

because they did not earlier take steps to defend themselves, because they were cowardly, etc. I came across this argument only recently in a book by that honest Jewish anti-semiter, Kurt Tucholsky. I cannot express myself, of course, with Kurt Tucholsky's eloquence, but I cannot deny that he was right: if all the Jews had run away—in particular, to Palestine—more Jews would have remained alive. Whether, in view of the special circumstances of Jewish history and Jewish life, that would have been possible, and whether it implies a historical share of guilt in Hitler's crime, is another question.

not yet made your discovery, apparently, that evil is banal. Of that "radical evil," to which your then analysis bore such eloquent and erudite witness, nothing remains but this slogan—to be more than that it would have to be investigated, at a serious level, as a relevant concept in moral philosophy or political ethics. I am sorry—and I say this, I think, in candour and in no spirit of enmity—that I am unable to take the thesis of your book more seriously. I had expected, with your earlier book in mind, something different.

Gershom Scholem

I SHALL SAY NOTHING concerning that other central question of your book: the guilt, or the degree of guilt, of Adolf Eichmann. I have read both the text of the judgment delivered by the Court, and the version you substituted for it in your book. I find that of the Court rather more convincing. Your judgment appears to me to be based on a prodigious *non sequitur*. Your argument would apply equally to those hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of human beings, to whom your final sentence is relevant. It is the final sentence that contains the reason why Eichmann ought to be hanged, for in the remainder of the text you argue in detail your view—which I do not share—that the prosecution did not succeed in proving what it had set out to prove. As far as that goes, I may mention that, in addition to putting my name to a letter to the President of Israel pleading for the execution not to be carried out, I set out in a Hebrew essay why I held the execution of the sentence—which Eichmann had in every sense, including that of the prosecution, deserved—to be historically wrong, precisely because of our historical relationship with the German people. I shall not argue the case again here. I wish to say only that your description of Eichmann as a "convert to Zionism" could only come from somebody who had a profound dislike of everything to do with Zionism. These passages in your book I find quite impossible to take seriously. They amount to a mockery of Zionism; and I am forced to the conclusion that this was, indeed, your intention. Let us not pursue the point.

After reading your book I remain unconvinced by your thesis concerning the "banality of evil"—a thesis which, if your sub-title is to be believed, underlies your entire argument. This new thesis strikes me as a catchword: it does not impress me, certainly, as the product of profound analysis—an analysis such as you gave us so convincingly, in the service of a quite different, indeed contradictory thesis, in your book on totalitarianism. At that time you had

New York City, July 24, 1963

DEAR GERHARD, I found your letter when I got back home a week ago. You know what it's like when one has been away for five months. I'm writing now in the first quiet moment I have; hence my reply may not be as elaborate as perhaps it should be.

There are certain statements in your letter which are not open to controversy, because they are simply false. Let me deal with them first so that we can proceed to matters which merit discussion.

I am not one of the "intellectuals who come from the German Left." You could not have known this, since we did not know each other when we were young. It is a fact of which I am in no way particularly proud and which I am somewhat reluctant to emphasise—especially since the McCarthy era in this country. I came late to an understanding of Marx's importance because I was interested neither in history nor in politics when I was young. If I can be said to "have come from anywhere," it is from the tradition of German philosophy.

As to another statement of yours, I am unfortunately not able to say that you could not have known the facts. I found it puzzling that you should write "I regard you wholly as a daughter of our people, and in no other way." The truth is I have never pretended to be anything else or to be in any way other than I am, and I have never even felt tempted in that direction. It would have been like saying that I was a man and not a woman—that is to say, kind of insane. I know, of course, that there is a "Jewish problem" even on this level, but it has never been my problem—not even in my childhood. I have always regarded my Jewishness as one of the indisputable factual data of my life, and I have never had the wish to change or disclaim facts of this kind. There is such a thing as a basic gratitude for everything

that is as it is; for what has been *given* and was not, could not be, *made*; for things that are *physei* and not *nomō*. To be sure, such an attitude is pre-political, but in exceptional circumstances—such as the circumstances of Jewish politics—it is bound to have also political consequences though, as it were, in a negative way. This attitude makes certain types of behaviour impossible—indeed precisely those which you chose to read into my considerations. (To give another example: In his obituary of Kurt Blumenfeld, Ben Gurion expressed his regret that Blumenfeld had not seen fit to change his name when he came to live in Israel. Isn't it obvious that Blumenfeld did not do so for exactly the same reasons that had led him in his youth to become a Zionist?) My stand in these matters must surely have been known to you, and it is incomprehensible to me why you should wish to stick a label on me which never fitted in the past and does not fit now.

TO COME TO THE POINT: let me begin, going on from what I have just stated, with what you call "love of the Jewish people" or *Ahabath Israel*. (Incidentally, I would be very grateful if you could tell me since when this concept has played a role in Judaism, when it was first used in Hebrew language and literature, etc.) You are quite right—I am not moved by any "love" of this sort, and for two reasons: I have never in my life "loved" any people or collective—neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love "only" my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons. Secondly, this "love of the Jews" would appear to me, since I am myself Jewish, as something rather suspect. I cannot love myself or anything which I know is part and parcel of my own person. To clarify this, let me tell you of a conversation I had in Israel with a prominent political personality who was defending the—in my opinion disastrous—non-separation of religion and state in Israel. What he said—I am not sure of the exact words any more—ran something like this: "You will understand that, as a Socialist, I, of course, do not believe in God; I believe in the Jewish people." I found this a shocking statement and, being too shocked, I did not reply at the time. But I could have answered: the greatness of this people was once that it believed in God, and believed in Him in such a way that its trust and love towards Him was greater than its fear. And now this people believes only in itself? What good can come out of that?—Well, in this sense I do not "love" the Jews, nor do I "believe" in them; I merely

belong to them as a matter of course, beyond dispute or argument.

We could discuss the same issue in political terms; and we should then be driven to a consideration of patriotism. That there can be no patriotism without permanent opposition and criticism is no doubt common ground between us. But I can admit to you something beyond that, namely, that wrong done by my own people naturally grieves me more than wrong done by other peoples. This grief, however, in my opinion is not for display, even if it should be the innermost motive for certain actions or attitudes. Generally speaking, the role of the "heart" in politics seems to me altogether questionable. You know as well as I how often those who merely report certain unpleasant facts are accused of lack of soul, lack of heart, or lack of what you call *Herzenstakt*. We both know, in other words, how often these emotions are used in order to conceal factual truth. I cannot discuss here what happens when emotions are displayed in public and become a factor in political affairs; but it is an important subject, and I have attempted to describe the disastrous results in my book *On Revolution* in discussing the role of compassion in the formation of the revolutionary character.

IT IS A PITY that you did not read the book before the present campaign of misrepresentation against it got under way from the side of the Jewish "establishment" in Israel and America. There are, unfortunately, very few people who are able to withstand the influence of such campaigns. It seems to me highly unlikely that without being influenced you could possibly have misunderstood certain statements. Public opinion, especially when it has been carefully manipulated, as in this case, is a very powerful thing. Thus, I never made Eichmann out to be a "Zionist." If you missed the irony of the sentence—which was plainly in *oratio obliqua*, reporting Eichmann's own words—I really can't help it. I can only assure you that none of dozens of readers who read the book before publication had ever any doubt about the matter. Further, I never asked why the Jews "let themselves be killed." On the contrary, I accused Hausner of having posed this question to witness after witness. There was no people and no group in Europe which reacted differently under the immediate pressure of terror. The question I raised was that of the co-operation of Jewish functionaries during the "Final Solution," and this question is so very uncomfortable because one cannot claim that they were traitors. (There were traitors too, but that is irrelevant.) In other words, until 1939 and even until 1941, whatever Jewish function-

aries did or did not do is understandable and excusable. Only later does it become highly problematical. This issue came up during the trial, and it was of course my duty to report it. This constitutes our part of the so-called "unmastered past," and although you may be right that it is too early for a "balanced judgment" (though I doubt this), I do believe that we shall only come to terms with this past if we begin to judge and to be frank about it.

I have made my own position plain, and yet it is obvious that you did not understand it. I said that there was no possibility of resistance, but there existed the possibility of *doing nothing*. And in order to do nothing, one did not need to be a saint, one needed only to say: I am just a simple Jew, and I have no desire to play any other role. Whether these people or some of them, as you indicate, deserved to be hanged is an altogether different question. What needs to be discussed are not the people so much as the arguments with which they justified themselves in their own eyes and in those of others. Concerning these arguments we are entitled to pass judgment. Moreover, we should not forget that we are dealing here with conditions which were terrible and desperate enough, but which were not the conditions of concentration camps. These decisions were made in an atmosphere of terror but not under the immediate pressure and impact of terror. These are important differences in degree, which every student of totalitarianism must know and take into account. These people had still a certain, limited freedom of decision and of action. Just as the SS murderers also possessed, as we now know, a limited choice of alternatives. They could say: "I wish to be relieved of my murderous duties," and nothing happened to them. Since we are dealing in politics with men, and not with heroes or saints, it is this possibility of "*non-participation*" (Kirchheimer) that is decisive if we begin to judge, not the system, but the individual, his choices and his arguments.

AND THE EICHMANN TRIAL was concerned with an individual. In my report I have only spoken of things which came up during the trial itself. It is for this reason that I could not mention the "saints" about whom you speak. Instead I had to limit myself to the resistance fighters whose behaviour, as I said, was the more admirable because it occurred under circumstances in which resistance had really ceased to be possible. There were no saints among the witnesses for the prosecution, but there was one utterly pure human being, old Grynszpan, whose testimony I therefore reported at some length. On the German side, after all, one could also have mentioned more than the single case of Sergeant

Schmidt. But since his was the only case mentioned in the trial, I had to restrict myself to it.

That the distinction between victims and persecutors was blurred in the concentration camps, deliberately and with calculation, is well known, and I as well as others have insisted on this aspect of totalitarian methods. But to repeat: this is not what I mean by a Jewish share in the guilt, or by the totality of the collapse of all standards. This was part of the system and had indeed nothing to do with the Jews.

How you could believe that my book was "a mockery of Zionism" would be a complete mystery to me, if I did not know that many people in Zionist circles have become incapable of listening to opinions or arguments which are off the beaten track and not consonant with their ideology. There are exceptions, and a Zionist friend of mine remarked in all innocence that the book, the last chapter in particular (recognition of the competence of the court, the justification of the kidnapping), was very pro-Israel—as indeed it is. What confuses you is that my arguments and my approach are different from what you are used to; in other words, the trouble is that I am independent. By this I mean, on the one hand, that I do not belong to any organisation and always speak only for myself, and on the other hand, that I have great confidence in Lessing's *selbstdenken* for which, I think, no ideology, no public opinion, and no "convictions" can ever be a substitute. Whatever objections you may have to the results, you won't understand them unless you realise that they are really my own and nobody else's.

I REGRET that you did not argue your case against the carrying out of the death sentence. For I believe that in discussing this question we might have made some progress in finding out where our most fundamental differences are located. You say that it was "historically false," and I feel very uncomfortable seeing the spectre of History raised in this context. In my opinion, it was *politically* and *juridically* (and the last is actually all that mattered) not only correct—it would have been utterly impossible not to have carried out the sentence. The only way of avoiding it would have been to accept Karl Jaspers' suggestion and to hand Eichmann over to the United Nations. Nobody wanted that, and it was probably not feasible; hence there was no alternative left but to hang him. Mercy was out of the question, not on juridical grounds—pardon is anyhow not a prerogative of the juridical system—but because mercy is applicable to the person rather than to the deed; the act of mercy does not forgive murder but pardons the murderer insofar as he, as a person,

may be more than anything he ever did. This was not true of Eichmann. And to spare his life without pardoning him was impossible on juridical grounds.

In conclusion, let me come to the only matter where you have not misunderstood me, and where indeed I am glad that you have raised the point. You are quite right: I changed my mind and do no longer speak of "radical evil." It is a long time since we last met, or we would perhaps have spoken about the subject before. (Incidentally, I don't see why you call my term "banality of evil" a catchword or slogan. As far as I know no one has used the term before me; but that is unimportant.) It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface.

It is "thought-defying," as I said, 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." Only the good has depth and can be radical. But this is not the place to go into these matters seriously; I intend to elaborate them further in a different context. Eichmann may very well remain the concrete model of what I have to say.

You propose to publish your letter and you ask if I have any objection. My advice would be not to recast the letter in the third person. The value of this controversy consists in its epistolary character, namely in the fact that it is informed by personal friendship. Hence, if you are prepared to publish my answer simultaneously with your letter, I have, of course, no objection.

Hannah Arendt

## This Europe

"No, My Lord . . ." — by NORA BELOFF

NO, MY LORD, the bomb is not the way to unite Europe. This was my first reaction to Lord Gladwyn's proposal, advanced in these pages last month, for the creation of a *European Political and Military Authority*: "autonomous," as he said, "even in the nuclear sphere. . ."

Since that article appeared we have had the tragic news of the murder of President Kennedy and a shudder of uncertainty about the whole future of the Western Alliance. Without any misplaced antagonism to the new American President, it is predictable that a man with Lyndon B. Johnson's background and education will have a less European turn of mind than his remarkably Anglicised Irish-Bostonian predecessor who filled his administration with Rhodes Scholars.

It is therefore more than ever tempting to argue that, in the post-Kennedy world, Europe, including Britain, must be less reliant on the United States. This may well reinforce the case, now being privately examined by political strategists in both parties, for providing the Europeans with a nuclear arsenal of our own.

Certainly those of us who agree on the need for reviving the hopeful post-war trend towards European unity, and who accept the truism that Britain is part of Europe, should examine Lord

Gladwyn's suggestions with calm and care. Not only because, like everything he writes, they are put forward with cogency and wit, but also because his views reflect the general thinking of many of the best Europeans on both sides of the Channel. Jean Monnet and his friends have openly counselled a European deterrent as a sound way of re-launching the European unity movement. The idea found favour with many senior members of the Kennedy Administration, perhaps even with the late President himself. It was he who personally sponsored "the Grand Design"—the concept of an equal partnership between a United States of America and a United States of Europe, which might seem incompatible with an American nuclear monopoly.

The change at the White House would not invalidate Lord Gladwyn's view that the Americans are unlikely to be willing to subordinate decisions on when to use, or threaten to use, their strategic forces to a NATO executive. This leads him to the conclusion that, as you cannot have *either* a truly British *or* a truly NATO nuclear force, only a European one can avert what he calls "the system of an American Empire."

As he assumes that neither the British nor the French, even under left-wing governments,