyond what the Nuremberg trials established concerning the individual's criminal accountability when acting upon superior orders, even within a system guided by insane aims. There is, however, much to be learned from the Final Solution about other matters, and principally about anti-Semitism. When Miss Arendt speaks of the amazing extent of the moral collapse that the Nazis caused "everywhere," she must be referring specifically to the Jewish question. The will to fight the German armies did not collapse everywhere, and the will to defend democracy against the Nazi onslaught stood up well enough to triumph in the end; the only collapse that took place "everywhere" was a collapse of the will to prevent the Nazis from wiping the Jews off the face of the earth. Here again, Miss Arendt can be refuted out of her own mouth, for acquiescence in the Final Solution (as she demonstrates) was far from universal in Europe (though it may well have been nearly uni-

versal in Germany). The fact remains, however, that there was acquiescence enough to allow this insane Nazi ambition to come very close to succeeding. Nobody cared about the Gypsies because nobody ever thinks about the Gypsies—except the police. But how did it happen that nobody cared about the Jews when everyone seems always to be thinking about the Jews? The question surely answers itself, and the answer incidentally provides the justification for Ben Gurion's statement that one of the purposes of the Eichmann trial was to make the nations of the world ashamed.

Miss Arendt dislikes that statement, but no more than she dislikes every other statement Ben Gurion made about the trial. She is also unhappy with the trial itself—the fact that Eichmann was tried before an Israeli court instead of an international tribunal, the substance of the indictment, the way Hausner handled the prosecution, the way Servatius conducted the defense. The only aspect of the trial that pleases her is that the judges behaved with scrupulous regard for the interests of Justice: she is as unstinting in her praise of them as she is relentless in her contempt for Hausner and Ben Gurion ("the invisible stage manager of the proceedings"). A few of Miss Arendt's criticisms of the trial seem reasonable, but given the animus she exhibits from the very first sentence of the book, it becomes extremely difficult to look upon these criticisms as anything other than further instances of the inordinate demands she is always making on the Jews to be better than

other people, to be braver, wiser, nobler, more dignified—or be damned. (When, to take a trivial example, has it ever popped into anyone's head to accuse a prosecutor in an adversary proceeding of being unfair to the defendant he is working to convict? But Mr. Hausner was the attorney-general of a Jewish state, and therefore it is proper to attack him for doing what all prosecutors are expected to do.)

This habit of judging the Jews by one standard and everyone else by another is a habit Miss Arendt shares with many of her fellow-Jews, emphatically including those who think that the main defect of her version of the story is her failure to dwell on all the heroism and all the virtue that the six million displayed among them. But the truth is—*must* be—that the Jews under Hitler acted as men will act when they are set upon by murderers, no better and no worse: the Final Solution reveals nothing about the victims except that they were mortal beings and hopelessly vulnerable in their powerlessness. And as with the victims, so with those who were lucky enough to survive the holocaust. There is no special virtue in sheer survival, whatever Bruno Bettelheim may say, and there is no martyrdom in sheer victimization, whatever certain sentimentalists among us may think.

The Nazis destroyed a third of the Jewish people. In the name of all that is humane, will the remnant never let up on itself?