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**HOW TO THINK ABOUT EVIL: A RESPONSE TO RICHARD J. BERNSTEIN
Ph.D. ON ARENDT'S BANALITY OF EVIL**

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Abstract

As an adjective applied to evil, 'banal' is the wrong word: it means commonplace, ordinary, trivial. Its synonyms are: 'trite,' 'hackneyed,' 'platitudeous,' 'vapid,' 'wishy-washy,' and 'silly.' The eminent political philosopher, Hannah Arendt, committed an egregious mistake when she plagiarized Karl Jaspers' words ("total banality;" "prosaic triviality") in the subtitle of her book on the Eichmann trial: "A Report on the Banality of Evil." While the phrase died hard and is still a popular cliché, it is an injustice that offends the memory of the martyrs of the Holocaust.

Even though Arendt met with vigorous protest from many quarters, she never admitted her mistake. Arendt's fatal flaw is vindicated in the article by Professor R.J. Bernstein, 'How Not to Think About Evil,' published previously in this Journal. Arendt claimed that calling Eichmann 'banal' was factual; but it was not. She merely expressed her emotional reaction to the appearance of Eichmann in court: a poor 'nebbish' who did not know what he was doing. The historical facts presented here (below), however, will demonstrate irrefutable evidence that the criminal, Eichmann, knew all too well what he was doing, and that there was nothing either 'banal' or 'trivial' about it.

Introductory Note to the Reader

In the beginning was the deed, said Goethe, while Shakespeare wrote a drama about the evil that men do. Evil is what people do to each other, it is practical, not a metaphysical matter. This discussion of Prof. Bernstein paper "How Not to Think About Evil" is a continuation of my talk "What does evil do?" at the Washington Square Institute's 37th Annual Scientific Meeting "Psychoanalytic and Philosophical Perspectives on Good and Evil."

On Professor Bernstein's own showing, the right question to ask about evil is *not* "what really is evil," for this question "seduces us into thinking that there "really" is an *essence* to evil" (2014, p. 99, his italics). Indeed, this "essence" is in the realm of metaphysics and thus deserving of Occam's razor; for the right question is *not* what evil *is* but what evil *does*. However, instead of remaining true to his own wise precept, Bernstein proceeds to become caught up in metaphysical meanderings. Bernstein's main purpose is to champion "a more reflective approach to good and evil" (p. 90), to avoid what he considers "simplification" (p. 98), to show "why black and white judgments are totally inadequate" (p. 99), which becomes a big problem. Moreover, there is no indication that he is fully aware of the ethical dimensions of evil, the connection of good and evil with such issues as right and wrong, lawful and criminal, just and unjust. It is with Bernstein's opinions as applied to the Holocaust that I will take issue.

Bernstein's two openers are: (1) "Few are hesitant to condemn the gratuitous murders of Sandy Hook, Columbine, and Virginia Tech as evil deeds" (p. 89); (2) "This way of thinking of sharply contrasting good and evil is especially prevalent in politics. Bernstein notes that on September 11, 2001, George W. Bush declared: 'Today our nation saw evil, the very worst of human nature' " (p. 89, 90). However, mark well: the opener about the serial murderers is not a metaphysical musing: the word evil is used there as an *adjective*, not an essence: a *characterization* of the murders giving vent to an emotional and moral outrage at the vengefully violent murder of innocent bystanders (Lothane, 2014a-in press). On the other hand, Bush's rhetoric is propaganda aimed at fabricating justifications for waging a war of aggression on a sovereign state, buttressed by bogus claims about weapons of mass destruction, whose disastrous consequence are now facing us full force. Bush reminds us of Reagan characterizing Soviet Russia as the Evil Empire, which the Soviets usually countered by painting the USA as a war-monger. But were the two superpowers that different over the years? We have not heard the last word about the consequences of the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan and of the American one, either. However that may be, the propagandist rhetoric of politicians exploiting the word evil vs. the reality of the evils of the Holocaust perpetrated by Hitler's regime is another matter, a distinction blurred by Bernstein.

The conflation of deeds and depictions of deeds runs like a crimson thread through Bernstein's glowing account of "one of the most fascinating epistolary exchanges of the twentieth century [...] the correspondence between Hannah Arendt and her mentor and friend Karl Jaspers" (p. 90). When the Americans and the British liberated the remaining 'Concentration Camps' by May 8 1945, they discovered the mounds of corpses and malnourished inmates left behind by the fleeing Nazis; and in November of that year began the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders for crimes against humanity. In 1946 Arendt wrote this to Jaspers: "Your definition of Nazi policy as a crime ("criminal guilt") strikes me as questionable [...] that is precisely what constitutes their *monstrousness*. For these crimes no punishment is enough" (p. 91; italics added). Jaspers' definition was both wrong and contradicted the imminent decisions of the Nuremberg court that defined, tried, and convicted the Nazi murderers for crimes against humanity. In his response, Jaspers disagreed with Arendt's characterization of "monstrousness," the only right statement she made about the Holocaust in this exchange and thereafter, and rejected out of hand 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" (p. 91, my italics).

Wrong again, Jaspers, on two counts: Nazi crimes were neither 'an epidemic' nor 'banal' nor 'trivial:' they were an evil, hate-filled, heinous and horrendous genocide of the Jewish people and a destruction their culture on an industrial scale. On a personal level, how could Jaspers, in good faith, prate about banality and triviality when he and his Jewish wife lived under a constant Nazis threat of deportation to the camps? On a factual level, how could he, this otherwise prominent philosopher, compare premeditated genocide, an act of mankind, to nations wiped out by bacteria, an act of nature? I regard such a comparison with utmost indignation because to me, as a survivor of second World War, Hitler is the most demonic leader that ever lived, more sinister—if there is room for comparison—than Stalin, who master-minded the Gulag, executions, and genocide of his people. To so characterize these two dictators is not mythologizing. While sucking up to

Jaspers, “we have to combat all impulse to *mythologize* the horrible,” she, to her credit, retorted correctly: “But still, there is a difference between a man who sets out to murder his old aunt and people who built factories to produce corpses” (p. 91, my italics).

This fallacious exchange spawned a bigger falsehood in 1963 when Arendt plagiarized Jaspers’ banality and inserted it into the title of her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* (revised edition in 1968)—the report was about the trial of a Nazi criminal, not about his behavior in the Jerusalem court. With this approach to Eichmann, Arendt retreated from upholding the concept of radical, or man-made evil, the idea of Emmanuel Kant, that moral corruption of character is radical, i.e., the root cause, of evil deeds. The book led to a storm of protest from many quarters but Bernstein, a former colleague of Arendt at the New School in New York, thinks Arendt was “badly misunderstood” (p. 93). I strongly disagree: she was not misunderstood, she made a bad mistake. Bernstein endorses Arendt’s statement quoted from her later

Postscript:

When I speak of the banality of evil, I do so on the strictly factual level, pointing to a phenomenon which stared on in the face at the trial. Eichmann was no Iago and no Macbeth, and nothing would have been further from his mind than to determine with Richard III “to prove a villain.” Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all...He merely, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing* (Arendt, 1963, 287; italics added; source: Arendt 1965).

Arendt confused historical facts with literary fancies. Had Eichmann read this, he might have hired Arendt to be his lawyer during his trial. The “strictly factual level” was for Arendt the nebbish she saw during her brief presence at the trial, not the factual SS officer Eichmann working for his bosses, exterminators Hitler, Himmler, and Heydrich. She had not seen him wearing his uniform with the SS insignia organizing the mass deportation of Jews to their death in Auschwitz, especially the Hungarian and Czech Jews during the last year of the war. It was absurd to compare the real Eichmann with *fictional* Shakespeare characters like Iago, a jealous husband, or Macbeth, an ambitious thane,

both tragic not evil heroes; or even with the villainous Richard III – what does this have to do with Eichmann and his role in the Holocaust?!

It was preposterous of Arendt to conclude that Eichmann “never realized what he was doing.” *The historical fact is that Obersturmbannführer Eichmann, as representative of the SS, participated in the 1942 Wannsee Conference that finalized the decision of the Final Solution, the extermination of the Jews in Europe.* WW II historian and Nazi hunter Professor Wolfgang Eckart, Director of the Institute of the History of Medicine at Heidelberg University (THE sponsor during my visiting professorship there with the support of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) informed me that “Eichmann knew about everything in detail from the beginning. He wrote down the minutes of the Wannsee-Conference. And he did not just sit at a desk: he traveled to the death camps and saw the extermination installations with his own eyes. Eichmann had the odor of gas in his nose and the taste of the poison on his tongue as he kept signing the deportation orders piled up on his desk” (email of May 29, 2013; Čvančara, 2004, p. 81).

The website Hannah Arendt Center of Bard College shows an undated statement by Arendt:

In response to the my [sic] essay, “Misreading ‘Eichmann in Jerusalem,’” I have been asked repeatedly how to access the Sassen papers, the more than 1,300 pages of memoir and interview transcripts that Eichmann produced while he was in Argentina. The first answer is simple: Read the two issues of *Life* magazine from November 28 and December 5, 1960 in which a large chunk of these interviews are excerpted.

Sassen was a Dutch Nazi collaborator whose interviews of Eichmann in Argentina in 1960 were published in *Life* magazine. Sassen is mentioned repeatedly in her book (1965) without any quotes from the interviews. The first excerpt is Eichmann’s reaction to witnessing the murder of Jews by the Einsatzgruppen firing squads:

When I rode out the next morning they had already started, so I could see only the finish. Although I was wearing a leather coat which reached almost to my ankles, it was very cold. I watched the last group of Jews undress, down to their shirts. They walked the last 100 or 200 yards—they were not driven—then they jumped into the pit. It was impressive to see them all jumping into the pit without offering any resistance whatsoever. Then the men of the squad banged away into the pit with their rifles and machine pistols. Why did that scene linger so long in my memory? Perhaps because I had children myself. And there were children in that

pit. I saw a woman hold a child of a year or two into the air, pleading. At that moment all I wanted to say was, “Don’t shoot, hand over the child...” Then the child was hit.

I was so close that later I found bits of brains splattered on my long leather coat. My driver helped me remove them. Then we returned to Berlin (Sassen, 1960).

In another excerpt, Eichmann describes his first experience viewing mobile gassing centers:

A doctor who was there suggested that I look at the people inside one bus through a peephole in the driver’s seat. I refused. I couldn’t look. This was the first time that I had seen and heard such a thing and my knees were buckling under me. I had been told that the whole process took only three minutes, but the buses rode along for about a quarter of an hour. ...

The *Life* magazine excerpts ends with a transcription of Eichmann’s final outburst when, fed up with Sassen’s attempt to deny the Holocaust or to diminish it, he bursts out in a fit of self-justification:

But to sum it all up, I must say that I regret nothing. Adolf Hitler may have been wrong all down the line, but one thing is beyond dispute: the man was able to work his way up from lance corporal in the German army to *Führer* of a people of almost 80 million. I never met him personally, but his success alone proves to me that I should subordinate myself to this man. He was somehow so supremely capable that the people recognized him. And so with that justification I recognized him joyfully, and I still defend him.

I will not humble myself or repent in any way. I could do it too cheaply in today’s climate of opinion. It would be too easy to pretend that I had turned suddenly from a Saul to a Paul. No, I must say truthfully that if we had killed all the 10 million Jews that Himmler’s statisticians originally listed in 1933, I would say, “Good, we have destroyed an enemy.” But here I do not mean wiping them out entirely. That would not be proper—and we carried on a proper war.

Now, however, when through the malice of fate a large part of these Jews whom we fought against are alive, I must concede that fate must have wanted it so. I always claimed that we were fighting against a foe who through thousands of years of learning and development had become superior to us.

I no longer remember exactly when, but it was even before Rome itself had been founded that the Jews could already write. It is very depressing for me to think of that people writing laws over 6,000 years of written history. But it tells me that they must be a people of the first magnitude, for law-givers have always been great (Sassen, 1960).

In 1944, Himmler issued an order to stop the killings in Auschwitz and the deportations, but it did not stop Eichmann from zealously proceeding to deport thousands

of Hungarian Jews to be murdered in Auschwitz, a matter Arendt discusses with habitual casuistry (1965, p. 138). On 16th of May 1961 of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, Israel State Attorney Bach stated:

We shall show what were Himmler's motives in August 1944 in giving orders to stop the deportations and, in fact, to prevent the deportation of the Jews of Budapest – what caused it, and what preceded it; what caused Himmler's order to stop the extermination of the Jews in October, 1944. We shall be able to prove the attempts by the Accused to contravene and, indeed, to sabotage this decision of Himmler's (*Trial*, 1961).

Gilbert (1985) wrote: “On 10 March 1944 Adolf Eichmann and his principle subordinates met at Mauthausen concentration camp in order to work out a deportation programme for the 750,000 Jews of Hungary” (p. 662). Among them was SS major Dieter Wisliceny. Arendt mentioned the latter a few times, and even that at the Nuremberg trial “Wisliceny appeared as a witness for the prosecution and gave his damning evidence” (p. 236), without evaluating the importance of this evidence. Nazi expert, Wistrich (2002), reported:

Eichmann was a witness for the prosecution and gave shocking details about ‘The Final Solution.’ It was to him that Eichmann allegedly said that he would ‘leap into his grave laughing,’ because the feeling that he had five million people on his conscience was to him ‘a source of extraordinary satisfaction’ (p. 279). (See, also, the article “Wisliceny” in the Wikipedia and the most recent book about Eichmann by David Cesarani (2007[2006]).

And this, according to Arendt, was the lowly paper pusher who did not know what he was doing? Like a good German, Arendt remained unbowed by such critics as her former friend Gershom Scholem (who ended his relationship with her over this scandal), and stubbornly stuck to her guns to the very end. Was she motivated by trying to remain loyal to her former lover, Nazi party member Martin Heidegger, who never expressed his remorse about the Holocaust? Bernstein quoted Arendt's rehashing her previous argument:

the banality of evil' is something quite factual...which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or *ideological conviction of the doer*...it was not [Eichmann's] stupidity but a curious quite authentic inability to think" (p. 93).

Eichmann might be seen as stupid or shallow, but he certainly was capable of reading. As a good Nazi, he read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and became an ardent follower of that ideology. Eichmann was banal, not the ideology he served with great zeal. What we see here is not Eichmann's but Arendt's inability to 'think.'

The last statement quoted by Bernstein was in Arendt's letter to Scholem:

You are quite right: I changed my mind and do no longer speak of 'radical evil.' It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay to waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is 'thought-defying' 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.' (p. 94).

The fungus simile, copying the aforementioned biological metaphor of Jaspers, is unworthy of a philosopher of political science. The biological simile was used by Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, a venomous book still banned in Germany, in which Jews were depicted as bacteria and vermin. It is thus ironic that philosophers Jaspers and Arendt became ensnared in a racist Nazi metaphor. It is the Nazis who reduced the person of the Jew to a biological organism. It is they, as argued by Arendt quoted by Bernstein, who "[killed] the juridical person—by the denial of any and all rights to the victims" (p. 92). Moreover, they killed the moral person as well: "the one thing that still prevents men from being made into living corpses, the differentiation of the individual, his unique identity," with a number tattooed on his arm.

As *correctly* expressed by Bernstein, "it is this destruction [as shown in Arendt's 1951 book]; this attempt to transform human nature; to make human beings something

less than human; to make humans beings superfluous, that [Arendt] calls *radical evil*” (p. 91). However, with this new “opinion” in the just cited passage, Arendt acts oblivious of the enormity of the Nazi radical evil committed as a *state*, “totalitarian and criminal” (Arendt, 1965, p. 68). A state with its constitution, legal system, economy of slave labor and expropriation, and its army, that had initially conquered and subjugated all of Europe (minus the neutral countries). A state that, by its acts, caused the uprooting, starvation, death, torture; the massacres of civilians, and the suffering and misery of millions of men, women, and children (including the Germans themselves at war’s end).

The warlords and their collaborators, the civil servants, the scientists, were not devoid of the ability to think, plan, organize and execute Hitler’s ambition of world conquest and extermination of Jews, gypsies, Jehovah witnesses and regime opponents. They knew what they were doing. The Holocaust historian who understood it best was Raul Hilberg (1961, cited by Arendt), who claimed Arendt had plagiarized his work and his major thesis that Hitler did not do it alone, as he stated in 1988:

Speer was once asked, “How did you know when Hitler made a decision?” ...At first there were the laws. Then there were decrees implementing laws. Then a law was made there should be no laws. Then there were orders and directives written down but still published in ministerial gazettes. Then there was government by announcement: orders appeared in the newspapers. Then there were only the hidden orders—the instructions that were not published, that were given within the bureaucracy, that were oral. And finally there were no orders at all. Everybody knew what he had to do (Woodruff & Wilmer, 1988, p. 103).

A more trenchant indictment was published by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (1996). To deny such mass man-made evil by calling it nothing is Arendt’s thought-defying abdication of what she had achieved in 1951, her thinking deeply and investigating the roots of radical evil—‘roots’ being the etymological root of ‘radical’—of evil as doing. It is banal to stick to the ‘banality of evil’, which was not her original idea but a poor imitation of Jaspers.

Arendt's grossly misleading "Eichmann never realized what he was doing" is contradicted by her account of his doings (1965, e.g., Chapter IX) and the sources she read, not only Hilberg but also Poliakov (1951), cited by her in 1966 (p. 505) and the German translation of 1955, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden* (1965, p. 302). In Poliakov (1951) we read:

"on 30 July 1941 Heydrich was ordered "to take all the preparatory measures required for the final solution of the Jewish question in the European territories under German control...In fact, the power to carry this out was given to Adolf Eichmann...Heydrich authorizes Eichmann to put into operation the first deportation trains: it is no longer a matter of evacuation but of imminent extermination" (pp. 130-131, my translation).

Thus, the final solution was put into operation already prior to the 1942 Wannsee Conference, during which, as reported by Arendt, Eichmann "sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt." Who was he to judge? Who was he "to have his own thoughts in the matter"? (Arendt, 1965, p. 114).

However, according to Poliakov, under Heydrich as chief of R.S.H.A. (Head Office for Reich Security), "Eichmann as chief of Office IV-B-4 [a subsection R.S.H.A.], is the true architect of the "final solution," at least as far as the first part of the process is concerned, the numbers of the Jews to be arrested and transported to extermination sites... Eichmann was informed about everything and played an active role in exterminations wherever they took place. As chief of bureau IV-B he was specifically in charge of organization and negotiations that this involved in all the [Nazi-occupied] European countries, with the exception of Germany and Poland, that were the direct responsibility of Himmler and Heydrich" (pp. 161-162, my translation), so noted by Arendt (1965, p. 84)

In 1999 Hilberg gave an interview to the German newspaper *Die Welt* in which he stated:

Eichmann was not banal. He was no banal person, but a member of the SS. Arendt misled half the world with her so-called "banality of evil." Neither the actions nor the man Eichmann were banal. Hegel had already warned us not to

observe world historical figures from the perspective of their servants. That is what philosopher Hannah Arendt has overlooked in Eichmann. Neither was he a case of blind obedience. He did not follow every order, as he had argued. He was still so zealous in 1944 that he continued to deport Jews when he no longer had to. At the trial he represented the entire Nazi bureaucracy's work of destruction which included countless collaborators (my translation).

Bernstein does not do much better with ideas drawn from Primo Levi which he introduces by asking this question: "But what can we say about the victims—those who suffered such pain and humiliation. How do the categories good and evil apply to them—especially those who experienced the horrors of the concentration and extermination camps? Primo Levi is the most subtle and profound reporter of what it was like to be in Auschwitz" (p. 95). (But this immediately begs this question: if Bernstein really believes that there was a "good" element to being a prisoner in the camps, or slave labor, he should notify the German government post haste and have them recalculate their reparation payments to the few surviving victims of the Holocaust.)

Furthermore, according to Primo Levi, as paraphrased by Bernstein, this is what was actually going on in the camps in the so-called 'gray zone' given to "privileged" inmates:

Levi gives an extraordinarily subtle phenomenological account of what he calls the privileged prisoners—those singled out to perform special tasks in the Lagers. Although they were a minority within the Lager, "nevertheless they represent a potent majority among the survivors" Obtaining extra nourishment—the extra piece of bread or a bowl of soup, was essential to avoid starvation. Survival frequently required privilege. Levi considers the various forms and groups of privilege, ...the low ranking functionaries, ...the Kapos, ...the *Sonderkommando* who were charged with running the gas chambers and the crematoriums. They received and were treated relatively well as long as they managed to survive. For after performing their gruesome duties they too were regularly murdered (pp. 95-96).

What is so subtle in Levi's account? The special treatment given to the *Sonderkommando* was as cynical, callous and evil everything else the Nazis did to the Jews. How many *Sonderkommando* handlers of the gas chambers and crematoriums survived to tell the story—did Primo Levi know? On the other hand, as quoted by Bernstein, Primo Levi wrote: “It is naïve, absurd, and historically false to believe that a system as infernal as was National Socialism sanctifies its victims: on the contrary, it degrades them, it makes them resemble itself...” (Levi 1989; 40). Those who perished were martyrs, the *Sonderkommando*, a cynical euphemism, were not privileged, they were abused, degraded and exploited to carry out the infernal tasks of emptying the gas chambers, extracting gold teeth from the corpses, shoving the corpses into the ovens or burning them on wood piles doused with gasoline. The used-up batch of surviving handlers was periodically murdered to be replaced by the next unit. Should they have been grateful for the privileged treatment they had received?

Last but not least, “Levi concludes his chapter on the gray zone, with a discussion of the notorious Chaim Rumkowski, the Jewish leader of the Lodz (in Polish, Łódź) Ghetto—a man vilified as suffering from lust for power and delusions of his own grandeur. The story of Rumkowski epitomizes the corruption of victims of National Socialism. Even with this terrible scoundrel we must be wary of simplistic judgments of good and evil” (p. 96). It is mind boggling that Bernstein should apply the allegedly “simplistic judgment” of good and evil to corruptor Eichmann and the corrupted victim Rumkowski. And why did Bernstein call Rumkowski a terrible scoundrel? Here is what Martin Gilbert (1985) had to say about Rumkowski:

Chaim Rumkowski was convinced that he could keep the ghetto in productive work and thus preserve life, and that he could find work for all the surviving 100,000 inhabitants (p. 348).

In fact, appointed by the Nazis as the “Elder of the Jews,” the industrial site he organized and maintained helped the Nazi war effort. In 1942 the “scoundrel”

Rumkowski had been ordered to deport 'some twenty thousand Jews', he told a meeting of Jews in the ghetto. The Germans told him that if he refused, 'we shall do it ourselves'. Rumkowski added: 'I have to perform this bloody operation myself; I simply must cut off the limbs to save the body. I have to take away children, because others will also be taken.' The days of those who were sick were also numbered. 'Deliver me the sick ones,' Rumkowski asked, 'and it may be possible to save the healthy ones instead. An eye-witness, Oscar Singer, recalled the sequel: 'Horror seizes the crowd. "Why do the Nazis want our children?" Pandemonium broke out in the ghetto. But Rumkowski knew he had to deliver, "I love children as much as you do," he cried hysterically; "still I fear we must surrender the children as a sacrificial offering in order to save the collective, because should the Germans take matters into their own hands..." Rumkowski spoke 'with a broken heart', Singer added, 'he who was a "Father" to thousands of orphans' (p. 448).

Arendt (1965) was also critical of Rumkowski and the cooperation of the Jewish Councils with Eichmann and his men: who "informed Eichmann [them] how many Jews were needed to fill each train, and they made out the list of deportees" (p. 115). Were they collaborators, like the Norwegian Quisling? According to Margrit Wreschner, survivor (of Theresienstadt), rabbi Benjamin Murelstein, who worked with Eichmann in Vienna and was later the head of the Jewish Council in Theresienstadt, was a traitor (personal communication). It was a great tragedy of the Jews everywhere. Should their members have committed suicide en masse, like the ancient defenders of Massada?

The Lodz ghetto lasted two years longer than the Warsaw ghetto but eventually its inhabitants were deported to the gas chambers of Auschwitz:

By the end of August 1944, sixty seven thousand Jews had been deported from the Lodz ghetto to Birkenau. Among them, Chaim Rumkowski, 'King of the Jews' of the Lodz ghetto, their protector and their mentor, was deported with his family, and perished in the gas chamber together with more that sixty thousand

other Jews from the ghetto over which he exercised so much control, and, as he believed, protection (p. 722).

On January 19, 1945 a few hundred survivors of the more than 245,000 former ghetto detainees were liberated by the Soviet Army.

The last authority on evil Bernstein cites is Sigmund Freud, and therein is another problem. Bernstein first quotes Freud's thought about evil of 1915:

In reality, there is no such thing as 'eradicating' evil. ... Psychoanalytic investigation shows instead that the deepest essence of human nature consists of instinctual impulses which are of an elementary nature, which are similar in all men and aim at the satisfaction of certain primal needs... according to their relation to the needs and *demands of the human community*. It must be granted that all the impulses that *society condemns* as evil—let us take as representative the selfish and cruel ones—are of this primitive kind (p. 281; emphasis added).

Bernstein uses this passage to argue as follows:

We can seek to mitigate the impulses that society takes to be evil only if we have an unsentimental understanding of what human beings are capable of doing... A deep human tendency— [is] the desire to simplify, especially judging what is good and evil. It is one of the defenses that we [sic!] employ when confronting an ambiguous reality that threatens to overwhelm us. Hannah Arendt and Primo Levi also warn us about the dangers of oversimplification. Arendt cautions us that we distort the reality of how the Nazis functioned if we think they must have been psychopathic monsters. On the contrary we must see how many of those who so efficiently carried out Nazi policies were not only perfectly normal but even banal. This is the real horror of what twentieth century totalitarianism has revealed (pp. 97-98).

But Freud is being quoted to frame a confused and self-serving argument. Firstly, Freud has done some simplifying himself. In his attempt to explain, a few paragraphs earlier, “the sense of disillusionment: the low morality shown externally by states which in their internal relations pose as guardians of moral standards, and the brutality shown by individuals whom, as participants in the highest human civilization, one would not have thought capable of such behavior” (p. 280), Freud is critical of a “development [that] consists in eradicating [a person’s] evil human tendencies and, under the influence of education and a civilized environment, replacing them with good ones. If so, however, it is surprising that evil should re-emerge with such force in anyone who has been brought up in such a way” (pp. 280-281).

Freud goes on to point out that the well-intentioned illusion of eradicating evil human tendencies by moral exhortation is contradicted by instinctual impulses, the germ of his future theory of the death instinct. (See, as I have shown - using the same passage as Bernstein - in my 2011 chapter entitled “Evil and the death instinct” (see also Lothane, 2012; Lothane, 2014a- in press). Freud then continues the theme of instincts expatiating on their “inhibition, reaction-formations, ‘ambivalence of feeling’ [an idea he took over from Bleuler], egoism change into altruism, the fact that intense love and intense hatred are so often found together in the same person” (p. 281), thus sliding into personal psychology and weakening his ideas about war as a societal manifestation.

Freud wrote about the evils of war again in 1916:

The war broke out and robbed the world of its beauties. It destroyed not only the beauty of the countryside through which it passed and the works of art which it met with on its path but it also shattered our pride in the achievements of our civilization (*Kultur*), our admiration for many philosophers and artists and our hopes of a final triumph over the differences between nations and races. It tarnished the lofty impartiality of our ‘science,’ it revealed our instincts in all their nakedness and let loose the *evi*/spirits within us which we thought had been tamed

for ever by centuries of continuous education by the noblest minds. It made our country small again and made the rest of the world far remote. It robbed us of very much that we had loved, and showed us how ephemeral were many things that we had regarded as changeless (p. 307; emphasis added).

As if aware of the dangers of illusion and disillusionment that were on Freud's mind in 1915 and 1916, Arendt, in Chapter IX, (1965), "Duties of a Law-Abiding Citizen," notes that

feeling like Pontius Pilate, [Eichmann believed] this was the way things were...based on the Führer's order; whatever he did he did, as far as he could see, as a law-abiding citizen. He did his *duty*, ... he not only obeyed orders, he obeyed the *law*.... [And] he declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral precepts, and especially according to the Kantian definition of duty. This was outrageous, on the face of it, and also incomprehensible, since Kant's moral philosophy is so closely bound up with man's faculty of judgment, which rules out blind obedience (pp. 135-136; italics Arendt's).

Arendt had it right this time and, as far I am concerned, not only nullified the banality defense but also took the wind out of Bernstein's claim that Eichmann was a man both "perfectly normal and even banal."

There are two more important issues in approaching war and the Holocaust not discussed by Arendt and Bernstein. These are more of the nature of lessons that can be applied to psychotherapy. The first issue is the collective phenomenon of the psychology of masses, crowds, and groups, not just personalities of the evil leaders alone but the crucial dynamics of leaders and the led (Freud, 1921; Lothane, 1997, 2006).

In 1921 Freud transitioned from a monadic one-person psychology to a dyadic interpersonal psychology: “in the individual mental life someone else is invariably involved, as model, an object, as a helper or an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology ... is at the same time social psychology as well” (p. 69). Gustave Le Bon, the main inspiration for his mass psychology, was quoted by Freud as follows:

‘the individual forming part of a crowd acquires, solely from numerical considerations, a sentiment of invincible power which allows him to yield to instincts, which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint ... a crowd being anonymous [so that] the sentiment of responsibility disappears entirely. The second cause [is] contagion ... classed among phenomena of a hypnotic order ... A third cause is ... suggestibility. ... Isolated, a person may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd he is a barbarian -- that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings’ (Le Bon, 1897, pp. 9-12; Freud, 1921, pp. 74, 77].

Instincts in Le Bon are not limited to Freud’s instinctual drives, but to the reality of the life of emotions, or passions: the craving for love, frustration of love resulting in anger and hate, the hunger for influence and power over others, the power of emotions vs. reason and responsibility (Lothane 2014a-in press).

The so-called Spirit of 1914, the mass war euphoria in Germany, whipped up by Emperor Wilhelm and the German political parties, contrasts starkly with the aforementioned disillusionment described by Freud. Similarly, Hitler’s dream of world conquest began as a romance between the Führer and the masses in an ecstatic, orgiastic love embrace. Under the illusion of being loved by the Führer, was created the psychic reality of feeling common bonds of identification among adherents old and young, men and women; with the young abandoning parental values to follow the Führer. This seduction was facilitated by Fuhrer through the use of all the modern paraphernalia, torch lit military parades and impassioned theatrical speeches producing mass visceral excitement and enthusiasm. Also, hundreds of university professors and thousands of

students enthusiastically took the oath of allegiance to the *Führer* in these mass meetings. Le Bon's observations and insights provide understanding the phenomenon of *transfer* of feelings and emotions in the therapeutic group of two. This mutual flow of emotions creates the need for self-regulation in each member and the homeostasis of both participants (both verbalized and non-verbalized) via body language, and the interchange of emotions (Lothane 2014b-in press).

The second issue is the problem of 'the lie and of lying' as Buber was concerned with (and wrote about) in 1952:

The lie is the specific evil which man has introduced into nature...the lie is our very own invention, different in kind from every deceit that animals can produce. A lie was possible only after a creature, man, was capable of conceiving the being of truth. It was possible only as directed against the conceived truth. In a lie the spirit practices treason against itself (p. 7).

So as to fully understand this passage it is necessary to keep in mind Buber's definition of evil:

It is usual to think of good and evil as two poles, two opposite direction, two arms of a signpost pointing to right and left...we must begin by doing away with this convention and recognizing the fundamental dissimilarity between the two in nature, structure and dynamics within human reality... Evil, though concretely presented to extra-spective vision also, in its actions and effects, its attitudes and behaviour, is presented in its essential state to our introspection only; and only our self-knowledge—[and] our knowledge of others—is capable of stating what happens when we do evil. ... It follows from the foregoing that [the person] must now be aware of the existent actuality of evil as evil (p. 121-122), [of] "the biographically decisive beginnings of evil and good (p. 124), [of] a 'radical evil' ...because what man finds in himself is willed (p. 140).

These ideas had also been expressed by the Stoics and the Evangelists: "But let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil (Matthew 5:37); "The truth will set you free" (John 8:32); "If any man is able to convince

me that I do not think or act right, I will gladly change; for I seek the truth, by which no man was ever injured. But he is injured who abides in error and ignorance” (Marcus Aurelius).

Lying is a willed, chosen evil truth-destroying action and Hitler and Goebbels, and the other Nazis, were past masters at it. The arch fiend and liar was Hitler himself who said this on January 30th 1939 in a speech to the Reichstag after he seized power and became dictator of Nazi Germany:

“Today I want to prophecy once again. Should the international finance-Jewry in Europe and elsewhere succeed in plunging the nations once again into a world war, then the result will not be the bolshevization of the globe and the victory of the Jewry but the extermination of the Jewish race in Europe.”

This was no prophecy: it was a declaration of his planned extermination of the Jews. According to Poliakov (1951), his chief helper in realizing this plan was Hitler’s virulently anti-Semitic and lying propaganda minister Josef Goebbels.

Goebbels wrote in his diary:

With regard to the Jewish Question, the *Führer* is determined to make a clean sweep of it. He prophesied that, if they brought about another world war, they would experience their annihilation. That was no empty talk. The annihilation of Jewry must be the necessary consequence. The question is to be viewed without any sentimentality. We're not there to have sympathy with the Jews, but only sympathy with our own German people. If the German people has again now sacrificed around 160,000 dead in the eastern campaign, the originators of this bloody conflict will have to pay for it with their lives (see Browning, 2004).

In 1965 Arendt (1965) noted that:

During the war, the lie most effective with the whole of the German people was the slogan of “the battle of destiny for the German people,” coined by Hitler or by Goebbels, which made self-deception easier on three counts: it suggested, first, that the war was no war; second, that it was started by destiny and not by

Germany; and, third, that it was a matter of life and death for the Germans, who must annihilate their enemies or be annihilated (p. 52).

Unfortunately, she cannot be given full credit for this perceptive analysis for she changed one crucial word: Hitler did not say the war was started by destiny, he said it was started by the Jews, as his enemies, *before* he gave orders to murder them. She acted similarly in characterizing Eichmann as banal, an ‘untruth’ if ever there was one.

It was said about Bill Clinton’s Monica Lewinski scandal: when Clinton lied nobody died. The consequence of Clinton’s lies was the electoral defeat of Al Gore. It was different when George W. Bush lied about Saddam Hussein’s weapons of mass destruction: these were actually Bush’s propaganda weapons of mass deception, with consequences that are still with us. Similar tactics are employed by various political parties in the various modalities of electoral campaigns.

To lie means to know the truth and willfully to distort it. Freud rarely wrote about lying as a conscious interpersonal action: lying as action melted away in various defenses, mostly unconscious, of repression, denial, disavowal. Therein lies an important lesson for the practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy offered by dramatology. Whenever we are confronted by a patient who distorts, dissembles, pretends, is insincere, or plain lies, we need to confront him with his enactment of a lie. Both patient and therapist will grow from such a confrontation.

To conclude: I do not doubt the seriousness of Bernstein’s seeking an answer to the question of evil, but Arendt on Eichmann was a poor choice of an example to facilitate that quest. Evil, whether with a small ‘e’ or big ‘E,’ is what we do to ourselves or to others. Evil is waging war instead of forging peace; destruction vs. dialogue; rage vs. reason; and revenge vs. reconciliation. How to think about evil? Since evil is a moral concept (a concept with implications as to what is ‘right’ vs. ‘wrong’) we want to think about it fearlessly, openly, and truthfully, without recourse to defensive, rhetorical or metaphysical, embellishments and excuses.

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