

I sent the following letter to the New York Times Book Review:

To the Editor:

In your review of the book about Hannah Arendt (April 15) she is credited with coining "the term 'the banality of evil,'" the highly controversial subtitle of her report on the Eichmann trial. This is incorrect: Arendt borrowed this term from her teacher Karl Jaspers, as proven by their letters published in 1992. Arendt wrote to Jaspers: "Your definition of Nazi policy as a crime ("criminal guilt") strikes me as questionable [...] that is precisely what constitutes their monstrosity. For these crimes no punishment is enough." In his response Jaspers questioned "monstrosity" and rejected the idea of "the demonic element in Hitler and so forth. It seems to me that we have to see these things in their *total banality*, in their *prosaic triviality*, because that's what truly characterizes them. Bacteria can cause epidemics that wipe out nations, but they remain merely bacteria. I regard any hint of myth and legend with horror" (italics added).

This letter was not printed.

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