

Philosophy not History

I was honored to be invited to open this conference – until I sat down to work on my lecture, and then I was daunted. In the past sixteen years I'd written about Eichmann in Jerusalem three times, and in looking over the last piece I was reasonably satisfied. I had a reading of the book that makes sense of the whole, and answers most of the objections that have been made to it. Nothing I had read before gave me reason to revise it. But I had little taste for repeating myself, particularly when I saw the list of other speakers and knew that some of them, at least, had read or heard what I had to say before. After spending ten years of my life thinking about evil, it seemed an act of sanity to turn my attention to other subjects, and I cursed myself for having accepted the invitation in the first place.

When Bettina Stangneth's *Eichmann vor Jerusalem* arrived, I groaned. I had ordered the book to make sure I did my homework, but 700 pages of what I expected to be the usual ponderous German academic prose seemed onerous homework indeed. Moreover, earlier works that had been touted as undermining Eichmann in Jerusalem's central theses have been flawed at best, and driven by a combination of resentment and incomprehension at worst. On my view, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is neither journalism nor history but philosophy – quite probably the most important work of moral philosophy produced in

the 20th century. New revelations about Eichmann, therefore, might force us to revise Arendt's conclusions about Eichmann himself, but not the central and radical claims of her book.

Contrary to every expectation I had, *Eichmann vor Jerusalem* is a major achievement, a worthy successor to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* with which, according to the author, it is a dialogue. You might even view it as an homage to Arendt, whom Stangneth tirelessly defends. Against the often-heard criticism that Arendt didn't attend the whole trial Stangneth shows that few if any people read the protocols – of the trial and the interrogation before it – more carefully than she did. Against the claim that Arendt was duped by Eichmann's trial behavior, Stangneth argues: so was everyone else. Not only other trial observers like Harry Mulisch were convinced by the mindless bureaucratic image Eichmann sought to convey; Avner Less, the chief interrogating police officer in Jerusalem, said that everyone who saw him was disappointed: they all expected someone imposing, they all saw what Mulisch described as “a nothing”. Stangneth's book is clearly driven not by the wish to dethrone Arendt, as are so many others, but to keep faith with her spirit. Even her prose, full of the deep humor and irony for which Arendt has been criticized, is Arendtian, and therefore a pleasure to read. Stangneth simply shows, through research among documents to which Arendt could not have had access, that Eichmann had been a skilled liar and manipulator all

his life, and he used those skills to create an image that was diametrically opposed to the one he'd always cultivated. (For in private, the SS man was outraged at any suggestion that his life's work could be viewed as mindless bureaucracy.) In a text for a book about von Trotta's film, Stangneth writes, "There is no doubt: Arendt would have had viel Forscherfreude (researchers' delight) with the documents that are now available." (Stangneth, in Weibel, ed, Hannah Arendt: Ihr Denken veränderte die Welt, Piper, 2012.)

But why? The Eichmann who emerges from Stangneth's work is anything but the dull careerist we know from Arendt. He wasn't driven to organize mass murder by the ordinary desire to keep his head down and concentrate on getting ahead on the job no matter the consequences. In Arendt's words, "Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his own advancement, he had no motive at all." (EIJ 287) Quite to the contrary, he was driven by the desire to shape world history through the very conscious and viciously anti-Semitic Nazi program to which he, and everyone he chose to have around him, was deeply, clearly, and consciously committed. Add to his proud and unwavering commitment to one of the vilest ideologies the world has known Eichmann's ability to deceive even those who knew him well – an ability that enabled him to escape Europe without detection, and for which the words 'criminal mastermind' seem accurate – we have as perfect a specimen of a classical evildoer as ever

lived. The fact that unlike many Nazis, he never enriched himself with the stolen goods to which he had access may count as mitigating evidence for some, but for many it will only darken the picture. A man who, in his own words, is such an idealist as to be immune to the temptations of ordinary forms of criminality appears more terrifyingly evil than those with more human flaws.

So why exactly would Arendt's reaction to these discoveries have been one of "viel Forscherfreude"? Of course, she was honest; her deep commitment to truth and understanding would have led her to revise her own theses in the face of truly outstanding new research, so different from the hostile, hysterical and uncomprehending criticism the book received in her lifetime (and ever since). And she could always say, as I've said, with Christopher Browning and others, that even if she was wrong about the man Adolf Eichmann, she was right about the general claim: the Holocaust could not have happened without the participation of millions of people who were not particularly committed Nazis, or even Nazis at all, but were willing to follow whatever orders made for the least thinking and the most comfort. This is certainly true, and it bears repeating and reflecting, for it remains relevant for every moral and political struggle we face today. But I believe Stangneth's work does raise philosophical questions that require us to rethink some of Arendt's claims. I wish Stangneth were here to discuss them. I'm still in the process of

digesting that work, so my remarks will be tentative; but I want to lay out some first thoughts, which can serve to begin a discussion. (ask if anyone else has read it)

What is new in *Eichmann vor Jerusalem* derives from a mind-bogglingly detailed analysis of the Sassen tapes and papers, most of which were allegedly lost or sealed, as well as other documents that several institutions did not want exposed. (Most prominent among them is the West German intelligence service, which still refuses to release others, but the CIA and the Vatican also played helpful roles.) The documents show that the famous Sassen interview in Argentina was neither the journalistic scoop that Sassen tried to sell, nor the casual “Wirtshausgespräche” that Eichmann dismissed at his trial. Rather, it was a fragment of transcripts of tapes carefully made from meetings held every weekend for nearly a year in Sassen’s house. (Stangneth also conducted interviews with the distinguished sociologist Saskia Sassen, who had the misfortune to be Sassen’s daughter, and was old enough to remember the careful preparations made for taping the sessions in her home.) Eichmann annotated and edited every transcript by hand.

The gatherings were attended by Nazis who had fled to Peron’s Argentina to escape prosecution and remained committed to most every aspect of Nazi ideology. From Buenos Aires they followed German politics closely, and what they saw raised their hopes of

returning to power. They knew how many of their former comrades held high positions in the chancellor's office, the foreign service, the army and the courts of the early Federal Republic. They also knew how early Allied efforts at Denazification were both scorned by the general public in Germany, and quietly given up altogether by the Western Allies as the Cold War unfolded. The climate for a rebirth of Nazism, give or take a few revisions, was auspicious. All one had to do was get rid of what they were certain was the Holocaust lie. Nazis to the core, they regarded Jews as eternal enemies, and since most of them had been at the front they knew Jews had been killed there. War is war, after all; hadn't countless civilians been killed by Allied bombers from Hamburg to Dresden? But they were sure that the claim that six million Jews had been calculatedly murdered was an invention of enemy propaganda constructed to extort money from the Germans. Much of their time was spent reading and discussing the books that were just emerging in the '50s about the nature and scope of the Holocaust. Who could better counteract that enemy propaganda than the man who had been in charge of Jewish affairs, who would surely provide a detailed report of just how many Jews had been murdered?

Eichmann's testimony in Buenos Aires, which included his reading aloud from a number of tracts he seems to have written for the occasions, sorely disappointed his listeners. For he not only confirmed the early estimate of six million murders, he was proud of

it. His only regret was that he had failed to kill all the Jews of Europe, as he'd originally intended. In a series of statements that are as chilling as they are depressing, he hopes that "millions of Muslims, to whom I have a strong inner connection since I met your grand mufti of Jerusalem" will finish the task. (Stangneth, p. 298)

Eichmann comforted himself for his failure to achieve his goals himself with the knowledge that he had never been what he called a "Schwein" – unlike other Nazis who had extorted large sums of money in exchange for exemption from deportations. "Because of them there are still a lot of Jews who ought to have been gassed (die an sich vergast sein sollten) who are still enjoying life today", he said ruefully. (Stangneth, p. 342) Time and again in the Sassen discussions Eichmann insisted on his central role in the Final Solution. In contrast to the image of the bureaucratic desk-murderer he created at his trial, Eichmann in Argentina went out of his way to portray himself as a hardened and powerful SS officer. Though he hadn't fought on the front – a distinction on which other members of the company prided themselves – he insisted he had done something even tougher, namely, directed and observed even more and bloodier killing than the Waffen-SS could have done in the field. As one sentence of Sassen summarized: "The battlefields of this war were called concentration camps." (Stangneth, p. 362)

Eichmann's confessions were too much for many of his fellow Nazis, who were, as it turned out, less thoughtful than he. The logic of their beliefs should have led to his conclusions. Their virulent anti-Semitism, unbearable attempts at humor, sentimental nationalism, and paranoid conviction that an extraordinarily powerful World Jewry was out to destroy them: all that seemed to make the total elimination of the Jewish people seem the rational course of action. But even fanatical SS men like Sassen were disturbed by Eichmann's description of the methodical murder of children. Though there is no evidence that any of the members of this group went through deep changes of heart or mind, the attempt to regain power by disproving what they viewed as the Auschwitz lie was abandoned after Eichmann exposed it as truth.

So what was Eichmann doing in Jerusalem? Once again, Arendt was by no means the only person at the trial to observe nothing but a whiney, pathetic bureaucrat; she was simply the only one to turn her observations into philosophy. His interrogators assumed he would lie, and attempted many times to catch him at it, but neither they nor any of the trial reporters grasped what an expert he was at deception. As Stangneth points out, Eichmann was the master of the sort of lying that had the presence of mind to prevent suspicions that could lead to resistance by telling prisoners to remember the numbers of the pegs on which they hung their clothing – moments before they entered the

gas chambers. Still, given the pride Eichmann displayed in Argentina for his role in the Holocaust, along with his hunger for recognition, one might expect him to make a last loud stand in the courtroom, rather than playing just the sort of figure he despised once he took his turn on the world stage. Why did he choose to go out with a whimper?

The answer is as humanly simple as it is politically disturbing. Not until his defense lawyer Servatius told him he could face the death penalty did Eichmann contemplate being sentenced to anything more than a few years in prison. Among his Argentinian papers are drafts of an open letter he often considered sending to Adenauer, in which he offered to return to Germany for trial. No Nazi, whatever his crimes, had received more than a few years' prison term there since Nürnberg, and even those light sentences were often commuted. What were a few years in jail next to the opportunity to return under his own name to his beloved country, where his family would also receive a host of financial benefits? Let me note that this is not just a feature of the Adenauer years. To this day, former SS officers and their widows receive full pensions. By contrast, anyone who can be classified as having been close to the system – *systemnahe* – of the former East Germany is financially penalized. This includes teachers and firemen.

Thus Eichmann's calculations were entirely plausible. Playing the dull-witted bureaucrat who had followed others' orders had functioned to earn light sentences for so many of his comrades – now

free in Germany to continue to practice their far-right if not explicitly Nazi views – that he had every reason to believe it would work for him. For let us be clear: although Stangneth has shown that, despite all its denials, the Adenauer republic knew as early as 1952 where Eichmann was, it was far from the only force that did not want him to stand trial and talk. The Vatican put it most clearly: “The leading Nazis of World War II should no longer be persecuted; now they belong to the active side of the defense of western civilization against communism, and today it is more necessary than ever to join all anticommunist forces.” (Stangneth, p. 454) But even this is saying too little. As the historian Christopher Simpson showed some years ago in his book *Blowback*, it was not simply the case that the U.S. was willing to use the help of Nazis in fighting the Cold War. Far more devastatingly, U.S. policy and perception of the Soviet Union was crucially shaped by many of those Nazis, in whose world view anticommunism played, from the start, an even larger role than anti-Semitism. The fact that the GDR had begun to use the number of former Nazis in powerful positions in Adenauer’s government for its own propaganda purposes led to a last ditch effort by West German officials to throw those seeking Eichmann off the trail. Any trial revelations, they rightly feared, would be of help to the GDR in its claim to be the other, anti-fascist Germany. When they failed to stop Fritz Bauer from his pursuit, and Eichmann was captured by the Mossad, they turned to their Allies

for help in damage control. We know that the CIA persuaded Life Magazine to remove any references to Adenauer's right-hand man Globke when it published its wildly distorted version of the Sassen report. Given how many files remain unavailable, we still do not know what else was covered up. In short: Eichmann knew very well that Western priorities were set on fighting communism, not fascism. And given how many people, internationally, were questioning Israel's right to hold the trial at all, and given that Arendt was one of the few to defend the death sentence it pronounced, Eichmann's calculations at his trial were nearly right.

All of the above may serve to show how astute Eichmann was when it came to instrumental rationality, but we know that's not what Eichmann meant when she wrote about thoughtlessness. Far more troubling is the fact that, as it turns out, Eichmann actually thought about morality. He expressed his thoughts not only in the discussions at Sassen's house, but in a text he wrote at the time called "The others have spoken, now I want to speak". In contrast to the trial, where he shocked the public by claiming to be a Kantian, this text makes clear that he fully understood the core of Kant's doctrine, a commitment to universalism, and that he rejected it. The text raises the question "What about morality?" and offers the answer: "There are a number of moralities: a Christian one, a morality of ethical values, a war morality, a struggle/battle (Kampf) morality. Which one should it

be?” (Stangneth, p. 283) Here it is already clear that he finds the idea that there might be a universal morality that makes claims on everyone to be as absurd as it is hypocritical, as he later explains. In fact, he is suspicious of philosophy itself, which he (rightly!?) sees as an internationalist project. But as he said to the Sassen circle, “We are fighting against an enemy who is intellectually superior to us, through many many thousand years of schooling.” (Stangneth, “Bekenntnisse des Täuschers Adolf Eichmann”)

For Eichmann and his fellows, genuine thinking is racial thinking. As Walter Groß, head of the Racial–Political office of the Nazi party, put it in 1939: “There can be no possible agreement with international intellectual systems because these are not true and not honest, but simply based on an incredible lie, namely the lie of the equality of human beings.” (Stangneth, p. 286) Every people, so Eichmann, is engaged in the struggle for world domination; he holds this to be a law of nature, in which the drive for self–preservation is stronger than any other force, particularly “so–called moral drives”. The Jews, however, had neither a state nor an army, so they fought with the weapons they had, namely intellectual ones. Thus they brought into the world false and deceitful doctrines of internationalism, beginning with the prophetic messages of the Old Testament, continuing through the French Revolution, which was driven by Freemasons, and culminating most dangerously in the Bolshevik message of the Jew

Karl Marx. Eichmann admonished his listeners to understand the weapons of the enemy, which meant reading both Jewish literature and philosophy in general, both of which might on occasion be put into service against the enemy. Just how this might be done was demonstrated in his use of Plato; the fact that Socrates accepted Athens' death sentence shows that even universalists know that morality must yield to state power. "Socratic wisdom," wrote Eichmann, "bows to the law of the state. That is what the humanists teach us." (Stangneth p. 283) In this, of course, he means to show the weakness of humanism, which must yield to the inevitable laws of nature and power. Not for a moment does he take a universalistic position seriously. Kant, he often repeated in Argentina, was not sufficiently German a thinker – an honor Eichmann also extended to Nietzsche.

Now none of these discoveries show that Eichmann took philosophy seriously. By his own lights he could not, since he held that "philosophy is international". (Stangneth, p. 283) In one of many felicitous phrases Stangneth describes Eichmann's relationship to books as that of a thief breaking into a house, looking as quickly as possible for whatever he can take from it. But the Argentinian papers show that he did take and use a variety of philosophical texts to construct a worldview of which he was proud. "For my oath of allegiance (to the Nazi party) did not forbid my independent thinking

(eigenwilliges Denken)”. (Stangneth, p. 284) This hodgepodge of claims can hardly be counted as truly independent thinking. Behind the racist, vitalist doctrine that was standard Nazi fare is a standpoint that goes back to the Sophists: virtue is either a matter of helping your friends and hurting your enemies, or it’s a load of hypocritical rhetoric designed by one group to maintain its power over another by claiming to be acting for the common good. Readers of Plato will recognize these as the two positions set out in Book One of *The Republic*, against which Socrates tries to defend a universalist conception of virtue. As I have argued elsewhere, the contemporary version of these pre-Socratic standpoints was best stated by Carl Schmitt, who held that the only genuine political distinction is between friend and foe. Schmitt considered those liberal democrats who seek a neutral framework to settle competing claims by justice, rather than power, to be hypocrites or fools. For any allegedly neutral framework simply represents the triumph of a stronger faction over a weaker one; true politics makes no claims to neutrality, or morality at all.

Though Schmitt was the Third Reich’s leading legal theorist he was not its chief propagandist; despite the similarity of their arguments there is no evidence that Eichmann actually read Schmitt’s work. But the conclusions he draws are far more consonant with that work than the harebrained attempt of some contemporary thinkers on the left, who seem to think they can take up Schmitt’s critique of the more

hypocritical aspects of liberal democracy while somehow leaving the rest. For all their crudeness, Eichmann's philosophical reflections are coherent and clear. There are just two choices. Either you believe in universal moral categories that are valid for every human being on earth or you do not, and a great many consequences follow from that very simple decision. Eichmann in Argentina knew very well which side Kant was on. He may even have read the works of those Nazi philosophers who, unwilling to burn the treasures of German patrimony as easily as they'd burnt the works of Freud and Heine, drew careful distinctions between what they called the Jewish Kant, who emphasized universalism, and those parts of Kant which could be mined for quotes about duty and rule-following, which could be celebrated as German virtues. Thus Eichmann in Jerusalem hoped that calling himself a Kantian would endear him to his enemies (whom he could assume were all closet Kantians, and on the terms he was using, he was right) or at least confuse them into pardoning him. Were there no copy of the original documents it would beggar belief: Eichmann's lawyer had to talk him out of using Kantian formulations and references in his final statement to the court.

Eichmann's philosophical musings may be crude and superficial, but crude and superficial views of this kind are still very much with us. The unholy combination of neoliberalism and evolutionary biology supports the idea that every moral ideal is a rationalization of the

more genuine will to self-preservation and power. It's the rare young person, these days, who doesn't view that idea as self-evident – and regard those who hold universal moral ideas to be genuine with the mixture of pity and contempt Thrasymachus expressed for Socrates. What is also still with us, and taken even more for granted, is an increasingly anticommunist consensus which, though slightly less rabid than that shared by Eichmann and his comrades, is all the more imperious. In Germany today, few people bat an eye at the equation of the Third Reich and the GDR (though the more decent ones invariably preface their comments with the formula, "I don't want to equate them, but..."). Twenty-five years ago, such an equation drove not only leftwing thinkers like Habermas but centrist journalists like the Spiegel publisher Augstein into the paroxysms of printed outrage that made up the Historikerstreit. Today, Germans yawn. And President Obama, whose Jerusalem speech this year was a small masterpiece of insight into Israeli mentalities, could give a speech just months later in Berlin that reproduced the tireddest of Cold War clichés, in which differences between dictatorships simply disappear. In short: Eichmann's thinking may not be good thinking, but in its very shoddiness it is very much the kind of thinking that surrounds us. We may know how to oppose it in our seminars or intellectual journals, but that is not enough.

What consequences does all this have for reading Eichmann in Jerusalem? Let me summarize the reasons why I've always viewed the book as philosophy rather than journalism or history. It isn't systematically developed philosophy, to be sure, but it's a book that contains deep and radical philosophical claims of which Arendt herself, understandably bewildered by the storm the book raised, was not entirely aware. Can it still be philosophy if she got something wrong? Whatever we've learned since Quine taught us about the fragility of the analytic/synthetic distinction, most people think philosophy concerns timeless and universal reflection that cannot be affected by empirical research – presumably part of what Arendt meant, in the Gaus interview, by denying that she was a philosopher. I think this reflects a Heideggerian picture of philosophy that is deeply mistaken. Precisely because of the role she, and Kant, will give to judgment, philosophy must concern itself with particulars – in this case, a long and complex judgment about an exemplar that must be analyzed if we are to understand anything about the existence of evil. How much does it matter that the judgment turned out to be mistaken? I am not entirely certain – and hope this is a question we can discuss.

Previously I had focused on two philosophical claims that had not been sufficiently addressed, or noted at all, in other literature on Eichmann in Jerusalem. One is the denial that evil must be intentional.

Although many aspects of Arendt's work are deeply Kantian, that denial is a direct attack on just that part of Kant's moral philosophy that even non-Kantians find so intuitive. For Kant, the only good in itself is a good will. For Arendt, this is to locate goodness and evil in something subjective. "On nothing, perhaps, has civilized jurisprudence prided itself more than on this taking into account of the subjective factor." (EJ, p. 277) The Eichmann trial showed that the subjective factor is irrelevant; as she wrote in the address she imagines giving to Eichmann, "We are concerned here only with what you did, and not with the possible non-criminal nature of your inner life and of your motives or with the criminal potentialities of those around you." (EJ, p. 278) "In other words, guilt and innocence before the law are of an objective nature." (ibid) Arendt believed the Holocaust should lead us to abandon subjective criteria of good and evil like intention and motive for the more objective and public criterion of judgment. Unlike intention, judgment must be shown in action, or it simply isn't there.

These are deep and complex claims that Arendt did not live to develop, and it's doubtful whether even her planned book *Judging* would have answered all the questions they raise, if only because the assumptions they strike at are so central. We need to acknowledge how philosophically radical those claims are if we are to make sense of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as a whole. Understanding the book as an

attack on the importance of intention is the only way to understand the part of the book that caused the most trouble, the discussion of the Judenräte. We are so accustomed to thinking that doing evil requires intending to do it that Arendt's denial of Eichmann's evil intentions is still commonly taken to be a way of excusing him, while her apparently gratuitous introduction of the role of the Jewish councils seemed to blame the victims themselves. Neither, of course, is the case. The Jewish Councils – along with the so-called inner emigrants, whom she discusses in the same section – are discussed for the same reason Eichmann himself is discussed: to show that not intention but judgment is the heart and soul of moral action. The road to hell was paved with all sorts of things: from the admirable motives of the heads of the Jewish Councils to the questionable ones of most of the inner emigrants to the shoddy but undemonic intentions of the sort of desk-murderer Eichmann played at his trial. The destination is what matters; the pavement is secondary. The world must hold you responsible for what you do, since it's what you do, not what you intend, that affects and resounds in the world. With this in mind, we can also understand the detail with which she discussed the differences between deportations in different countries, which had so little to do with subjective states or cultural histories. Despite vast differences between them, the Danes and the Bulgarians made the right judgments – and this is all that matters. Here plurality, and

freedom to begin anew – two crucial categories in Arendt’s work as a whole – show themselves at their best.

Previous attempts to dispute Arendt’s characterization of Eichmann missed the philosophical point. In one way or another they argued that anyone capable of such evil actions must have had evil intentions. This argument, first used by prosecutor Gideon Hausner, has been repeated and pursued by emphasizing the evilness of the actions – which Arendt, of course, never questioned – without any attention to the philosophical assumption behind it. And the assumption that evil actions require evil intentions has been shown to be inadequate to understand the Holocaust any number of times since Hilberg first laid out the lines of inquiry into the divisions of labor that made mass murder possible.

Now it turns out that we have not merely speculation, based on dubious philosophical reasoning, about Eichmann’s intentions. We can no longer say, with Arendt, “He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he is doing” (EIJ 28/), for there is incontrovertible evidence that he meant to do exactly what he did all along. His own words in Argentina condemn him, over and over. A man whose only regret some twelve years after the Third Reich’s defeat is that he was unable to organize the murder of all the Jews of Europe deserves a place in the lowest circle of hell and the highest scale of intention. If the Holocaust was carried out by a great number

of people whose intentions varied from high-minded to abysmal, Eichmann's belonged to the worst.

This does not undermine the validity of Arendt's central claim about the relative importance of intention and judgment. But I don't think it would be enough to elevate Eichmann, as it were, to the pantheon of Hitler, Himmler and Heydrich – prime movers who clearly intended to produce the Holocaust – and go back to thinking about thoughtlessness in regard to everyone else. We need to think about thought, beginning with the Nazi ideology that functioned as a driving force in the Final Solution both at the highest levels of planning and the lowest levels of compliance. For Arendt's mistaken judgment about Eichmann was not the result of hasty oversight, or arrogance, or any of the other charges often made. Rather, there was a systematic and politically motivated suppression of major sources of information she could not possibly have known – that should by itself raise questions we cannot yet fully answer.

The now common distinction between functionalists and intentionalists in Holocaust studies is too neat and too crude to apply to most serious researchers, and it certainly doesn't apply to Arendt. But whenever intention does take center stage it is invariably called anti-Semitism, though strictly speaking a worldview, by itself, is not an intention at all. If we are going to understand worldviews as motivating forces – and I think the new research on Eichmann shows

that we must – we need to look at all of them. This research shows that anticommunism was at least as integral to Nazi worldviews as was anti-Semitism. Of course the two were often merged, however incoherently, in standard attacks on Jewish Bolsheviks. But the role of anticommunism in driving Nazi ideology has hardly been studied in the West – because so much anticommunist thinking was quietly absorbed by democratic forces after the war. For East Germans devoted to Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung, both at the official and individual level, understanding Nazi ideology was confined to understanding its anticommunism, and anti-Semitism was ignored – a fact often noted in complaints that East German monuments to Nazi victims didn't mention the word 'Jew'. But if the East German (and Soviet) discussions exaggerated in one direction, we in the West have exaggerated in the other.

Google 'images' under 'Nazi propaganda' and you will find a number of disgusting posters featuring disfigured caricatures of Jews accompanied by the claim that the war is their fault. The really terrifying images, however, depict the Bolshevik menace, seen as monster ape, grim reaper, or ghostly bandit poised to take over Europe. I submit that anti-Semitism would never have been enough to mobilize the German nation towards the total war that made the Holocaust possible without the anticommunism that was sometimes melded with it but always had a distinct face of its own. For twenty

years, communism, socialism and fascism had been at war for the soul of Germany's working class, and the left was winning the battle: in free elections the Nazis never received more than 37% of the vote, significantly less than the combined votes on the left. Street fighting between parties was significant enough for the first German republic to move its seat to Weimar – not because of the town's bucolic squares and appealing historical resonances, but because security measures were easier to handle there than in battle-torn Berlin. If the possibility of Jewish domination was a phantom the Nazis created and touted, the possibility of a communist revolution was there for anyone following German politics to see.

Eichmann's papers make it clear that his understanding of communist ideology, and its connection to the Jewish question, was based on much more than the fact that Karl Marx and many early Bolsheviks happened to be Jews. The most bizarre evidence of that understanding occurs in a letter Eichmann wrote from an Israeli jail cell telling his brother about his alleged conversion to communism. The letter was the brainchild of Servatius, who was urging his client to write anything and everything that might be marketed in order to cover his legal fees; both knew that everything Eichmann wrote would be immediately read by West German, American and Israeli intelligence services. As a moneymaking gambit, the letter flopped; though it was printed in two regional papers, the major media outlets found it too

absurd to be newsworthy. While Eichmann's conversion to communism cannot be taken seriously, the terms in which he describes it show that he had indeed thought through the conceptual framework of his enemy well enough to imitate it perfectly. He writes that having given up his faith in Hitler, who he curiously describes as a pawn of international fatalism, Eichmann goes on to consider the liberal democracies, whose pseudo-idealism is really motivated by egoism; just look at the racism towards blacks in America, or France's Algerian problem! Communism is the only doctrine, therefore, that works against "the roots of evil: racial hatred, racial murder, and anti-semitism." (Stangneth, p. 514) Eichmann's sincerity is not at issue here; perhaps, in addition to generating an income for Servatius, the letter is another attempt to ingratiate those who were observing him, similar to his claims about Kant. What is interesting, however, is his logic. Liberal democracies are hypocritical and thus drop out of the picture; the remaining political possibilities are fascism and communism. The one is rooted in the evil that leads to racial hatred and murder, the other is the only doctrine that strikes at those roots through resolute internationalism.

Does the letter show anything more than Eichmann's ability to quickly learn and parrot the thoughts of others when he thought they might be of use? Still reeling from all these discoveries I am not yet sure how to make sense of them, but it does suggest that if we are to

understand the driving ideas of Nazi ideology we must look more closely at anticommunism. This is hard to do not only because it is the one piece of Nazi ideology that passed seamlessly into postwar Western thought, but because the information about state socialist regimes that became available after 1989 has seemed, to many, to justify every anticommunist screed. Anticommunism keeps Angela Merkel in power in contemporary Germany, where the combined votes of left-leaning parties would be enough to replace her, were it not for the hysteria that precludes a coalition with the one genuinely socialist party. Revelations of the brutality of Soviet regimes are not merely music to the ears of the right, but balm to the souls of many others – for a reason that is as deep as it has been unexplored. If daddy, or grandpa, fought in Hitler’s army to get rid of the Jews, it is hard to forgive him; if he was defending his homeland against the Bolshevik menace, it’s another matter entirely. And the worse the Bolsheviks turn out to have been, the better daddy, and the army he served in, now look. I won’t address the question of why American anticommunism is as virulent and immovable as its German cousin, except to say that it wasn’t always this way. (Those interested in hearing how socialist, antifascist positions could be expressed in idioms as American as apple pie are urged to listen to an amazing collection of songs from the late ‘30s and early ’40s called “That’s Why We’re Marching”, by Guthrie, Seeger, Josh White, Leadbelly and others.)

Let me make clear that I don't believe the enemy of my enemy is always my friend; the fact that Eichmann and his fellows were at least as committed to anticommunism as to anti-Semitism, and connected the two not just anecdotally but conceptually, doesn't make me a communist. It is, however, one more reason to be extraordinarily wary of anticommunism, an unreflective and deep-seated attitude with fascist roots that is present in both the U.S. and Germany, but largely missing elsewhere. In most countries from Italy to India, the question of whether to include communists in a government can be weighed and considered like any other political question. I realize I'm in a country, at the moment, where even the word 'liberal' is suspicious enough. But I've been surprised in recent years to see how few Europeans are willing to use the word 'socialist' even when it is the only historically accurate word to use. This was brought home recently while listening to a lecture on Einstein's worldview, when the speaker described Einstein as "caring deeply about social justice". When I asked why he refrained from using the word 'socialist', given that Einstein called himself one, lectured regularly at workers' circles, and wrote pamphlets with titles like "Why Socialism?", the speaker grew uncertain and finally suggested that Einstein had no original economic theory. Later he acknowledged that he'd hesitated to call Einstein what Einstein called himself because of the increasingly common feeling that socialism has been so thoroughly discredited

that it couldn't be used in connection with everyone's favorite secular saint.

I believe the left has been so shaken by the events of 1989 that we still have not entirely understood them. (At least, I haven't.) The collapse of state socialism left homeless even those who had long since distanced themselves from the policies of the Soviet Union. In addition to the historical work that is now unfolding there is conceptual work to be done if we are ever to offer a robust alternative to neoliberalism – not simply as a set of economic policies but as a worldview that extends market rationality to every institution and practice. I know that some of those here are engaged in such theoretical rethinking, but it rarely reaches beyond the university or its presses. On a popular international level, the only viable resistance to neoliberalism has been provided by a variety of fundamentalist movements. It cannot be a coincidence that the rise of fundamentalism has taken place during just the time when socialism came to be seen as anachronistic at best, and neoliberalism the only rational choice we have left.

To summarize: I have argued that, while the new revelations about Eichmann do not undermine Arendt's core claim that evil intentions are not necessary for evil action, they do suggest how important it is to think more seriously about the role ideologies play in intention. Eichmann was not a bureaucrat, but neither was he a sadist nor a

psychopath, or even in an ordinary sense corrupt; rather, he organized mass murder in service of an ideology to which he was completely devoted. The standard liberal reaction – so much for ideologies, let's focus on self-interest – will not carry us through the 21st century, if only because few people can live on bread alone.

If the first reason I have always viewed Eichmann in Jerusalem as philosophy has to do with its claims about the roles of intention and judgment, the second reason may be more surprising: I believe it is a modernist theodicy. It is this that explains much of the tone of the book, and the feeling that Arendt was not simply describing but defending something. The object of her defense was not, however, Adolf Eichmann, but a world that contained him. If evil like Eichmann's can be made comprehensible, the world is a place we may trust. In the interests of saving time for discussion I will not repeat arguments I have made elsewhere, but simply remind you of the letter in which Mary McCarthy wrote to Arendt that reading the book produced an "exhilaration akin to hearing Figaro or The Messiah – both of which are concerned with redemption". Arendt's reply was extraordinary: "You were the only reader to understand what otherwise I have never admitted – namely that I wrote this book in a curious state of euphoria. And that ever since I did it, I feel – after 20 years – lighthearted about the whole matter." (Between Friends, p. 168) None of the new research on Eichmann need change this, for

Arendt never denied the existence of radical evil. If it turns out that the term fits Eichmann better than she could know, this doesn't mean that Eichmann's evil is incomprehensible, only that we need other ways of comprehending it, as I've tried to sketch above.

I want to end this talk where I was thinking of beginning before reading Stangneth's book, namely with the question: why are we still talking about Adolf Eichmann? Or to put it slightly differently: why have there been countless books about Eichmann, and only one, just published this year, about Anton Schmidt? You will remember the one moment in the book when Arendt's ironic tone turns sublime, in recalling the "sudden burst of light in the midst of impenetrable, unfathomable darkness" that marked the story of Anton Schmidt. (EiJ, p. 231) Arendt's most important, and utterly prescient reason for calling Eichmann a clown was to undercut the fascination with Eichmann, and evil in general, that is such a feature of contemporary culture. Satanic greatness has an erotic element; funguses do not; the more Eichmann and his kind resemble a fungus, the less likely they are to appeal. – But instead of following out such threads I read a book that shows how Eichmann still provides food for thought. I want to insist, nevertheless, that such food cannot by itself be nourishing, and to suggest that if there is still more to be thought about Eichmann, it's even more important to think about those men and women who made the right judgments in dark times.

