



# Eichmann and the Holocaust

*Hannah Arendt*

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## **Eichmann and the Holocaust** Hannah Arendt

Inspired by the trial of a bureaucrat who helped cause the Holocaust, this radical work on the banality of evil stunned the world with its exploration of a regime's moral blindness and one man's insistence that he be absolved all guilt because he was 'only following orders'.

## **Eichmann and the Holocaust Details**

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Author : Hannah Arendt

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## From Reader Review Eichmann and the Holocaust for online ebook

### Ingeborg says

A very good and important book, a shorter version of Arendt's "Eichmann in Jerusalem". It shows how dangerous non-thinking can be!

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### Robert says

"Nothing's as hot when you're eating it as when it's cooking." The failure of that piece of conventional wisdom to predict the Holocaust, to predict the way history would unfold, cuts to the awful core of what those average men - bad men, but not monsters rather mediocre, because that lets us all off the hook (terrifying is to speculate that many of them would have been regarded as good men) - acted in form to the way that Eichmann, the cliché-spouter, the bureaucrat, the banal evildoer, does. This happened because of our ability to keep going - to filter out, to disregard in order to overcome and faithfully triumph. It happened because millions of regular Germans kept their heads down and focused on what they could comprehend, day in and day out, not the enormity before which words and action seem to fail. The capacity to reduce existence to the commonplace - "just doing my job", "there's a war on", "Elders of Zion", "it's worse in Russia" - is the only way to reconcile a faith in the human drive toward benevolence and cooperation with the "Final Solution." Arendt's words show us just how culpable we all are, that none are truly innocent before such travesty - this is vital even today. This is a collection of excerpts from the complete Eichmann in Jerusalem: The Banality of Evil, and I may just have to read the whole thing.

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### Mandy E says

so interesting that arendt says explicitly in her postscript that the book was not "a theoretical treatise on the nature of evil" (112), and yet penguin describes it in the synopsis as a "radical work on the banality of evil," and the full work from which this text is excerpted is titled Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil in fact, most of the work deals with issues of justice and legality.

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### Sarah Leslie says

No matter how many years pass, the topic of the Holocaust will never cease to be anything short of affective. From the foundation of the Final Solution to the morality behind war, Eichmann and the Holocaust is an insightful volume that sheds light on the psychology of Eichmann and the genocide of WWII.

Arendt has pieced together a fantastic little book that made me look at history in an alternative perspective. I've never given much thought to the psychology behind the Schutzstaffel's motives, they've always just been heartless monsters to me, but the psychology behind the *why* of their motives is by far the most interesting thing about this documentation. Arendt illustrating their moral blindness makes you question your own. Thought-provoking and hauntingly honest; this is a minuscule but mighty must read for history and psychology lovers, and general readers alike.

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## Aleka says

Me ha resultado inquietante lo actual de sus planteamientos en materia jurídica, política y moral. La existencia de la culpabilidad y la inocencia colectivas, el análisis de los clichés en los que se basan ciertas emisiones de juicios, las competencias de los tribunales internacionales de justicia, los límites legales y morales de las leyes... Son todos conceptos que debemos tratar de comprender si queremos vivir y participar de un mundo más justo. Que por cierto, nos queda un poco lejos, dadas las circunstancias actuales. Un libro interesantísimo.

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## DilanAc says

Certainly an important historical document. I am not a history buff though and all of the listing of names and dates was rather boring.

I guess the most shocking part was not the banality of Eichmann (that banality leads to evil seems perfectly true) but rather the depiction of Jewish compliance and their participation in the organized transports to the death camps. It put me on alert to stand up, to protest, to say no, hell no, particularly during the times when it is so much easier just to go along.

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## Robert says

"Eichmann and the Holocaust" is an important read, if only because the book, assembled from Arendt's "Reporter at Large: A five-part article commissioned by "The New Yorker," and excerpted from her more comprehensive: "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil," reminds us that we have not in half a century, come to terms with the nature of war crimes or crimes against humanity.

Arendt offers a combination of reportage and critical analysis of her subject, Adolf Eichmann, and the context in which he performed his diabolical work. It is a story that we all assume we know, if only because the phrases and words: "banality of evil," holocaust, genocide and crimes against humanity, have become such commonplace descriptions in a world that has grown too familiar and, so, too indifference to horrible acts committed to advance one ideology or political party or another.

It's always important to return to the source to understand an author's thesis and this slender book enables us to look closely at the man and the Officer, as well as those who gave and who followed his orders. In this context it's also important to understand the evolution of the Nazi's "Final Solution."

Anti-Semitism may have been at the center of the Nazi ideology, but genocide was not a given, nor was a machine put in motion in 1933 when Hitler took power. There were precedents to the mass murder of Jews and it's important to keep in mind that Jews were neither the first put to death, nor sent to concentration camps.

Arendt's story and analysis is a helpful corrective to the sentimental fairytale told by Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List." Evil was far less pervasive and considerably more seductive and complex than the usual representations of the perpetrators of Shoah.

If I understand Arendt correctly, the Nazi's discovered, more through trial and error than analytics, the means

to accomplish their ends. But the famous "machine" metaphor is less apt than I previously thought. The whole spectrum of human attributes and qualities were necessary, put into place by 1,000s of people—across the political, social and religious spectrum—made Eichmann the committed and successful bureaucrat he proved to be.

Which is to say that Eichmann could not have famously been just a "cog" in the machine, if the machine, however Rube Goldbergesque, was not in place and maintained, in a surprisingly slipshod manner. And, maintained, ironically, as much by the victims as by the perpetrators of the Holocaust, as Arendt, without blaming the victims, makes clear. She suggests that perhaps as many of half the victims of Shoah would have survived had they not participated in their own extermination.

Another important element of the book, which still resonates today, involves the controversy of the Trial itself. It is a legitimate question to ask: Did the State of Israel have the right to try and judge, sentence and execute Eichmann?

While acknowledging the man was a criminal and guilty of terrible crimes, she asks us to contemplate what were the natures of Eichmann's crimes: Crimes against the Jews, or crimes against humanity, or crimes against his conscience? Yes, she concludes the "court in Jerusalem succeeded in in fulfilling the demands of justice," but it did so without providing an unambiguous process that would help us to seek and deliver justice in the future. The proof of this is how we find ourselves today, limited to metaphors such as "regime change" to eliminate uncooperative or failed states, or to firing missiles from drones, to kill those deemed by those in power a threat to our way of life.

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### **Lysergius says**

For me the most surprising thing to come out of this little volume was the admission that the Jews had cooperated and participated in their own destruction. The the Jewish Councils (Judenrat) registered and selected the victims for deportation and the Jewish police rounded up the reluctant victims.

As for Eichmann himself what can you say that has not already been said?

Hannah Arendt addresses the other issue, namely what sort of crime is this? "Genocide" is the term that was coined at Nürnberg, but I am inclined to agree that "administrative massacre" is closer to the truth.

Its not often that such a small volume provokes such interest. Excellent.

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### **Sunny says**

Interesting book about the trial of adolf eichmann who was responsible for the jettison of Jews from Austria if i Understood correctly and then for the mass movement of Jews to concentration camps in the east especially. The book touches on his trail near the end although it's a short book. He was hung but claimed to have been following orders at all times. The Most remarkable thIng I learnt was the involvement of higher ranking and common jews in the ghettos and the concentration camps themselves. One line says that if the common Jews hadn't blindly trusted leaders in the ghettos then maybe the number of deaths would not have been as high. Gets very philosophical at times as well. Challenging but I enjoyed it.

## Guillermo Macbeth says

Un libro tan brillante como polémico. Es bien sabido que la tarea de los filósofos es preguntar, no responder. Filosofar es preguntar, refinar preguntas. Este libro formado por textos encargados por la revista The New Yorker a Hannah Arendt sobre el juicio en Jerusalén al genocida Adolf Eichmann presenta una importante colección de observaciones, comentarios y reflexiones -derivadas de preguntas filosóficas de Arendt-. Eichmann fue un teniente coronel nazi que luego de ser descubierto en Argentina durante la segunda postguerra tuvo un juicio en Israel que concluyó con la pena capital. Arendt tiene una visión crítica de todo el proceso, sobre todo respecto de problemas propiamente legales. En su mayoría, pareciera que estas críticas están bien fundamentadas. Sin embargo, el núcleo duro del libro es una teoría del mal que propone Arendt para interpretar el caso específico de Eichmann y advertir al futuro para prevenir casos similares. Esta teoría se conoce como la banalidad del mal. No es tan sencillo el planteo. Su teoría afirma que existe una variedad peligrosa del mal que surge de la irreflexión, de la mediocridad, de la torpeza, de la estrechez intelectual de un burócrata situado en circunstancias históricas, sociales y políticas particulares. A esto le llama Arendt la banalidad del mal. Las notas en The New Yorker y luego el libro tuvieron muchas críticas desfavorables de las que Arendt intenta defenderse en un Epílogo de ediciones posteriores. Estas críticas, en mi opinión, están justificadas. Si bien creo posible que exista algo así como una variedad banal del mal, no me parece aceptable que se pueda aplicar al caso de Eichmann. Su gestión administrativa, sus decisiones, sus invenciones, su firma, su trabajo cotidiano durante muchos meses llevó a millones de personas a campos de concentración y a la cámara de gas. Opino que ni la más cerrada de las ideologías pueda deshumanizar tanto a un ser humano como para dejar de percibir el mal perpetrado a otro ser humano. Al menos en algún sector de la conciencia pienso que habría un registro del mal como algo grave, no como banalidad. Creo que la definición del mal podría intentarse por allí: una persona destruye premeditadamente a otra persona. La investigación de este problema, sin embargo, es infinita. En síntesis, creo que se trata de un libro muy recomendable porque presenta argumentos inteligentes, pero deja abierta la discusión, casi como una provocación. Según mi parecer, la banalidad del mal, en caso de ser una tesis revisada y posiblemente aceptada, no puede aplicarse al caso de Eichmann.

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## Jack Mundale says

...a very incisive rendering of the facts surrounding the trial of Adolf Eichmann. I wanted to read this book after seeing the 2012 film Hannah Arendt. This is not actually a book but the collection of controversial articles Hannah wrote for the New Yorker after the trial in which Hannah famously coined the term "banality of evil". I think the epilogue should be read by students everywhere as a cautionary to the evils of ideological/dogmatic thinking.

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## Alan says

This is the abridged version of Eichmann in Jerusalem. This is a great read offering insight into Eichmann's trial and the philosophical claim on the banality of evil. Having already read up and having reflected on Arendt's philosophical claim before delving in, I can't say I learned much from this book. It was, however, surprising to read about the relationship between Eichmann, the Nazi's and the Jews before the Final Solution was proposed. Still, this is an incredibly important book. Everyone interested in philosophy, sociology or Holocaust/Israeli history should read this (if not the unabridged version).

## Connie says

Eichmann and the Holocaust is a book based on excerpts from a five-part article Hannah Arendt wrote for "The New Yorker" in 1963. She reported on the trial of the German Nazi, Adolf Eichmann, in Israel. He was found guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes, leading to his execution in 1962.

Eichmann was one of the chief organizers of the Holocaust. He was involved first with the forced emigration or expulsion of the Jews from Austria. Later, he organized the deportation of the Jews to Poland where they were shot, or sent to concentration camps to await the gas chambers in Poland and Hungary. His reason for doing this seemed to be a desire to raise in rank in the Nazi organization, a career move as a transportation administrator of extermination. He said he was following orders.

Eichmann lived in Argentina under a false identity after World War II. He was eventually captured by Israeli agents in 1960, and tried in Jerusalem. There were questions about the legality of his capture by kidnapping, and about his trial which was not in an international court.

The material presented in this book about the trial was good, and thought-provoking. But more background information was really needed, especially about his time in Argentina, and a few pages of biographical information on Eichmann would have made it a better book. I found myself getting more details from the Internet. Perhaps that information was in the author's longer book, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.

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## Pino says

A very important book. An overview of the trial, the man and the circumstances of such trial of such crime. Who's to blame , who's the responsible , who's to trial and who has to bear the guilt ?

These questions are not only related to Auschwitz but to every genocide that happened and may happen in the future.

There is also the controversy of "blaming the victim" , the role of the Jew police and Jew community in this genocide.

The question of "obeying/defying the authority" when it comes to inhuman orders.

I loved this book. It triggers your brain to think about morality , question your values, your respect of the community boundaries, challenging your limit and most importantly the notion of "humanity" in our world. What's the limit of nation "values", "vision" and "laws" faced to the global human rights.

When to intervene and take responsibility as human in favor and to help other human from different country , religion . Immigration crisis as example nowadays.

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## Ugh says

I think you need to have a bit more background knowledge of the events of the holocaust and Israeli law (maybe just the law or concepts of justice in general) than I do in order to fully appreciate this. I could easily see myself giving it 4 stars if I did know a bit more about these things, but I think the most useful thing I can do is score it in terms of what I actually felt and thought, not in terms of what I think I could potentially think and feel. Anyway.

It's certainly interesting, it's just that at times I didn't find it all that clear, all that linear, or all that focused. There are some facts in it that I was unaware of and very surprised by, and there are some philosophical things in it that I shall be pondering for a while. The book comprises extracts from a larger work, and I expect the larger work is a bit more coherent. However, this is still well worth a read.

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