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Bureaucracy and Thoughtlessness: Totalitarian Evil in the Political Theory of Hannah Arendt

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Bureaucracy and Thoughtlessness: Totalitarian Evil in the Political Theory of Hannah Arendt

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil was inspired by her experience with the totalitarian governments of the twentieth century. However, Arendt argued that the thoughtlessness which was at the root of this banal evil was not unique to totalitarianism. Rather, it was a function of modernity. The bureaucratic governments that have become synonymous with political life in recent decades act as a hedge between individuals and certain stimuli for thought. Through a close reading of Arendt's political theory it is argued that bureaucracy, though generally benign, presents the same temptation to thoughtlessness as totalitarianism once did.

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Introduction

This thesis is a focused look at Hannah Arendt's (1906-1975) theory of bureaucracy and thoughtlessness based on a close reading of her work and seeks to draw some commonsensical conclusions about the relationship between totalitarianism, bureaucracy, thoughtlessness and the world in which we live. It is argued that, based on Arendt's theory, bureaucracy, even without the total ideology and terror of totalitarianism, presents the same temptation to thoughtlessness as it did under totalitarian conditions. Though bureaucracies are essential to government as we know it today, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of our bureaucratic institutions and encourage the thoughtful autonomy that Arendt argued made moral judgments possible. Although engaging with Arendt beyond the historical context in which she wrote involves "a certain amount of loose translation" every effort has been made to stay faithful to her ideas in order to preserve their clarity (Philp 2008, 138).

Chapter One examines the structure of the totalitarian state, the world-altering nature of its ideology, and the mass movements that brought it into being. The totalitarian ideology would not have been properly totalitarian without the bureaucratic state working to make its outlandish claims a reality. In Arendt's view, whether the Nazism of Adolf Hitler or the Sovietism of Joseph Stalin, what made an ideology total is the way it was implemented. Lest criticism give way to "bureaucrat-bashing," Arendt's concerns are contextualized with her theory of politics and mass society. Arendt considered the public sphere of politics, the private sphere of the household, and the social sphere of bureaucracy essential to human flourishing. Her concerns regarding bureaucracy were based on an apparent accumulation of power that threatened to eclipse public and private life. Arendt argued that bureaucracy is not merely ill-suited to provide the freedom

and plurality found in politics or the contemplative solitude found in thought, but that it is incapable. This does not mean that bureaucracy is disposable or ought to be eliminated altogether, but that it is dangerously inept when expected to fulfill certain roles. It is argued that bureaucrats are not the problem, but rather the bureaucrat that is expected to act as a sovereign or philosopher. To balance with the public world of politics the social bureaucracy must serve, not govern. To balance with the private world of thought it must leave room for contemplation.

Chapter Two explores the potential within contemplative thought to “condition” individuals against evil actions (Arendt 1981, 5). Ironically, the work that catalyzed this idea, which assigns moral responsibility to the individual in every circumstance, was initially criticized for exonerating Nazi bureaucrats. In 1961 Arendt went to Jerusalem on behalf of *The New Yorker* to report on the Eichmann trial, which was later published as *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). This report launched an “overheated debate” among intellectuals over the nature of Eichmann and his crimes (1963, ix). It was her experience during this trial that led Arendt to develop her theory of banal thoughtless evil, an amendment to her description of the “truly radical evil” of Nazi Germany in the *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). Adolf Eichmann’s appearance of banality was as great a shock to Arendt as it was to her readers, but her goal in her writing was neither to provoke nor persuade but rather to comprehend.

Much of the controversy revolved around the idea that Arendt’s theory of banal evil excused those who were involved in the crimes of the Nazi State by affirming their lack of agency. This reading could not be farther from what Arendt intended. According to Arendt, obedience is a concept that can only be applied “in the nursery or under conditions of slavery” (Arendt 1966, 39). Adults do not obey, they consent. In the words of Mary McCarthy,

“If somebody points a gun at you and says, ‘Kill your friend or I will kill you,’ he is tempting you, and that is all” (2003,18). The professionalism, propaganda, and perverse legality of the totalitarian state tempted many to support the evil regime, but they retained their freedom to withhold consent. The totality of the state did nothing to absolve the people from their moral responsibilities.

Arendt attributed the controversy surrounding the banality of evil to the fact that she had “taken it for granted that we all still believe with Socrates that it is better to suffer than to do wrong,” when in reality there was a “widespread conviction that it is impossible to withstand temptation of any kind, that none of us could be trusted or even be expected to be trustworthy when the chips are down” (2003, 18). The idea that no one could truly control their actions when they found themselves in a difficult situation lead to a “fear of judging” based on the assumption that everyone is “equally bad,” and that those who judge are “either saints or hypocrites, and in either case should leave us alone” (19). This line of reasoning lead to an assumption of collective guilt by the innocent and a general lack of remorse by the guilty, where by identifying with Eichmann to say that “we are all guilty” the innocent expressed a “solidarity with the wrongdoer” (148).

The lesson implicit in Arendt’s judgment of Eichmann was not that totalitarianism rendered people powerless, but that it used their complacency for evil by making evil the path of least resistance. To resist this temptation one had to think, a capacity Arendt expected of “every sane person” (1981, 13). She argued that the thoughtful person’s “refusal to join” in the constant movement of totalitarianism while absorbed in the stillness of thought, “is conspicuous and thereby becomes a kind of action” (1989, 110). Her point was not that there is an Eichmann in

each of us or that we are “mere cogs,” both interpretations that were met with her “horrified surprise,” but that the totalitarianism of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia rested on the consent of millions of adults who had the ability to refuse to participate but chose not to (1966, 3). She attributed this choice to thoughtlessness made effortless by the nature of the regime.

Chapter Three examines the influence of non-totalitarian organizations on the actions of individuals, as well as several alternative theories of the root of human enmity that bolster Arendt’s conclusions. It is argued that institutions ought to be structured in a way that encourages thoughtful people who possess identities of their own to act on principle. A good bureaucracy is not one with an ideal set of rules that all employees are duty-bound to follow but one that encourages thought and independence. Finally, efficiency, hierarchy, and whistleblowing procedures are examined to gain insight into effective institutional practices.

Chapter One: The Nature of Totalitarian Evil

In her 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt argued that totalitarianism, as manifested in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, was an entirely new form of government. The unique evil of the new regime, radical in its severity but banal in its appearance, cast a fresh light on many of the mundane aspects of modern society, revealing the sinister side of the Western world’s impeccable organization. Arendt, more than anyone else, sensed the seriousness of what was revealed. She saw within totalitarianism, in particular Hitler’s Germany, a new kind of evil, one unlike the traditional conception of disturbing, easily identifiable evil deeds. The evil of totalitarianism was carried out by ordinary people in an orderly and organized way. Along with the examples of terror, murder, and propaganda that the term “totalitarian” continues to evoke, she brought attention to the machinery of the Nazi State and how it supported

total ideology. The problematic elements of bureaucracy that she analyzed provide insight into the problem of how ordinary people could have allowed and even supported such brutality. Though there were many things that lead to the formation of the totalitarian state, the organizational capabilities of the bureaucracy were largely responsible for the remarkable scale of its crimes. The size of bureaucratic organizations, the mandate to implement decisions efficiently, and the insular fragmentation of offices that prevented individual bureaucrats from realizing the full moral weight of their actions, formed a system of government that was as destructive as it was effective. Professional, procedural, bureaucratic institutions provided fertile ground for rootless, thoughtless evil.

1.1 How the Structure of the State Made Totalitarianism Possible

The large, amorphous, bureaucratic organizations of Nazi Germany were ideally suited to carry out crimes for which no one wished to take responsibility. Its layered, onion-like structure was meant to obscure and gloss over what the people within it were doing (Arendt 1973, 244). Totalitarianism's particular "apparatus of rule" was a crucial part of the state, as well as significant departure from previous regimes. It masked evil, controlled the population, and lent the Nazi genocide its strange appearance of banality. The bureaucracy made it possible to execute the mass killings with a sterile professionalism, and to perpetuate the governing myths of the state (Arendt 2006, 98; Young-Bruehl 1982, 43). "Organization and propaganda (rather than terror and propaganda)," writes Arendt "are two sides of the same coin" (Arendt 1973, 364). It was the organizational ability of the state that made the claims of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin not only plausible, but brought them to fruition. It was "designed to translate the propaganda lies of the movement...into a functioning reality, to build up, even under non-totalitarian

circumstances, a society whose members act and react according to the rules of a fictitious world” (364).

Nearly every aspect of a citizen’s life, both their working and leisure hours, was enmeshed with the bureaucratic order. As long as one lived in the state they had some involvement in its programs (Davidson 2010, 140). The Nazis thus obtained a greater measure of control over both the actions of the German people and the reality to which they were exposed than could have been achieved through any other method of rule. When seen from the perspective of its organizing institutions as opposed to its radical ideology, it is much easier to understand how the totalitarian movement could “attract so many ordinary philistines” despite its violent extremism. The structure of the state made evil banal by offering every person a place within its many layers and giving each individual a small piece of responsibility. It was so all-encompassing that within the totalitarian state Nazism appeared normal (Arendt 1973, 368). Because everyone was involved to some extent, murder was indeed ordinary, or “banal,” within the German borders.

To maintain the illusion of normalcy, the totalitarian bureaucracy was organized to minimize the civil servants’ contact with the outside world. It was not hierarchical, rather it was made up of a system of concentric circles, where each circle nearing the centre added a layer of fanaticism. The leader occupied the centre of the circle, serving as the “motor that [swung] it into motion,” the mysterious figure who acted as a spokesperson for the movement. Arendt meant this quite literally, writing that Hitler was an easily replaceable “functionary” who depended on the masses as much as they depended on him. Hitler did not lead the masses by thinking and willing on their behalf, rather he believed that “thinking...[exists] only by virtue of

giving or executing orders,” (as cited in Arendt 1973, 325), thus eliminating the distinction between both thinking and acting and “the rulers and the ruled” (326).

The bureaucracy expanded from Hitler’s place in the centre, with the most fanatical situated closest to the centre and the least fanatical comprising the front organizations (373). Each layer between played “the role of normal outside world for one layer and the role of radical extremism for another,” while the front organizations provided “a facade of normality to the outside world” (373, 384, Arendt 2006, 99).

However fanatical a single person was, they were hedged in by a protective layer of people whose exposure to reality differed from their own only by degree. The shapeless mass of layers made the totalitarian state “organizationally shockproof” against the factuality of the outside world (Arendt 2006, 100). The organization of the totalitarian state meant that only a few were needed to support fully the Nazi ideology. The most militant members gave up their private lives entirely to live by the rules of the state. The “ordinary members” of the Nazi party retained their own social lives, but understood the primacy of state responsibilities. The “fellow-travellers,” finally, were the farthest removed from total rule, the most free of all involved, and only “adopted the totalitarian creed as one may adopt the program of an ordinary party,” supporting the regime without abandoning their self-interest (Arendt 1973, 367). Whatever the degree of commitment, totalitarianism made it possible for everyone to work within the confines of the state.

This structure had the unique ability to obscure the world for all involved. It provided both the feeling of normality, as well as the “consciousness of being different and more radical than it,” a perception that made ordinary people feel they were a part of something great (99).

Richard Bernstein notes that the people within the bureaucracy were “committed to a movement that transcend[ed] the life or death of any individual” and were therefore selfless in their devotion to its programs (2002, pg. 7). The Nazis created an all-encompassing “us versus them” narrative, with the entire outside world acting as the “other” that served to unite the organization. For the purposes of Nazi propaganda, the movement and the rest of the earth’s population formed “two gigantic hostile camps,” that had no choice but to go to war (367). The most militant within Nazi Germany were so far removed from the rest of the world that they could not see how reckless their aggression really was, while those on the outer periphery of the regime were imbued with only a vague sense of nationalistic purpose (367). The onion-like layers of the regime thus provided the tools necessary to perpetuate the myths of the totalitarian ideology. Hitler’s rhetoric would have sounded radical coming from just one source, but when filtered through the entire population it took on the appearance of fact.

To further distort one’s sense of reality, the chain of command was intentionally confused. The Nazis did not pare down the government to one central authority, rather they multiplied the number of roles in both the administration and the party, creating many competing authorities and offices (Arendt, 1963, 398). The creation of duplicate positions served two important purposes. It made it difficult to hold people accountable by distorting the hierarchy of command and it introduced competition, specifically, a competition “to kill as many Jews as possible” (71).

By the end of WWII, there were duplicate organizations everywhere, from student unions to professional associations to police, with power shifting continuously between their various branches (Arendt 1973, 401). Even those within each organization “could never be absolutely sure of their own position in the secret power hierarchy,” and the “seat of power” remained a

mystery (400). New, more radical groups were continuously added to “control the controllers,” that is, to supersede groups that had become too mainstream by pushing them “away from the centre of the movement,” to the more moderate periphery. Even under totalitarian circumstances, it was easier to change the course of the bureaucracy by adding more bureaucrats than by taking them away. The result of this constant expansion was that each group actively sought to outperform its rival, creating an organization constantly driven from within to radicalize (369, Feldman and Seibel 2006, 7).

The incentive for each individual to press towards the centre of the regime while simultaneously displacing those that had been there before provided a constant state of movement, while the practice of shifting roles and creating multiple titles kept the bureaucracy “fluid,” a requisite for administering a constantly changing and expanding ideology. All parts taken together, the duplication of offices, drive to radicalization, disjointed hierarchy and anonymity, made it nearly impossible to determine culpability. Arendt writes that to the outside observer, the only reliable indication of which group was most powerful was the level of secrecy: the less one knew of any particular branch, the greater its power (Arendt 1973, 403). The overall effect was to break each person’s sense of responsibility into so many tiny pieces that no one person felt its weight. Within the regime there was not a single person who took responsibility for the direction of the movement. At the centre, Hitler claimed to be doing the work of the people, while along the periphery the people professed to simply following orders.

Totalitarian government was remarkably effective at mobilizing masses of otherwise ordinary people to implement genocide. “Desk murderers,” the bureaucrats who orchestrate murder from behind the scenes, were a “necessary condition” of the Nazi regime (Rosenberg

1990, 215). The Holocaust would not have been possible without highly skilled, well-organized, rational people working towards evil aims. The Nazi State made otherwise nonviolent people into systematic murderers. Its bureaucracies continued to operate as it had before their rise to power, while the civil servants implemented orders with the same professionalism and efficiency they had cultivated in better times. The mass murders, once decided upon, were treated like any other “vast and complex administrative problem.” It did not require any significant deviations from procedural norms (Adams and Balfour 2009, 39, 47).

1.2 How Bureaucracy Supports Mass Movements

Arendt is careful to distinguish between mass movements, which brought the Nazis to power, and traditional political parties. Political parties have articulated principles and encourage the participation of their membership. They appeal to their supporters’ ideas, have platforms to which they are expected to adhere, and operate within the borders and laws of their countries of origin (Arendt 1973, 308). The drive for power is not the primary motivation for their existence; they function as a gathering place for those who share their ideals even when they are out of office. In contrast, movements “can have only a direction...any form of legal or governmental structure can be only a handicap to a movement which is being propelled with increasing speed in a certain direction” (398). Totalitarianism’s shifting centre of power required a governmental structure that could accommodate its shapelessness. The permanence of an established rule of law, the clarity of hierarchy and the accountability introduced by democratic participation would have interfered with the momentum of the movement. Though both movements and parties are prone to bureaucratization, bureaucratization is detrimental to parties because it makes it difficult to act on principle. In contrast, the type of organization bureaucracy offers is precisely what

political movements needed, and what no other form of government could provide (Arendt 1973, 247).

Even tyrannical government, the type of rule most often mistaken for totalitarianism, would have made the scale of the totalitarian state's crimes difficult, as the concentration of power in a single individual would also mean a concentration of responsibility. It would not provide the tools needed to mobilize and implicate the general citizenry in the crimes of the state, nor would it create the same sense of fear within the population. A tyranny merely provides a common enemy for the equally oppressed, whereas totalitarianism creates a system where no one can be trusted and each person is a potential threat to his neighbour. Bureaucracies and totalitarian movements were thus natural partners. Bureaucracy functioned as a "tremendous machine" which could be "set in motion" by a single person, with nothing to impede the continual reformulation of regulation and evolution of rules (247). Their shared sense of secrecy, movement, and indifference toward the rule of law worked together to create a new and more modern evil regime.

The amenability of bureaucracy was vital to totalitarianism, for any limitation to the party's constant expansion "was a serious obstacle to a process that was unable to stop and stabilize, and could therefore only begin a series of destructive catastrophes once it had reached those limits" (144). The layers of the totalitarian regime were fluid and loosely defined and its bureaucratic organization was geared towards ruling by decree rather than by a more formal legislative process. While ordinary legislators were responsible both to the law and to the people, bureaucratic leaders were free to change their orders on a whim (244). Rule by decree was a natural extension of the totalitarian "Leader principle," where "every functionary [was] not only

appointed by the Leader but [was] his walking embodiment” (374). The movement “combine[d] a sense of infinite power with a total lack of human responsibility.” (Canovan 1994, 62). The people saw themselves as the personification of both the power and the ideals of the movement.

Arendt argued that modern bureaucratic government like that of totalitarianism had its roots in Britain’s imperial era, where bureaucracies were the preferred method of ruling subject countries (Arendt 1973, 185). She suggested that the way totalitarianism operated domestically was like the way imperial regimes acted abroad. Both totalitarianism and imperialism regarded the country’s resources “as a source of loot and means of preparing the next step of aggressive expansion,” all of which was “carried out for the sake of the movement and not of the nation” (417). Imperial governments favoured bureaucratic rule because instead of founding new and more permanent institutions, they could let regulators gradually accrue power and, without specifying exactly what goal they were working towards, gradually exert “informal influence” over the territory.

The expertly specialized civil servants who were willing to work anonymously, and thus received neither credit nor blame for what they had done, formed the backbone of these governments (213). Their anonymity simultaneously prevented the great things they did from being recognized and the poor things they did from being punished. They were made “safe from control...of all public institutions, whether Parliament, the ‘English Departments,’ or the press,” essentially operating beyond the rule of law (214). From the perspective of an outsider, the bureaucracy’s anonymity coupled with the arbitrariness of their decrees gave the institutions an air of “pseudoscientific immanence,” by ensuring that only experts within the bureaucracy understood any given order (249). Because there were “no general principles which simple

reason [could] understand behind the decree,” the people lived “under the perpetual rule of accidents,” as if the deeds of the country they inhabited were entirely beyond their control (244 - 245).

Though the imperial governments were not totalitarian, they were bureaucratic political movements, the regime type that Arendt found the most capable of evil. In a letter to Karl Jaspers, she wrote that the Roman Empire was superior to the British because though the Romans were crueller, their empire was “genuine,” for “the Roman conquerors forced Roman law on foreign peoples and by doing so avoided the disastrous bastardized governments of modern times” (Arendt and Jaspers 1992, 167). Without public promises and identifiable politicians there was no clear way to assess the bureaucratic government’s effectiveness, no sounding board from which to launch one’s critique. Instead, the structure of the bureaucracy provided a convincing veneer of all-knowingness while supplying a substitution for the ever-tenuous sense of stability which was lost with the destruction of traditional institutions of authority (Arendt 2006, 94). Government by bureaucracy, whether within the totalitarian, imperial, or other mass state, gave order without permanence or durability, mitigated the shock of the rapidly changing nature of the regime, and spared people the exercise of thought. In Arendt’s opinion, the cruelty of a despotic regime was in many ways preferable to the dullness of bureaucracy (95).

1.3 Totalitarian Ideology as a Method of Control

Totalitarianism is not so much an ideology to stand alongside liberalism, conservatism, socialism and so forth, but rather a system of government and method of thinking that could emerge from any ideological stream. All ideologies have totalitarian tendencies, but it takes a vast organizational system and a supreme commitment to consistency to make them truly total.

Each one, whether liberal, conservative, tyrannical or socialist, Arendt argued, is based on a central premise and therefore has the potential to become total by subsuming every particular. Ideologies provide a view of the world from a fixed point, a single perspective or idea, and their persuasiveness hinges on the ability of their respective ideologues to provide a reasonable explanation of the events of the world in a way that offers a cohesive, certain and linear continuation of their central tenets. “Ideology is quite literally what its name indicates,” writes Arendt, “it is the logic of an idea” (1973, 469). What constitutes the fixed point from which the ideology’s conclusion follows is unimportant. Like the Nazi and Stalinist regimes, governments can provide divergent explanations of the world while exercising the same totalitarian methods of control.

Arendt writes that at the centre of totalitarian ideology was the claim that it drew its power from a source beyond the world. Though totalitarianism disregarded all positive law including that which it created itself, it “claimed to obey strictly and unequivocally those laws of Nature or of History from which all positive laws always have been supposed to spring” (Arendt 1973, 461). This appeal to the otherworldly is not unique to totalitarianism. Most systems of political thinking start from some exclusive premise of human nature or history that could not possibly be proved, they just do so with less enthusiasm. Conservatives tend to paint history as a continual tale of diminishing authority and propose their method of thinking as its antidote.

At the same time, liberals look at the world and see a progressive, ever-improving march towards freedom, provided the conservatives do not interfere. Of course, “one only has to fix his glance on either of these two phenomena to justify a theory of progress or a theory of doom,” for, though both capture a small part of reality, the truth lies between them (Arendt 2006, 100). What

prevents the ideologues from realizing the legitimacy and shortcomings of both perspectives is their commitment to consistency. They display the same “inherent logicity” as totalitarianism; where if one accepts A to be true then B must be true as well, and C and D, all the way through to the end of what Arendt called “the murderous alphabet.” However, the non-totalitarian ideologues do not go on to implement their “ice cold reasoning” as if their conclusions were prophecy (Arendt 1973, 472).

Therefore, the difference between a total ideology and a regular ideology is how it is applied. A totalitarian regime must build a “totally fictitious world,” where it is possible to make each outlandish claim a reality. For example, when Hitler talked of “dying populations,” he meant that he was systematically murdering large swaths of the population (471). Similarly, when Hitler achieved total employment, he did so by changing the way employees were counted, including not counting those looking for work, making it nearly impossible to either quit one’s job or to be let go, and forcing many people into low-paying government sponsored labour jobs (Silverman 1998, 17, 203). There were no limits to what statements could be made true once Hitler had sufficient power to forcibly change the lives of the entire German population. Writes Arendt, “in a totally fictitious world, failure need not be recorded, admitted, and remembered. Factuality itself depends for its continued existence upon the existence of the non-totalitarian world” (Arendt 1973, 388). This aspect of totalitarianism, that its structure made it impossible to “either unmask the liar or force him to live up to his pretence” was unprecedented (384). No other regime so effectively eliminated reality within its own borders. The layered, onion like structure of the state and bureaucracy made this seemingly impossible task possible.

1.4 Why Banal Evil can be More Destructive than Radical Evil

Though totalitarianism turned every moral principle upside down, the distinction between right and wrong was reversed, not lost. The evil of totalitarianism did not spring from modern relativism; rather, its perverse ideology was grounded in an intentional recasting of conventional values. The people within totalitarianism were largely convinced that what they were doing was right, or at least unavoidable, and so necessary. Within the closed borders of the state's ideological message, its power was rational and its policy was lawful. Everything was permissible once it had been decreed. The world according to the Nazis was not an amoral place, it was a stratified realm of good and evil, triumph and defeat, the pure and the impure, only each category was inverted. Retaining the categories was essential, because the people, who had arrived at their previous moral code not from their own experience or contemplation, but by way of following the orders an external authority, had grown accustomed to the possession of rules more than their content. They expected order and professionalism from their government; the bureaucracy helped to meet this expectation while carrying out their murderous work.

Bureaucracy offered the people an escape, not from the evil of the regime but from their awareness of it, and the people willingly bought into a deception that became a self-deception. What the professionalism of the bureaucracy concealed was not that they were killing millions of human beings, but that this slaughter was evil. From behind a desk, the bureaucrats were willing to believe what they were doing was just. The bureaucracy could not possibly have prevented the workers from realizing the "master plan for extermination," rather its air of authority convinced them that their crimes were a legitimate exercise of state power (Johnson 2005, 385).

At least a third of the population was fully aware of the mass murders while they were happening, while others had heard rumours of the murders but could not bring themselves to believe they were true (Johnson 2005, 385). Even while the Holocaust occurred it was difficult for ordinary people to believe that genocide could take place in a modern, civilized country like Germany. Though many Germans heard rumours of the death camps, they were fragmented and unsubstantiated. In contrast, the bureaucracy was stable, professional, and much more in keeping with what was expected from a modern, respectable government. It was in each individual's interest to deny the extent of their involvement with the murderous regime. No one wished to think of themselves as a murderer.

The lives of Germans during the Nazi period were generally normal and they guarded this normality. They "knew instinctively that the terror apparatus was not intent on punishing them so long as they broadly accepted and went along with National Socialism, which most did" (398). Maintaining their routines provided a shield from both the psychological stress of accepting the horror of the regime and a way to blend in and prevent one's own arrest. While the bureaucracy helped preserve this illusion of business-as-usual, its success hinged on the willingness of people to comply. The bureaucracy's propriety sated the bureaucrats' consciences so that ordinary men with a common sense of decency could go about their murderous work without becoming nauseated. To what extent their detachment was denial as opposed to sincere ignorance is difficult to tell. It is, however, perfectly clear that the bureaucracy provided a measure of escapism by glossing over evil intentions with professional appearances, making it possible for regular people to act with indifference.

Michael Mann's 2000 analysis of 1,581 Nazi biographies provides evidence that most of the killers were unlikely candidates for murder. They were not sadistic or racist; instead they appeared to have been, as Arendt said of Nazi administrator Adolf Eichmann, "ruined by modesty," unwilling to judge the superiors who issued the murderous orders because they did not think themselves worthy (Arendt 2006b, 114). Mann groups these people into two categories that reflect their base motivation: the "*fearful or compliant* killers," who were unwilling to swim against the tide lest they face social ostracism, and the "materialist," and "careerists" killers, who were motivated by nothing more than their own financial interests (Mann 2000, 332-333). They shared an aversion to violence, a trust in governing institutions, and a strong sense of propriety.

Of course, Mann notes that there were others who were not so ordinary. There were "ideological killers," committed to the murderous idea of racial superiority; the "disturbed killers," were motivated by their own sadistic desire to murder, and the "bigoted killers," who were sympathetic to the Nazi's racist ideology (332-333). These types of murderers were more in line with what one would expect. They had a criminal edge to them that suggested a propensity to deviance regardless of their political circumstances. The type of evil they represent, demonic, envious and perverted, is the evil of the Bible's Lucifer, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Beethoven's *Fidelio*; the type of evil carried out by villains, condemned by religion and universally abhorred (Arendt 1981, 3). It is much easier to understand how these types of people became killers and to judge their motives and actions. Thus, the Nazis did everything they could to discourage this type of easily identifiable evil. That evil appear banal was an essential requirement of the Nazi genocide. They could not have gained the support of so many had they made them too uncomfortable.

In *Hitler and the Germans* Eric Voegelin (1999) writes that the sense of propriety that governed interactions within Nazi Germany were “secondary virtues” that had become, in the absence of primary virtues (both Christian and noetic), the governing mores of the people (102). Secondary virtues, such as punctuality, cleanliness and reliability, are all desirable traits that serve individuals well provided primary virtues retain their proper place (104). However, when society becomes disordered, the “simple man,” who thinks only of maintaining order, “goes wild” (105). These secondary virtues were the totalitarian bureaucrat’s guiding principles. In *Information Technologies and Social Orders* (1996), Carl J. Couch, David R. Maines, and Ching-Ling Chen write that the bureaucracy sent a memorandum to its members describing the behavioural boundaries for the workers implementing the Final Solution. It reminded the civil servants that they had “no right to take a single fur, a single watch, a single mark, a single cigarette, or anything whatever” so that in the end [they could] say “we have not been damaged in the innermost of our being, our soul, our character” (647, 91). Not only did the Nazi leaders provide clear guidelines for their own definition of behaviour, they promised salvation to those who obeyed.

Similarly, in the concentration camps inmates were charged with carrying out beatings and murders, because the commanders were concerned that their own ranks might become sadistic. They “fretted about the excesses such actions might generate among those who had to personally confront their victims” so they limited contact through bureaucratic means (91). By maintaining some space between themselves and the murders, the Nazi leaders were able to alleviate the “psychic burden” of the genocide while simultaneously disguising the nature of their deeds, all without ceding control (90). These rules were taken seriously; if any civil servants

were found to have breached the stated code of conduct, or if their motives for killing were thought to be perverted in some way, they were punished (91). The Nazis actively discouraged radical evil, doing everything in their power to maintain a civilized veneer to disguise their crimes.

The German bureaucracy and the Nazi party appear to have had a symbiotic relationship. Just as bureaucracy was well suited to support totalitarianism, so too was totalitarianism suited to the mindset of bureaucrats. Mann's 2000 study found that bureaucrats were particularly attracted to Nazism, primed by their years in the authoritarian civil service. As Arendt observed, the people who made the "best" Nazis were those who had clung most closely to a code of conduct before the Nazis came to power. They adapted quickly to the moral inversion that totalitarianism brought about, exchanging one set of rules for another.

"Over a quarter of [Theodore] Abel's sample of Nazi militants (Merkl, 1975: 50-61), over a third of Nazi security policemen (Banach, 1998: 42), and over half of high-ranking SS officers (Wegner, 1990: 240-41) came from military and civil-service backgrounds," writes Mann (21). The structure of power, the level of control and the coerced conformity attracted a similar kind of person to both totalitarian and non-totalitarian bureaucracy. Instead of alienating the workers, "Nazism seem[ed] to have proved quite a congenial extension of these peoples own statism." There was no large-scale purge of the bureaucracy nor new requirements of party loyalty because such measures would have been unnecessary. As Mann writes, "The state had long been a breeding-ground for authoritarian ideas, including Nazism" (21).

To keep the state running, the Nazis needed a wide array of specialized workers. There were those in the finance ministry who helped to orchestrate the confiscations, the armament

inspectors who organized forced labour, and the corporations that used their services. Municipal authorities oversaw the ghettos and the death camps, while the engineers determined new ways to dispose of the camp's human waste, a problem that prompted complaints from those living nearby. Along with the civil service, groups outside of the bureaucratic apparatus often cooperated to make the murders more efficient.

Michael Berenbaum (2009) writes that the churches “supplied birth records to define and isolate Jews while the post office delivered statements of definition, expropriation, denaturalization, and deportation” (74). There were millions of well-organized people involved in the murders to various degrees. Though most people did not kill anyone directly, the continued operation of the camps and the execution of the Nazi program depended on the compliance of both the bureaucrats and the general population (Adams and Balfour 2009, 48, 50). For those involved, the “repeated killing” was “not a deed, a single act, but an activity with all the distinguishing features of work” (2009, 39).

The Nazis likely did more damage with organized murders than they ever could have with chaotic violence, upending established institutions proved more productive than tearing them down, but their cooperation was reluctant. Once the Party took power the administration proved difficult to control. On April 26, 1942, Hitler remarked: “Ministries ought to direct from above, not interfere with details of execution. The civil service has reached the point of being a blind machine. We shan't get out of that state of affairs unless we decide on a massive decentralization” (Peterson 1966, 184).

Local party leader Gauleiter Sauckel complained in a 1937 letter that the red tape of bureaucracy was stifling the “Party virtues” of “initiative, decisiveness, and joy in

responsibility,” by insisting that local chapters wait for orders from Berlin, denying them any autonomy (174-175). Apart from Hitler and a few high-ranking members of the party, the bureaucrats retained power over their Party counterparts (176). Numerous Nazis complained of the bureaucratic decision-making process, including Göring and Lammers, who complained that if a local Party leader wished to decide on something so minor as the selection of a football goalie they would have to consult the bureaucracy first (179). The bureaucracy was both too pacifying and too far removed from the people. Party members, when hired into the bureaucracy, did not bring it closer to party values but instead adopted the officialisms of their new office, turning into “luke-warm men” (182, 183). To Hitler the bureaucratization of party business “was fully senseless and must be stopped.” Yet, “it was not stopped” (179).

Part of the reason the bureaucracy was so difficult to control was the fact that the Nazi Party had neither the trained membership nor the time to fill all, or even a majority of the administrative offices throughout the country. Fewer than half of city mayors and fewer than 20 per cent of rural mayors had been Party members before 1933. “The *Landräte* in the Catholic areas were as much as 85% non-Party before 1933, and a surprising 35% in one area did not join even after 1933” (189). Where there were duplicate offices the state often held the real power (190). Once the Party had served the purpose of igniting the mass movement that brought Hitler to power, it was no longer useful. It “became a nuisance in some ways, remarkable for its efforts to get soft jobs for its members,” but contributing nothing substantial (191). The enormity of the crimes Hitler wanted to achieve could only be carried out by the full-time professional bureaucrats that staffed the state. The Party never absorbed the bureaucracy, they were largely

replaced by it (191). For all of Hitler's criticism, he could "more easily have dispensed with the Party than with the despised bureaucrat" (192).

1.5 The Proper Role of Bureaucracy

Arendt's ideas concerning bureaucracy's potential for evil garnered criticism. For example, Larry M. Preston (1987) characterizes Arendt's theory of bureaucratic thoughtlessness as "misleading and dangerously overdrawn," not because he doubts that bureaucracies may provide the tools needed to rationalize evil deeds, but because he sees her critique as a wholesale condemnation of a useful institution, one that has gained power precisely because it competently performs the many services we expect from the state (792). "If we want powerful, centralized bureaucracies to play a smaller role in our lives," writes Preston, "we must choose purposes that do not require them" (792).

Furthermore, he argues that bureaucracy provides the structure in which freedom can occur. Rather than decrease individual freedom Preston suggests that social structures are essential to preserve it. Reliable, predictable processes allow people to acquire the experience and expertise necessary to make free decisions and expose them to a greater array of options (779). Bureaucracies, like religious institutions and markets, can provide "context for our individual choices," without the "conformity of traditional institutions or the inequality and uncertainty of the market" (793). Social programs, public education and militaries all require centralized administration. Preston suggests we either rely on the democratic arm of the government to guide bureaucratic decision-making, or adjust our expectations.

Contrary to Preston's opinion, Arendt had no real problem with bureaucracy in its proper place. She acknowledged the social sphere was as legitimate as the public and private sphere, she

merely feared its dominance. Bureaucracies are neither good nor bad, rather they become dangerously incompetent when their model of organization is used to administer tasks that require deliberation. They cannot be expected to “solve political problems,” nor resolve broader conflicts; rather, their most valuable work occurs at the lower levels of bureaucracy, where the managers and “operators” coordinate and perform the “critical tasks” that are necessary for accomplishing the broad set of goals assigned by the executive (Meier 1997, 196; Wilson 1989, 24-27). “The role of senior public servants,” writes Donald J. Savoie, “is to take political direction, and where it doesn’t exist, to tread water until direction is given” (1999, 8).

As S. N. Eisenstadt notes, thinkers like Arendt and Preston do not represent “two entirely separate points of view, but rather...they point to various possibilities, all inherent in the very nature of bureaucracy,” (304). He posits that instead of arguing over the nature of bureaucracy, one ought to focus on identifying the “conditions under which each of these tendencies becomes actualized and predominant in any given bureaucratic organization” (304). Similarly, Michael J. Wriston (1980) writes that the big bureaucratic question is “not whether [bureaucracy] is necessary, but what we can do to control it and optimize its use” (180).

Indeed, Max Weber predicted that controlling bureaucracy would become one of modern democracy’s greatest challenges. Bureaucracies, which initially contributed to a “social levelling” by emphasizing merit over wealth or social position, ultimately create “new social distinctions that privilege the bureaucrat” and stymie democratic participation (Espeland 2000, 1080). It is all too easy to allow expert decisions to replace democratic ones and bureaucratic authority to replace public participation (1080). That bureaucratization is so often the path of least resistance justifies its criticism.

Bureaucracies perform an important function in large, modern governments. They are, by design, intended to efficiently implement predetermined laws and regulations that are crafted with deliberation and discussion by a legislative body. They administer social programs that the collective determines to be essential for all people; and by providing certain necessities, they free individuals for political participation. Bureaucracies are stable and specialized, and as noted by Arendt, ideally suited to solving logistical problems that do not require democratic contribution beyond their inception (1965, 86). The process of decision-making employed is meant to be maximally efficient while still retaining a level of democratic accountability.

What bureaucracies cannot do is create space for political action or contemplative thought. Arendt believed that coming together as equals was the ultimate act of politics, and that the truest mark of humanity was the diversity of opinion among people who observe the world from their subjective place in it. Because of this diversity, ordinary people, when brought together to share knowledge and opinions, are as prepared for political activity as the professional thinker and their participation is every bit as important.

Politics “assures the mortal actor the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men” (198-199). By interacting with other people and sharing their opinions and ideas, ordinary citizens gain a clearer picture of reality, and the collection of subjective judgments from other individuals confirm the objective reality of the world (Arendt 2006, 219). It is only in politics where people from all sections of society appear as equals to start anew. They argue over ideas, principles and opinions and in doing so create the foundations of the world they share. They “are the world and not merely in it” (Arendt 1981, 22)

1.6 Bureaucracy in Context

Arendt's critique of bureaucracy was not limited to its totalitarian incarnation. It was part of her broader theory on what constituted a healthy society. She tended to see the world in dualities that functioned best when properly balanced. The private and the public, thinking and acting, labouring and working shaped the way she approached the challenges of modernity. Bureaucracy represented the social part of life, a sphere between the public life within politics and the private life within the home. It was based on the consumptive needs and biological necessity of the life process. It most closely resembled the private life of the household, only without the solitude found when one withdraws entirely from the public world.

Arendt believed that bureaucracy and the social life it governed had become too powerful, usurping the role of public and private life to the detriment of both, creating a mass society. Arendt argued that this was worrying, insofar as the social sphere was unfit for contemplative thought and political action, which were the human capacities she held in highest regard. During the "modern age" which "began in the seventeenth century and came to an end at the beginning of the twentieth century" the banal private concerns of the social were elevated to the "highest rank" (6). This trend culminated in the work of Karl Marx, who argued that labour, the mode of existence most closely related to the life process, was "the expression of the very humanity of man" (101). This cultural emphasis on the importance of the life process above all other facets of the human experience solidified the dominance of the concerns of the social realm, undermined citizens' political freedom, and primed their minds for "the self-compulsion of ideological thinking" that stifled human critical capacity (Arendt 1968, 474, 478).

The issue that most clearly illustrates the distinction between social, public and private life is the right to discriminate. The social provides a place where people outside of the family, including children, can associate without encroaching on the rights and freedoms of others. Schools, places of employment and vacation resorts are among these social institutions. They are not private, in the same sense that the household is, but when properly controlled they are not truly public either, as they have small jurisdictions of authority and can easily be avoided by people who do not share the values of those involved.

Though clubs and offices accommodate gatherings of individuals, their purpose is not to facilitate every viewpoint, but to draw similar people together. Be it class or culture or occupation, “like attracts like” in social circles (Arendt 1998, 24; 2003, 205). Within these institutions, people are free to choose their own company. This freedom to associate, and thus discriminate, is critically important to both social and private life, but it is easy to imagine its disastrous effects if this social principle were transposed to public life or made compulsory. Likewise, to replace the freedom of private life with the exclusive, organized groupings of the social would be despotic. When the social grows so powerful that it forms a mass society, it “blurs lines of discrimination and levels group distinctions” (Arendt 2003, 206 - 208).

The way scholars approach the social as opposed to the political reveals further differences between them. The social is studied through economics and statistics, disciplines based on the premise that meaning is found in people behaving in similar, pattern-forming ways with “predictable courses.” The public, on the other hand, is the subject of history and politics, and is the “story of events” that document individuals acting in new and exceptional ways (42). In politics, it is not the commonplace, but the “rare deeds” that give life meaning; thus “the

application of the law of large numbers and long periods to politics or history signifies nothing less than the willful obliteration of their very subject matter” (252). Bureaucracies, as they are the most social form of government, are not only apolitical, they are anti-political. They diminish the importance of individual action to emphasize harmony within the group as a whole, and they incentivize following predetermined procedures to ensure the uniform outcomes and predictable patterns so desirable in the social realm.

The replacement of the political experience of plurality with the unnatural homogeneity of the social lead to an “alienation from the world” among modern citizens. This alienation came as a result of the dissolution of the public relationships that affirm each individual’s understanding of reality. Without the opportunity to engage in politics and compare one’s own perspective with others, people begin to doubt the validity of their own experience and thus lose sight of the shared world (Arendt 1998, 6, 264). Arendt believed that the world exists between people, so when she wrote that modern persons are alienated from the world, she meant also that they are alienated from the rest of humanity resulting in “organized loneliness” (1973, 478).

These alienated citizens were the masses, or the *animal laborans* who laboured privately to create impermanent things for their own consumption. They formed a “mass society of labourers” who cared only for their personal livelihood and brought these concerns into politics (Arendt 1998, 45, 118). “While dire necessity made labor indispensable to sustain life,” writes Arendt, “excellence would have been the last thing to expect from it,” (1998, 48). When the masses were organized by movements, and thus asserted their private interests in the public sphere, politics became less about greatness and more about the mundane. Public life in mass society was merely “private activities displayed in the open” (Arendt 1998, 134). It reduced

humanity to its most unremarkable elements, and paved the way for “the wordless mentality of modern ideological mass movements” (Arendt 1998, 257).

Replacing the public sphere with the administration of things related to the life-process harmed both public and private life by removing the space where one could escape necessity. It infringed on the private space where man could stop and think and the public space where one could appear and have their reality affirmed by other people (45). As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl wrote in *Why Arendt Matters*, “When all that is asked of politics is that it does not interfere with the life process,” the people live their lives in darkness (2009, 6).

The “deadly passivity” of the social sphere housed a population too enthralled by their consumer needs and wants to think substantively and too busy with their labour to act anew. Totalitarianism rested on these social masses, but they were not a totalitarian creation, they were a part of modern society (Arendt 1973, xxiii). The perils of mass society were a popular topic of sociological literature, particularly during the 1950s among both liberals and conservatives who were both wary of communism. They centred around a few common themes; that public life has deteriorated, that social ties have weakened, and that people are isolated. For example, David Riesman, in his 1956 book *The Lonely Crowd*, coined the term “other-directed” to describe the bureaucratically-inclined people so concerned with what others might think that they neglect to think themselves. Likewise, in 1956, Peter Viereck decried the “overadjusted” masses in *The Unadjusted Man*, arguing that the acceptance of normalcy as an end in itself was destroying individual ingenuity, as if the population had undergone a “universal voluntary lobotomy.” C. Wright Mills’ *The Power Elite*, argued that the politically detached masses in the United States had destroyed “the classic community of publics.” While Richard Sennett’s 1977 book *The Fall*

of *Public Man*, argued, in contrast to Riesman, that people are excessively inwardly focused and thus oblivious to the importance of public life (26).

Throughout this literature, the masses consisted of those not represented by the class or party system. They were a large and aimless pool of individuals with a general distaste for political parties and the “chaos of opinions” they represented (Arendt 1973, 305). They preferred the routine of the social sphere to the unpredictable nature of politics, and they were thus best mobilized by bureaucracies. Arendt writes that Hitler understood that the way to appeal to the masses was to simply choose to adhere to “*one* of the many current opinions with ‘unbending consistency’” to provide the simplicity they craved (306).

Frustrated by the inevitable array of opinions and disagreements that arise whenever free people express their ideas, the “wordless and herdlike” masses of people “develop[ed] an almost irresistible inclination toward despotism” (160). Guided by their “assumed one interest,” bureaucracy was their natural government. The larger the population, the clearer this one interest became, as deviations from the norm turned into outliers. The influence of the individual was thus diminished as the statistical uniformity of the mass increased, resulting in an anti-political homogeneity (Arendt 1998, 40, 43).

Though other theorists focused on the conformity and self-centeredness of the masses, Arendt saw these tendencies as symptomatic of a deeper and more worrying proclivity towards thoughtlessness. The fact that most bureaucrats within totalitarianism were not fully committed to its radical ideology, but rather failed to think about what they were doing and judge for themselves, content with the mere possession of rules, revealed the danger inherent in passive compliance. Arendt concluded that the tradition of thought the world inherited could not

comprehend the new phenomena that was totalitarianism. The ease in which totalitarianism swept over Germany, destroying social bonds and turning morality on its head, demonstrated that the impetus for moral judgment must be found not in an all-too-easily replaced moral code or institution, but in the thinking lives of the people.

Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism provides a clear example of administrative evil. It is, of course, an extreme example, but it is also an illuminating one. It prompted a fundamental shift in the way Arendt viewed evil, from radical to banal, leading her to conclude that the traditional methods once used to determine the right course of action were ill-equipped to answer modern moral questions. Bureaucratic organizations minimized the bureaucrat's contact with the outside world, distorted their sense of responsibility, and made ordinary people who became bureaucrats particularly effective killers by facilitating their thoughtlessness. Its opacity propagated a sense of mysticism, its technical rationality made it prone to moral inversions, its professionalism disguised the evil it orchestrated, and for all its rules and regulations, there was nothing inherent to bureaucratic organization that opposed evil aims. These characteristics were made clear by the rise of totalitarianism, but there is nothing uniquely totalitarian about any one trait in isolation. They are, rather, part of the increasingly powerful social sphere. To bring the social back into its natural and limited place, one must reject its levelling influence and banal ideals and choose instead to think and act independently. Arendt's answer to the challenge of controlling bureaucracy was thus twofold: to balance its social influence, one must revitalize the political, but to do that a person must first find the space necessary for judgment. Arendt found this space in the life of the mind.

Chapter Two: Thinking and Judging

The murderous organizations and inverted morals of totalitarianism invalidated the traditional ethical benchmarks on which people were once able to base their judgments. Without sufficient guidance from the church and state many lost the ability to discern what was evil. Unwilling to judge freely they chose instead to trade their former life-affirming system of values and behaviour-guiding rules for the life-destroying ideology of the Nazis (Arendt 2003, 167). Knowledge of law, credo or other manifestations of rule-based morality proved powerless in the context of total ideology. Instead, the quality that set the honourable apart from the rest was a strong sense of self.

Hannah Arendt's theory of thoughtless evil, inspired by her experience reporting Adolf Eichmann's trial and execution for *The New Yorker*, illuminates the characteristics that aid in the development of the self. Arendt argued that within evil regimes one must rely on contemplative thought to provide their bearings (Arendt 2003, 78). The inherent skepticism of the thinking process leads one to weigh conflicting particulars, undermine the false certainty of dogma and evaluate rules independently (1989, 116). These internal activities, for which Arendt chose Socrates as an exemplar, cultivate what she called the "standard of the self."

In the 53 years since Arendt's report, new interviews and analyses have further developed our understanding of the importance of the self and the futility of rules. Through a series of interviews, Kristen Renwick Monroe (1994) discovered that identity was the central motivation for rescuers in Nazi Germany. The rescuers' strong sense of self constrained their perception of choice so that they felt they had made no choice at all, but rather acted the only way they could. This sense of identity was cultivated both inwardly and outwardly, by their thoughtful

understanding of the kind of person they were and by their universalist view of the public world that stressed the common bond of humanity between themselves and the Jewish people. They consistently acted according to these two principles, whatever the consequences. The moral sense present in these individuals proved more powerful than any command, convention, or threat to personal security.

2.1 Thought as an Inner Conversation

In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt concluded her study of the *vita activa* with a plea to the *vita contemplativa*. She asked that to prevent evil we begin to “think what we are doing” (Arendt 1998, 5). Arendt’s appeal was unexpected. She did not refer to thought in the way that is most often discussed in politics; neither as a matter of knowledge, i.e., a familiarity with party platforms, voting systems or policy choices, nor a matter of reason, of considering the consistency of ideas or the persuasiveness of arguments. The Nazis did not prey on a lack of intelligence in the German people (Arendt noted that even the most vicious were known to spend their evenings “reading Hölderlin and listening to Bach”) but on their superficial, easily replaced institutionalized mores (2003, 96-97). Their moral standards were based on external rules rather than discursive, contemplative thought. This inner conversation with its destructive power to tear down assumed truths, question consensus and undermine established societal conventions seemed an unlikely foundation on which to rest the public world of politics. However, it was its very destructiveness, and thus its ability to create a reflective “space” or “distance” within the mind, that made it essential to public life.

Arendt divides the thinking process into three categories: thinking, willing, and judging. Thinking, the silent dialogue, as she said, between “me” and “myself,” “aims at and ends in

contemplation” (Arendt 1981, 6). Willing chooses between compelling options to command the self; and judgment, the faculty linked most closely to the outside world, imagines the viewpoint of others to decide how one ought to act (1989, 140). In terms of providing the basis for moral action, the most important aspect of the three types of mindfulness is that they are grounded in a two-in-one conversation. That is, they require that a person live explicitly with themselves (2003, 45). As Elizabeth Young-Bruehl (1982) notes, the thinking dialogue is between me and myself, the willing dialogue is between the “I-will and I-nill” and the judging dialogue is between the “me and you (plural)” (294). When deep in thought, a person is not a unified one, but can consider many points of view at once. It is this ability to imagine different scenarios and consequences that informs one’s decisions and creates resistance to any “set system of values” (Arendt 2003, 44).

The standard of the self naturally arises from these internal conversations as the self does its best to provide a pleasant conversational partner. As Socrates stated in *Gorgias*, “I would rather that my lyre should be inharmonious...or that the whole world should be at odds with me, and oppose me, rather than that I myself should be at odds with myself, and contradict myself” (Plato 481; Arendt 2003, 90; 1981, 168). Socrates talked with others in the same way one converses with the self, continually examining problems for which there were no clear answers and exposing false opinions so that they could be discarded. He did not teach anything, just as an individual cannot teach the other half of the self, rather he made room for new judgments and perspectives by revealing how little certainty the individual possessed. By questioning the systems of thought the people had adopted, he brought them closer to reality. Neither logic nor doctrine are imperative to telling right from wrong, for “only those who are not

capable of thinking need to be compelled.” Rather, the habit of living explicitly with oneself through thought and the desire for a consistency between one’s identity and one’s actions is what keeps a person from doing evil (1981, 29).

It is natural to want to act respectably so that one can enjoy the company of themselves. Though what one finds respectable varies between people, most would not choose “Bluebeard for company,” and would be even more unlikely to do so if choosing Bluebeard meant that they would be forever bound to him with no chance of escape (2003, 145). Arendt illustrates the unhappy state of a person at odds with themselves with a brief excerpt from Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (V.iii.190-200):

What do I fear? Myself? There’s none else by.

Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.

Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:

Then fly. What from myself? Great reason why --

Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?

O no! Alas, I rather hate myself

For hateful deeds committed by myself.

I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.

Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.

Here, Richard II realizes that he fears the murderer within him, that he hates this murderer and wishes to harm him, and yet, that he cannot possibly escape this murderer without destroying himself (2003, 295). The fact that the person who commits an evil deed is the person most powerless against the evildoer becomes clear to him. In this way, the preference for the company

one keeps is augmented in the self, forming a sense of self-interest that incentivizes moral behaviour. It is therefore reasonable that a contemplative person hold themselves to a higher moral standard than they would their friends. The close relationship between the selves creates a standard of behaviour where the question is not, as in Kant, “can I will that everyone act in this way?” but “can I live comfortably with myself if I act in this way?” Arendt calls this maxim the standard of the self.

2.2 Adolf Eichmann and Thoughtless Evil

Arendt believed that contemplative thought had the potential to “condition” individuals against committing evil deeds (1981, 5). She came to this conclusion by observing the potentially evil consequences of nonthinking at Eichmann’s trial. Eichmann was the personification of thoughtless “banal” evil. According to the psychologists who evaluated Eichmann, he was psychologically “normal,” or as one of them put it, “more normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him,” yet he was instrumental in the Holocaust, overseeing the deportation of Jewish persons to concentration camps and facilitating the destruction of more than six million Jews at the hands of the Nazi government and its allies (Arendt 2006b, 25, 26). If Eichmann were judged on his work ethic alone or on his ability to follow orders and impress his superiors he would be an exemplary bureaucrat, a model mass man. He was precisely what Voegelin described as a “simple man,” one governed only by secondary virtues and therefore capable of anything save disorder (1999, 105). Competence, professionalism and consistency proved to be shallow mores and did not provide Eichmann with any reason to break rank with the Nazis (2006b, 95). All that was required to reconcile obedience, normalcy, and hard work with the Nazi ideology was to substitute good with evil in his general behavioural framework.

The banal thoughtlessness Eichmann exemplified was not the only manifestation of evil in the Nazi regime but it did present the greatest challenge to the common understanding of the nature of evil. When Eichmann stood before the court in Jerusalem, people expected to see not a man but a monster. There was a reluctance to accept that a regular person was capable of carrying out mass murder. The idea of Nazis as demons, as an evil not of this world, of the Holocaust as a freak accident that could never again occur because it was beyond the realm of human action, was comforting. It was much easier to look away from the horrors of totalitarianism than to contemplate its reality and judge the millions of people involved. By acknowledging Eichmann's normality Arendt confronts the fact that he was human, that his evil deeds were capable of being comprehended, and that his character was not beneath judgment (Arendt 1989, 116).

Eichmann was not a monster, though what he did was monstrous. Rather, his trial revealed firsthand how the civil facade of bureaucracy disguised the true power-holders, encouraged blind obedience and protected bureaucrats from the reality of what they were doing, shielding them from any potential impetus for moral action. At every ethical crossroad, Eichmann relinquished his moral responsibilities and chose instead to rely on the intuition of the group. When met with a moral conundrum, his guiding-principle was to ask himself "*Who am I to judge?*" a tragically modest attitude given the circumstances (114).

Though he was neither unintelligent nor sinister, Eichmann never looked beyond the boundaries of his desk to consider whether what he was doing was right, even after the Nazis lost the war. He was not entirely without or incapable of thought, Arendt notes that he had an excellent memory for "petty personal milestones," but he failed to consider the salient details of his work, as demonstrated by his inability to recall important details of the Holocaust (48, 53).

Eichmann was “stupid” according to Voegelin’s definition, in that he acted “on the basis of a defective image of reality and thereby create[d] disorder.” Eichmann lacked the capacity to identify which aspects of his life warranted thoughtful examination. He was illiterate in the realm of spirit and reason and this rendered his actions idiotic (1999, 89-90).

Paul Formosa (2009) illustrates the difference between being thoughtless and failing to think about the right thing with the example of walking through a crowd. On one hand, one could think carefully about where they were going, being careful not to step on anyone’s heels or get in anyone’s way. On the other, a person might be deep in thought about something else entirely, a problem at work, for example, and not pay any attention to the people around them. They would seem very thoughtless to the people they stepped on, but the cause would not be thoughtlessness per se, but a failure to think about the appropriate thing at that moment (56). Eichmann thought about fitting in with the elites of the party, but did not stop to ask whether their company was desirable or his work defensible (Arendt 2004, 114). He cared only for his career and his standing among his peers, and these concerns shaped his identity. Apart from his job he was a “nobody” (111).

The first sign of Eichmann’s thoughtlessness and lack of identity apart from his job title was the language he used to describe his experiences. During his trial, Eichmann was prone to “empty talk,” possessing a seemingly endless supply of meaningless self-consolatory statements. His speech was riddled with nonsensical cliched phrases and “officialese,” which he claimed was his “only language.” While Arendt at first attributed his incoherent babble to an effort to obscure a deeper, more evil motive, she soon concluded that his “inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to think” (Arendt 2006b, 49).

The propagandists exploited the connection between speaking and thinking by using a system of language rules to make the crimes of the state more palatable. One “trick” used was to turn the evil deed on its head so that the perpetrator became the victim. “Instead of saying: what horrible things I did to people!, the murderers would be able to say: What horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties, and how heavily the task weighed upon my shoulders!” (106). They claimed that the gas chambers were meant for “incurably sick persons” so that they might be “granted a mercy death,” while Eichmann declared the purpose of his murderous work served to spare his victims “unnecessary hardships” (108). These deliberate changes to the language of mass murder influenced the way Eichmann and others felt and thought about what they were doing, shielding them from the reality of their work while isolating them from contrary public opinions. Carefully chosen language meant to portray the organization in its best light is typical of bureaucracies. More recent examples of officialese include “collateral damage,” “deportation,” “rendition” and the continued practice of referring to the enemy as vermin. All are examples of the power of language to mask evil deeds (Adams and Balfour 2009, 18).

Eichmann never considered the existence of opposing viewpoints, nor thought himself to possess a viewpoint of his own. Instead he relied on the cliches supplied for him by the state which revealed his failure to examine reality for himself. Jakob Norberg (2010) writes that cliches indicate a “smooth and unquestioned social consensus,” both between people in society and within the mind of the individual. Unlike the expression of personal opinions and free judgments, an individual expressing cliches makes no attempt to persuade others to see the world from their point of view, rather they “take the support of others for granted” (5, 6). By speaking only in

well-worn phrases, Eichmann spoke only of the unexamined, uncontested mores of his particular social circle. Though the language rules did not change the nature of their deeds, they did provide a way for bureaucrats to continue their work without fully acknowledging what they were doing.

A second example of Eichmann's thoughtlessness was his experience at the Wannsee Conference, which he attended to discuss the implementation of the Final Solution (Arendt 2006b, 112). Eichmann, impressed by the rank of the people proposing the Final Solution and happy to be included among them, found peace in the consensus surrounding the mass murders to come. As the lowest ranking official included in the meeting, and seemingly the only person with any doubts towards the "bloody" policy, Eichmann stated that he "sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling" for he "felt free of all guilt" (114). His failure to think about what he was doing was therefore revealed to be deliberate. Whatever twinge of conscience Eichmann felt that spurred him to remind himself that he was but a small cog within the machinery of a large movement was promptly snuffed out by the weight of the opinions of others. The lessons he took away from the Wannsee conference was the party was all that mattered and the consequences of his work were beyond his control. This, of course, was a dangerous fiction.

Finally, Eichmann's thoughtlessness and internalization of the rules of the Nazi party was revealed when he offered an apology to his colleagues after admitting in court that he had helped his half-Jewish relatives. Helping Jewish people, even in the midst of a defence that centred on his positive feelings towards the Jews, remained in his mind an unfortunate breach of conduct (24, 137). Eichmann did not see anything wrong with his loyalty to the Nazis, rather he took pride in it. His unflinching obedience served as "proof that he had always acted against his 'inclination,' whether it was sentimental or inspired by interest, that he had always done his

‘duty,’” (137). It proved that he had been loyal to his colleagues above all else. Nazi General Alfred Jodl expressed a similar sentiment when asked why he and his peers had failed to resist Nazi orders. According to Jodl, it was “not the task of a soldier to act as a judge over his supreme commander,” it was the task of a soldier to obey (149). Even if Jodl had sensed that the orders were evil, as Eichmann did at the Wannsee conference, it would not have changed his behaviour. By accepting membership in the military he had relinquished his right to judge. Like Eichmann, he would have suppressed his subversive thoughts to accept the authority of his superiors, which he perceived to be a higher-order value (114).

2.3 The Clash of Duty and Integrity

Duty is often valued over other morality-promoting characteristics within organizations. Peter Olsthoorn (2009) argues that integrity, bolstered by a strong personal identity to which one is loyal above all else, is in every way at odds with the military ethos. “This notion of integrity as upholding personal values and principles is a very problematic one in itself, especially to those working in the military,” writes Olsthoorn. “An organization such as the military is, by its very nature a hostile environment for acting according to personal principles, if these are at odds with the organization’s views” (98). Balancing loyalty to the group and loyalty to oneself is difficult, for while the military requires a strong sense of duty to accomplish its mandate, “when those around are letting their moral standards go, or when the norms of a group are the wrong ones in the first place, sticking to one’s principles can be the only thing that stands between a soldier and a war crime” (90, 101).

The private nature of thought is at the same time what makes it a safe haven; within every mind there is the potential for autonomy. No one can control, discern, or encroach upon another’s

thoughts unless the individual allows it. The greatest danger to a person's thought life is the temptation to cede their autonomy and take the view of another, which is precisely what Eichmann did and bureaucracies encouraged. He respected the governing institutions of his country and was committed to following their orders simply because they came from his superiors. He saw himself primarily as a law-abiding bureaucrat and thus relinquished his moral sovereignty in favour of civic duty. In short, Eichmann's deference to the bureaucracy went beyond what could be achieved through force, persuasion or argument. His willingness to replace his judgment with the judgment of his superiors was a result of the institution's formative role in his identity (Sennett 1992, 59, Arendt 1993, 91).

The aspect of thought that prevents evil doing is not a question of content, but of process. It arises "out of the thinking experience as such" (183). The thinking person is driven to obey the "axiom of non-contradiction" that underlies Kant's categorical imperative because the self naturally avoids becoming its own adversary (186, 188). In other words, to live as a thinking being is to have "a witness within yourself" that holds you accountable (Arendt 1966, 25). When we consider ourselves while making moral decisions, as we were called to do by such maxims as the Biblical "Love thy neighbour as thyself," our judgments are based on the fact that "as long as we live we shall have to live together with ourselves" (Mark 12:31, Arendt 2003, 45, 76). As long as a person thinks and remembers there is a limit to the evil they can do. Though the limits may change significantly depending on the person, limitless evil is only possible in the absence of thought (101).

The purpose of the dialogue that forms the basis for judgment is to push past a person's own prejudice in an effort to align one's judgment with what is anticipated to be a shared

principle with others. The imagined presence of others draws our minds past our own prejudices to form judgments that, though limited in validity by the scope of the imagination, go beyond one's intuition (1989, 96). Here Arendt draws her inspiration from the Kantian idea of the "enlargement of the mind," or the process of "comparing our judgment with the possible rather than the actual judgment of others" (1981, 257). The enlarged mind goes beyond the Socratic desire to agree with oneself by requiring that one "think in the place of everybody else." It is not a dialogue between the selves, but rather an "anticipated" conversation with others. Thus we cannot indulge our "idiosyncrasies" but must "transcend [our] own individual limitations" (1993, 217). It is through this faculty that people are able to create political space for judgment even when isolated or oppressed.

To judge any event, a person must be able to distance themselves from it and examine it in a detached way. This is very difficult to do in a totalitarian regime, because nearly every aspect of a person's life is subject to state scrutiny. In *Iron Curtain: The Crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956* (2012) Anne Applebaum describes how formerly apolitical institutions were absorbed into the party machinery, turning opportunities for meaningful political organization into closely monitored state institutions where one's loyalty to total ideology was continually tested (xx). The control sought after by totalitarian regimes was truly total, any free grouping of people was seen as a potential threat to their desired power. Therefore, they allowed little freedom to discuss ideas with others, or to withdraw from the totalitarian world altogether. Given that thinking to form moral judgement is not about intellect, but about a dialogue, it is crucial that in the absence of real, free, diverse conversation, a person can draw upon their own imaginations to facilitate this kind of critical thought and create the space and perspective needed to judge (Parvikko 2003,

208). Imagination distances “what is too close to us so we are less biased” and brings “nearer what is too far away” (La Caze 2010, 84).

Arendt writes that the most fervent Nazis were those who had been the most upstanding citizens of the old regime. They were and remained “the least likely to indulge in thoughts, dangerous or otherwise,” and the most inclined to follow a fixed set of rules (1981, 177). It was easier to trade one set of rules for another than to make free judgments and “make up [one’s] mind anew” each time they were presented with a problem (177). The thinking dialogue can be upsetting, as the individual is forced to consider frustratingly conflicting details and is therefore made aware of the shortcomings of their theory. It is tempting to simply put the problem out of one’s mind and continue as usual. It was therefore the “*possession* of rules under which to subsume particulars” that the people in Nazi Germany had associated most closely with morality, rather than the content of the rules themselves. The fragility of this rule-based morality was demonstrated by the two complete collapses of moral order: the first when Hitler came to power and turned traditional morality on its head, and the second when he was defeated, bringing another equally abrupt change to turn mores back to “normal” (54). Rule-based morality was as disposable, as Arendt was fond of saying, as a set of table manners (2003, 43). It was easier for the people to transition from applying one set of rules to another than to make independent judgments.

Those who judged best during the Nazi era “did so freely,” on their own intuition, as the moral code specific to the regime’s legal inversion had not yet been written. They judged on their own accord, taking full responsibility for their conclusions and breaking step with society at large, an indispensable skill in a world where “nothing happens more frequently than the totally

unexpected” (1998, 300). While those who had cherished the old set of values were left with only “the mere habit of holding fast to something” the people who continued to think critically, to engage in dialogue with themselves and contemplate the consequences of potential action, were able to make their own judgments (45). Their method of moral reasoning was subjective and imprecise but grounded in reality (Arendt 2003, 44). These “doubters and skeptics” remained free from the compulsion of ideology. Within the insulated, bureaucratic reality of the Nazi regime, they found the space necessary to judge in their own minds, a space they created through contemplative thought (45).

2.4 The Problem with Consistent Ideologies

The lure of ideologies, logically consistent systems of ideas, was not limited to ordinary citizens. Dana Villa and George Kateb note a “strange alliance” between thoughtless individuals and professional thinkers. They are both alienated from the world, the thoughtless in their “absorption in everydayness,” the philosopher in “withdrawal,” but the result is the same: “the death of judgment” (Mack 2010, 19) In isolation, thinking is not valuable to society, nor is thoughtless action desirable. In either case, “depriving thought of reality and action of sense, makes both meaningless” (Arendt 1993, 25). Thus the problem with the systems of rules that form the basis of various ideologies and philosophies is that it is all too easy to lose sight of reality while searching for consistency.

Arendt writes that during the seventeenth century it was commonly accepted that the only way one could establish any sort of certainty was to create or do a thing for themselves. Mathematics, with its “self-made entities of the mind,” and the discoveries of the natural sciences that could be tested by performing experiments became the ideal models of attaining knowledge

(Arendt 1998, 290). The often counterintuitive discoveries yielded by these methods did more to prompt “the conviction that objective truth is not given to man” than any amount of skepticism had before (293). “One of the most plausible consequences to be drawn from Cartesian doubt,” writes Arendt, “was to abandon the attempt to understand nature and generally to know about things not produced by man” (298). Ordinary individuals gave up their natural inquisitiveness to defer to experts instead.

The practice of creating an internally consistent world based on a handful of propositions was adopted by philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, who attempted to “invent the means and instruments with which to ‘make an artificial animal...called a Commonwealth or State’” (299). His reasoning was a form of “reckoning with the consequences” created by the “artificial man” and state of nature he had created. The only “truth” he uncovered was the logical conclusion to his initial premises. All that was needed to arrive at a conflicting “truth” was to create a new point from which to start, as John Locke did in his *Second Treatise on Government*. Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarian “pain and pleasure calculus” went a step further to incorporate an explicitly mathematically inspired rationality with a premise grounded exclusively in the introspection of the individual (309). The arguments of these philosophers “founder[ed] on the perplexity that modern rationalism [was] unreal and modern realism [was] irrational -- which is only another way of saying that reality and human reason [had] parted company” (299-300).

Thinking politically requires that one see the world from the imagined perspective of others to better comprehend its full reality. The systematic unfolding of a logical argument can be persuasive but it is not properly political (Villa 1999, 19). Even the most well-reasoned philosophies are ill-equipped to address new events and inevitably fail to account for all relevant

variables when taken alone. The credibility of these systems of thought “resides in their intellectual consistency rather than in their adequacy to actual events,” so they “consider the whole question of truth and truthfulness irrelevant.” (Arendt 1993, 231, 37).

Nevertheless, creeds and ideologies are immensely appealing, as there are few incentives to trade an established system of thought for the unknown. It is easier to “condition human behaviour and to make people conduct themselves in the most unexpected and outrageous manner, than it is to persuade anybody to learn from experience” (1993, 37). When ideologies are simply seen as another perspective from which to view the events of this world they can be useful in formulating one’s independent judgments. It is only when they are treated as if they were an expression of truth that they distort reality (Arendt 2001, 8). All humans have an imperfect knowledge of both the present and future, so it is therefore unavoidable that one should be confronted with irreconcilable yet authentic experiences and principles. These contradictions ought not be ignored, rather they ought to stir the movement of thought that leads to greater understanding (Canovan 1994, 5). Writes Arendt, “the very humanity of man loses its vitality to the extent that he abstains from thinking and puts his confidence into old verities or even new truths, throwing them down as if they were coins with which to balance all experiences” (Arendt 2001, 11). One cannot make sound judgments if they choose to trust an ideology and ignore all facts to the contrary. Such a person trades their unique point of view for a false security and misses the opportunity to gain understanding.

The resistance in society to free thought is demonstrated by the fact that those who do make thoughtful judgments publicly, as Arendt and Socrates did, are regarded as heretics. Ideologies make perfect sense to the believer, who sees little reason to trade their elegant and

consistent theory for an unknown and ambiguous reality. Therefore, the people who challenge the conclusions that have been so thoroughly tested and agreed upon must either be conniving or unintelligent. Indeed, there are few things that appear more arrogant than expressing a dissenting political view where there is a sizeable consensus (Villa 1999, 28). The dissent does not possess perfect knowledge either, only the willingness to see where a past assumption has proved inadequate. Ideologues are thus naturally hostile towards those who resist their dogma, for they undermine their very reality (Arendt 1973, 471). They are more comfortable in their conventions than in reality.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1973) suggests that most adults never move beyond a conventional understanding of morality. He postulates a system of distinct stages in cognitive moral development, beginning with the preconventional stage, where “the physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness” and self-interested reciprocity dictates whether the individual will treat others fairly. From there, one matures to a conventional understanding of morality, where meeting other’s expectations and following rules is understood to be good for its own sake. Finally, when fully mature, a person enters into the postconventional category where they begin to make independent judgments (671). Kohlberg argues that the fact that most adults never progress past the conventional stage of moral cognition is not the root of modern evil. Rather, the perceived “moral decay” of recent years reflects a “weakening of conventional morality in the face of social and value conflict” (674). In other words, people were always conventional in their mores; what has changed is the nature of the moral authorities to which they conform. Part of this may be the decline of political participation that Arendt observed. Kohlberg found that “reasoning and decision making about political decisions are directly derivative of

broader patterns of moral reasoning and decision making,” so that psychologically speaking, “political development is part of moral development” (674).

2.5 Judging by Example

Given the importance of moral autonomy and plural opinions, Arendt’s approach to morality could not possibly spring from another set of rules. Instead, she argued that spontaneous, political judgments could “only proceed by way of examples” (La Caze 2010, 78). These judgments are based on the “representative figures” we hold in our minds. We can say, without recalling a set of rules, that someone is brave or good, because we are familiar with courage and goodness personified in figures like Achilles and Jesus Christ. They both represent “a particular which contains in itself a generality” (Young-Bruehl 1982, 299). We prepare ourselves for making these spontaneous judgments by thinking. By asking questions we establish guideposts for future judgments. Judgment is thus a “side effect” of thought; “Thinking’s gift to judgment is these thought-things, these absent-made-present exemplary figures.” These moral exemplars guide both aesthetic judgments of taste and moral questions, allowing the individual to “illuminate the universal without thereby reducing the particular to universals.” The example acquires “universal meaning” while “retaining its particularity” (301-303; Arendt 1989, 127).

Political judgments are difficult to make. They are rarely intuitive, encompass a large amount of data, and even once decided are a challenge to carry out. It is not enough, when making a political judgment, to consider only one’s own interests if the maximum good is desired. Political problems involve many people and have both long histories and the potential to influence future generations (195). Connecting “principles to particular policies” is challenging both for the expert and the layperson, which is why real life examples are so important (195). Not

only did Arendt use exemplary figures in her own judgments, she provided an example by publicly judging Eichmann. Parvikko argues that *Eichmann in Jerusalem* “ought to be read as a political judgment of a concrete, empirical phenomenon and not as a philosophical treatise of political judgment on a theoretical level” (2003, 201). It is a demonstration of Arendt’s capacity to judge, one that illustrates “the complexity of the circumstances in which political judgment typically takes place” (Thompson 1984, 194).

Arendt attended the Eichmann trial because she felt she had to witness it for herself to better understand “the totality of the moral collapse the Nazis caused” (Arendt 1973, xii). Her attendance at the trial was an example of the “unpremeditated, attentive facing up to” that she maintained was essential to comprehension (xiv). Arendt did not follow a set method of analysis, rather she judged the particular, prepared to accept that the phenomenon she witnessed was new and an entirely new way of seeing the problem was needed. She concluded that the Jerusalem court failed to comprehend fully the unprecedented nature of totalitarian crime, and that the trial revealed how unprepared the legal system was for judging administrative massacres.

Her judgments were more than controversial, they questioned not only the judgement of the court but the larger institutions in which they took place. Arendt noted that the justice system had three primary aims: to improve the criminal, to deter a further crime, and to seek retribution, and that these categories were clearly inadequate when applied to the “war criminals” of Nazi Germany (Arendt 2003, 25). The Nazis were much less likely to be reformed by the justice system than an ordinary criminal and the chance of reoffending was extremely thin. Retribution was likewise out of the question, as the magnitude of the crime was outside of the court’s comprehension (23, 26). Along with these institutional deficiencies, Arendt judged that the trial

in Jerusalem and the resulting decision failed on three counts; it was held in the court of the victors, it failed to determine a definition of “crime against humanity,” and it did not provide “a clear recognition of the new criminal who commits this crime” (274). Arendt’s assessment of the trial was far-reaching. The act of judging in itself demonstrated the courage required to challenge consensus, the clarity lent by distance, and the potential power of the spectator (Thompson 1984, 194).

2.6 Judging by Identity

Arendt’s writing on judgment focused primarily on cultivating the practice of thoughtfully assessing known particulars and acknowledging the inadequacy of rules. When she judged Eichmann she made precisely this sort of judgment. However, there is another dimension to judgment that she discusses in *Responsibility and Judgment* that reflects a natural maturation from the contemplative Socratic questioning of her initial description of judgment. It is the standard of the self fully developed, a sense of identity so thoroughly entrenched in the individual that their judgments are immediate and made with a certainty that is greater than any system of rules could provide.

John Kekes’ (1984) developed a similar idea with his description of the path to moral maturity, which begins with moral conventions and ends with a depth of identity. According to Kekes, Everyone is born into certain moral conventions which they are encouraged to accept as part of their moral education. Some are content with the conventional morality of their youth, while others seek different perspectives. Being exposed to a variety of world views adds a “breadth of understanding” to one’s perception of morality, but it provides little guidance, leading instead to “that facile relativism many social scientists put in the way of moral

understanding” (8). What one needs to reach moral maturity is to cultivate “depth” by reflecting on their personal experiences and “common ground in shared humanity” (8). Depth cannot be taught. It must come as a result of a great “imaginative effort” (9). Once a person has defined their identity through a process of contemplative thought (the “driving force of morality”), what one ought to do is not a question that must be mulled over repeatedly, for the answer is usually clear (9, 12).

We see this lack of depth in Eichmann. It wasn't simply that he was too self-absorbed to see the world from a new perspective, rather he had an “a-personal character.” That is, he lacked a point of view of his own and “registering another viewpoint require[d] one to understand that one also [held] a specific point of view” (8). Eichmann was normal and nothing more, akin to Robert Musil's Ulrich in his 1952 novel *The Man Without Qualities*. The man without qualities assumed different roles, but had no sense of his unique self and therefore no sense of reality (Voegelin 1999, 253; Musil 1995, 31-35). This lack of self, or identity, contributed to Eichmann's readiness to support and cooperate with the Nazis. In her 2003 paper “How Identity and Perspective Constrain Moral Choice” Kristen Monroe interviewed WWII rescuers and survivors and concluded that it was “not reason or religion ... but rather identity and a particular view of the self” that caused the rescuers to act according to their own moral standards rather than the state's corrupt rule of law (2003, 405). The people who saw themselves as responsible individuals were more likely to act morally than those who saw themselves as mere cogs. Whenever they sensed a “significant discrepancy” between their identity and behaviour, they claimed to “experience a cognitive dissonance which they try to minimize, either by modifying their behaviour or shifting their underlying values” (421). Their “feeling of moral salience meant rescuers could not turn

away from Jews without turning away from themselves” (422). As with Arendt’s standard of the self, the stress of living unhappily with themselves was enough to spur change (422).

A person develops their identity in a number of ways. At first it is through a process of discovery. As one grows into adulthood they realize they have certain preferences and proclivities. Genetics, upbringing and other social factors influence the nature of this identity. It is fundamental, but it is not fixed; one can change, refine and improve themselves if they employ “great psychological effort” (Monroe 1994, 220). Once one’s identity is established the process of political judgment is not perceived as a choice, but as reflection of that identity. These identity-based judgments are of a different nature than everyday choices. They are the type of judgments a person makes when they are personally affronted.

None of Monroe’s interviewees, rescuers or bystanders, mention a struggle to decide whether to risk their lives to help or not. Deliberation and willpower were not a part of their narratives. Instead their descriptions of the choices they made were remarkably similar: they felt as if they had only one available course of action. In her 2001 paper “Morality and the Sense of Self: The Importance of Identity and Categorization for Moral Action,” Monroe writes that while the rescuers, when questioned about their actions, responded: “But what else could I do? They were human beings like you and me,” the bystanders would respond: “But what could I do? I was one person alone against the Nazis” (496). Neither group could imagine acting any other way.

The perceived lack of choice meant that all the interviewees felt decisive in their action, even the rescuers who risked their lives, even in hindsight with full knowledge of the potential dangers. One rescuer, Margot, likened her actions to rescuing a drowning person. That is, in her

view there was no time for deliberation, if she had not acted immediately the Jews would have died (2003, 414). Her perception differs from reality in one key way: Margot's actions were not purely in the moment. Hers was a prolonged effort to rescue the Jews; it involved years of putting her own life at risk. She would have had ample time think things through had she felt the need to do so. Yet when asked if she worried her heroic actions might put her family at risk, she responded "No. No way" (414). She did not see her actions as remarkable, but as a necessity. When asked if she would do it all again, knowing all the personal risks the rescues entailed (her daughter was estranged and her fiancé had been beaten to death), she responded "Yes, at once" (415). Margot had no explanation as to why others did not act the way she had. For her, being a hero was being herself. She didn't weigh her options, or count her buttons "yes, no, and all that crap," or even feel the need for willpower to carry on. Day after day, she acted the only way she could (415).

Otto, a German rescuer living in Czechoslovakia who saved 100 Jews and married a Jewish woman explained: "I came to the conclusion that two people cannot survive simultaneously: Adolf Hitler and my wife. So I had to go all the way...I simply got mad." In his words, he "never made a moral decision to rescue Jews," rather he felt he "had to do it." Further, he insisted that his actions were not altruistic because they were inspired by his love for his wife. He was not motivated by a selfless desire to help others, rather his actions were "rooted in outrage" over a regime that threatened the life of the person he loved. He admitted having a "rather high opinion" of himself, and the interests of his wife were so tightly bound to his own that he made no distinction between them (416 - 417). He felt a similarly close bond with the others he rescued. He and the other rescuers shared a "perception of self at one with all

mankind” (Monroe 1991, 427). The crimes against the Jews were crimes against humanity, so the rescuers felt their actions to save them ought to have been expected.

The rescuers’ sense of identity was reinforced by their desire to appear a certain way to others. “The self is not merely a mental construct located just inside one’s head,” writes Monroe, “identity also contains the notion of the self as a social being” (2003, 418). Otto notes that his efforts to save the Jews were “part of showing off,” and that in the past he had done other heroic deeds to impress girls (409). His sense of identity was established both in public and in private. Arendt writes that for the people who lacked a moral identity, the dissolution of the societal moral authorities and the rise of totalitarianism meant that they could not even imagine acting morally. The Nazis “renounced voluntarily all personal qualities” (2003, 111). They accepted the erroneous idea that under the circumstances of totalitarian rule, no one could be held personally responsible for their actions. Their moral motivation was attached entirely to social expectations, while the motivation of the rescuers was anchored within them.

For example, Beatrix, a bystander who had a cousin who acted as a rescuer, seemed clueless about how she could have helped anyone. Beatrix and her husband had built a secret room in their home so that her husband could hide if he were drafted, though they had never had to use it. When Monroe asked if they had ever used the room to hide “anyone else,” Beatrix could not guess to whom she was referring. Even though she knew of, and was related to, a person who rescued Jews, she could not see that similar actions were in the realm of possibilities for herself (496). Beatrix’s explanation of her failure to help is not unlike Eichmann’s. While she saw herself as merely one person, Eichmann saw himself as a cog. They describe themselves as a small part of society, rather than morally autonomous individuals. When Eichmann asked “who

am I to judge?” he may not have been questioning his right or authority so much as expressing a confusion over who he was apart from his place in society (Arendt 2006b,114). Eichmann and Beatrix did not feel the same sense of outrage that Otto felt because their sense of self was too weak to be affronted.

Though the rescuers claimed not to have deliberated over the right course of action in the moment, they were thoughtful people who identified with some type of moral system. Many were religious or professed to be Kantians; but unlike Eichmann, who turned Kant’s categorical imperative from a thought exercise into a formula to be applied by replacing the standard of practical reason with the “will of the Führer,” the rescuers deferred to their sense of self to determine how they would behave (137). In difficult situations, rules did not matter. For example, John, the most religious rescuer, lied to save the Jews. He was clear that he had been taught to tell the truth, that he believed lying was wrong, yet he had lied and ultimately decided he had done the right thing. He described saving the Jews as a “higher value” than telling the truth (412). Margot had a similar experience, and used similar language to describe her feelings towards rejecting the rules she once accepted. Irene, too, rejected her old system of moral rules by choosing to sleep with a German to “buy his silence.” When a priest at her church instructed her to end the affair and turn in the Jews, she (in her words) “walked out of that church and never went back!” (412 - 413). From Irene’s perspective, when the priest advised her to act contrary to her own moral sense it revealed the church’s moral confusion rather than her own.

While they all found themselves in difficult situations, none of the rescuers fell back on the cliché of choosing the “lesser evil” to describe their experiences, though Arendt noted that the concept of choosing the lesser evil was prevalent and “played a prominent role” in the Nazis

“moral justification” of their actions after the war. While those who supported the Nazis believed that they had chosen the lesser evil, based on the assumption that they would have somehow caused more trouble if they had not remained complicit in the crimes of the state and that those who retreated into private life had “chosen the easy and irresponsible way out” by shirking their duties, the rescuers were confident in their personal sense of morality and did not see their actions as a compromise because in their minds breaking moral rules to save human lives was the only acceptable choice (2003, 35). Not only did the rescuers not rely on external codes of conduct to dictate to them what their actions should be, when they found themselves in a situation where they acted contrary to long-established rules, they did so with confidence. Their sense of self made it possible to judge new phenomenon where no precedent had been established and superseded moral conventions to clearly define what was good.

The experience of the rescuers aligns closely with Arendt’s description of the “intensely personal” and “subjective” criteria used to determine what is good and what is evil. Arendt cites Cicero and Meister Eckhart as examples of judgments based on the standard of the self. When weighing the conflicting philosophical arguments of the Pythagoreans and Plato, Cicero dismisses the Pythagoreans by saying, “By God I’d much rather go astray with Plato than hold true views with these people” (2003, 110). Eckhart’s example comes from an anecdote, where he meets a beggar who is supposedly the happiest person in the world. When Eckhart asks the beggar if he would remain happy if he were to find himself in hell, the beggar, who loves God and believes that God resides within him, responds “I’d much rather be in hell with God than in heaven without Him” (111). Objective standards, whether in regards to which philosophy to accept or simply whether to tell a lie or not, “yield precedence to the ‘subjective’ criterion of the

kind of person [one wants] to be and live together with” (11). When Cicero weighed the arguments of Plato and the Pythagoreans, he began in the first category of judgment, thinking over all the particulars, then deferred to his sense of identity to say he would rather live with Plato. He knew immediately who he would rather spend his life with. Because of his identity, choosing Plato was effortless. This was true for Eckhart and Cicero, and it was true for Irene, Otto, and John.

The inner conversation that is contemplative thought, the use of examples when judging something new, and the development of a sense of identity that dictates what is and what is not acceptable behaviour for each individual are all important aspects to making moral judgments and preventing thoughtless evil. Eichmann’s destructive thoughtlessness provides an example of the evil that can occur when individuals without a strong sense of identity replace their own thoughts on what is right and wrong with the procedures provided by society. Monroe’s rescuers, in contrast, demonstrate that even in the most extreme conditions autonomous individuals can make confident moral decisions that withstand the test of time. Paired with Arendt’s analysis, it is clear that it is possible for ordinary people to resist the logic of ideologies, the comfort of convention, and the pressure from one’s contemporaries and superiors, so long as they think independently. The power to resist these potentially destructive influences cannot come from a particular set of rules, rather, it can only come from the private thought life of individuals.

Chapter Three: Group Dynamics and Ethical Safeguards

Whether in Nazi Germany or the democratic west, systems of organization and models of authority have been demonstrated to profoundly affect how people behave within them. Arendt wrote that people “constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, their human origin

and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things” (1998, 9). The way individuals are organized can change the way they view themselves and the world, and can present incentives to act ethically or unethically. Bureaucracy is “the dominant organizational form of our epoch,” yet little has been done to ensure that these organizing institutions are arranged in such a way as to promote ethical behaviour (Jackall 1984, 176). Instead, the focus of reforms centre on questions of efficiency and loyalty to the organization itself. We treat bureaucratic organizations as amoral, as Woodrow Wilson did when he wrote that it is both equally advisable and possible to adopt the sound administrative practices of an otherwise evil regime as it is to copy the knife-sharpening technique of a “murderous fellow” without “borrowing his probable intention to commit murder with it” (Adams and Balfour 2009, 56). Yet, considering Arendt’s theory of thoughtless evil, it is evident that bureaucracies are not amoral, rather they both reflect the values of the individuals they employ and shape the way those individuals see the world by the process they use. Put simply, if the institutions we design emphasize loyalty to the group above loyalty to the self, fail to provide avenues for internal dissent, and have little public accountability, then we have left no space for moral behaviour, much less encouraged it.

3.1 Creating the Conditions for Judgment

In *Administrative Ethics in the Twenty-first Century* (2008) Michael J. Martinez and William D. Richardson write that “the starting point for improving ethics is to cast the public administrator as a moral agent” (75). Indeed, individuals are ultimately responsible for the things they do and the organizations they comprise are not entirely separate from themselves. Arendt’s understanding of the morality of groups is modelled after the ancient Greek polis, where the

virtues of the individuals that composed the group determined the virtue of the group as a whole. This is in sharp contrast to the modern understanding of institutional ethics, where groups and organizations are considered to be entities onto themselves, and it is thus “axiomatic... that a problem might arise between a public administrator’s private ethical values and the organization or public agency that employs the individual” (255). For Arendt, the ethics of individuals and organizations were inseparable, and therefore the solution to the problem of totalitarianism was not to merely change the institutions themselves, but to employ individuals to think. Arendt’s ideas on the role of thinking in moral action provide a perspective from which to evaluate group dynamics and administrative ethics (253). Institutions ought to be structured in a way that encourages thoughtful people who possess identities of their own to act on principle.

In *The Attack of the Blob: Hannah Arendt’s Concept of the Social* (1998) Hanna Fenichel Pitkin argued that Arendt misrepresented the social world of bureaucracies, along with the mass movements and bureaucratic governments that rule the social realm, by describing the social as a force outside of individuals, as if it were not simply a group of individuals but a person-eating alien Blob reminiscent of science fiction. She argued that this “paradox of modernity,” where, “more and more, as our power grows, the results of our own activities confronts us like an alien and hostile force, beyond our influence” contradicted Arendt’s emphasis on the individuals’ freedom to act and think for themselves (Pitkin 1998, 8). “Freedom has no preconditions” writes Pitkin, arguing that spontaneous action is always a possibility and therefore that Arendt’s critique of the social was misplaced. However, for Arendt, freedom did have preconditions; namely a measure of leisure, security, and the opportunity to interact with one’s equals (Bradshaw 1999, 533). Writes Arendt, “without a politically guaranteed public realm, freedom lacks the worldly

space to make its appearance” (Arendt 1993, 147). While evil or virtue can only ever truly be found in individuals, the way they are organized matters.

3.2 How Organizations Influence the way Individuals View the World

One of the unique aspects of Arendt’s writing on thoughtlessness and bureaucracy is its cross-disciplinary appeal. Many of the things Arendt uncovered in her efforts to understand totalitarianism and thoughtless evil are bolstered in sociological, political, and psychological literature. In his 2005 article “Seven Possible Social-Psychological Wisdoms” C. Daniel Batson compiled a list of ideas that he proposed constituted the enduring truths of social psychology. The now familiar “power of the situation,” that is, that groups influence the way people behave, and the fact that good people often do evil things were featured prominently, as was Arendt’s theory of banal evil, though he took it a step further. Writes Batson, “Atrocious acts are possible not so much because they are seen as commonplace and ordinary as because they are seen as positively good” (155).

The work of C. Fred Alford (1990), Stanley Milgram (1974) and Philip G. Zimbardo (2004) reflects the fundamentals identified by Batson, and provide further social psychological analysis that illustrates how groups influence individuals to see the world in a certain way. Their studies provide additional examples of how it does not take exceptional people to commit exceptional evil and that bureaucracy can have the same reality-distorting affect as ideology. Arendt’s ability to transcend disciplinary lines to uncover truths not often acknowledged in her area of study is derived from her ability to make spontaneous judgments. While the rest of the world struggled to equate totalitarianism with tyranny and Eichmann with Lucifer, Arendt saw what was politically new and uncovered truths that academia was only beginning to discover.

Alford argues that social behaviour and mass movements are best understood not as external forces that manipulate otherwise innocent people, but rather as the culmination of various social and institutional trends that unleash the potential for good or evil within each individual. “It is the *interaction* between the evil within institutions, ideologies, and historical opportunity that explains evil in the world” (1990, 7). His interactionist perspective compliments Arendt’s theory of bureaucratic compliance by probing the source of evil rather than focusing on the incentives for thoughtless obedience. In contrast to Arendt, Alford argues that there is an Eichmann within each one of us, in the sense that social trends tap into the aggressive potential for evil within each individual.

Alford grounds his theory of inner aggression in the psychological ideas of Melanie Klein. Klein argues that the experience of good and bad in infancy leads one to project their own aggression onto arbitrary outside objects. As the infant projects its primitive love and fear of death it initially views the objects of these projections as absolute. It idealizes the good of the object it loves and is anxious over the threat of the object it hates (10). This “splitting-and-idealization” is the first developmental step to determining right and wrong. Klein argues that this eventually leads to the recognition that both love and fear are present, and therefore connected, within the individual (11). In terms of group psychology, splitting-and-idealization manifests as the urge to create an alternate reality where good and evil are clearly defined and the individual is on side with the good.

Ideologies tend not to move past the splitting-and-idealization phase of thinking, hence the “us against them” mentality they typically encourage. We “need, and therefore create, via projection, enemies and allies” to mitigate our uncertainty and anxiety over what is good (11)

(Brock and Atkinson 2008, 169). Ideologies create a narrative that clearly identifies who is right and who is wrong so that their adherents can better justify their aggressive feelings towards the other. Their affirmation of the splitting process reduces the individual's anxiety by giving it legitimacy and direction (Alford 1990, 13). It is as if a therapist, in an effort to mitigate the anxiety experienced by a paranoid-schizoid, chose to affirm the patient's delusions and play along instead of "enhancing his ability to integrate love and hate, and so tolerate ambivalence" (13). Ideologies do not create hatred, rather they encourage "the further separation of love and hate" so that one's aggression towards the enemy is freed of inhibitions (13-14).

The most radical ideologies not only create two artificially antagonistic groups, they provide some sort of reversal. The Nazis used the totalitarian state to reverse the concepts of killing and healing (16). Similarly, though harmlessly, the Christians reversed the social order ("the last shall be first"). Perhaps most interesting of Alford's examples comes from Thucydides. After the "bloody revolution at Corcyra," Thucydides wrote that what was once considered to be a "thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member" (13). These examples illustrate the "fundamental reversal," which takes place when the perception of hatred and aggression, rather than the objects of their scorn, change to become "good" in themselves (14).

Bureaucracy provides a similar method to create a new reality. "Whereas ideologies encourage individuals to project their badness onto others, bureaucracies encourage individuals to split it up and distribute it to other bureaucrats, who perpetuate it" (19). Where the ideologues vilify "the other," bureaucrats see their colleagues, whether it be their boss who gives them orders or their subordinate who carries out their orders, as the bearers of badness. Bureaucracy

can thus be used as a “psychological defence” against an undesirable reality (18). It can act not only as an organizing institution issuing evil orders and demanding compliance, but also provide a way to think and act “that separate the individual from his own rage” (19).

Writes Alford, “In a vengeful, aggressive regime or institution, bureaucrats may do more than fearfully and reluctantly carry out orders. They may find relief from their own unintegrated aggression in doing so. Otherwise expressed, they may do more than transmit evil; they may multiply it” (18). The practical organizational aspect of bureaucracy is in no way at odds with this psychological function, rather the emphasis on procedure “discourages questions about the larger purposes one is serving” allowing bureaucrats tacitly to accept the reversal as part of their own defence against their anger (18). It directs their existing aggression, which may be no more intense than that of the average person, towards a scapegoat (20).

According to Alford, Arendt correctly diagnosed Eichmann’s banal behaviour, but she missed the likelihood that he was well-suited to bureaucracy not because of an inner banality but because of the aggression his career helped direct. At his trial it became clear that Eichmann did not perform his duties reluctantly. Rather, he loved his job and was expressly proud of his obedience, while he simultaneously embraced the idea that his death sentence would serve as a warning to future anti-Semites (23). His hatred and guilt existed simultaneously, but “never seemed to touch, a psychic phenomenon reinforced by life in a large bureaucracy” (23). At the end of his life, it was as if he were split entirely in two: one part of Eichmann proudly followed murderous orders, in his words, “I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews...on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction”; while the other part was “elated” at the death “of the self who would serve as an example to anti-

Semites” (Arendt 2006b, 46; Alford 1990, 23). In another context Eichmann may have been merely eccentric, his aggression mitigated. It only became problematic when the nature of his bureaucratic work gave his aggression a target.

Both the desire to label one’s enemy as evil and “define hatred and aggression as good, as long as it is directed to the enemy” are ordinary human inclinations. Fear and rage are powerful motivators and the “us against them” dynamic is exploited by governments across the ideological spectrum (24). This is not to say that evil exists only through our projections; no amount of projected good could make the Nazis less evil. Rather, we are inclined to believe our enemies are evil and our allies good, whether they are or not. Furthermore, there is a strong psychological incentive to reverse one’s conception of good and evil when one finds themselves on the wrong side.

3.3 Experiments in Authority

There have been a number of experiments conducted to assess the group dynamics that encourage cruel and authoritarian behaviour that have drawn attention to Arendt’s theory of banal evil. Yale University Psychologist Stanley Milgram’s 1963 experiment tested a sample of individuals to determine how willing they were to obey authority. The experiment consisted of an experimenter, a teacher (the subject of the experiment and the only non-confederate), and a learner. The teacher read a list of questions and was told to administer an electric shock to the learner whenever they answered a question incorrectly. As the shocks increased the learner would scream in pain, giving the teacher the impression that he was imposing harm. When the most powerful shocks were administered, the learner would bang on the wall and demand to be freed, until he at last ceased to respond altogether. The shocks increased in intensity until they reached

a potentially lethal 450-volts. Milgram reports that sixty-five per cent of participants carried the experiment through until the very end. Though the study began with the hypothesis that totalitarianism was bolstered by the German propensity towards authoritarianism, what it revealed was that the Germans were no more authoritarian than Americans, rather “situational factors,” in this case the professional sterility of the lab, “influence most people to obey authority” (Monroe 2001b, 161).

Milgram’s analysis of his experiment was inspired by Arendt’s report on the Eichmann trial, and thus explicitly confirmed a number of the behavioural tendencies that Arendt observed. The test subjects were “immersed in the procedures” of their work, willingly leaving the “broader task of setting goals and assessing morality” to the experimenters (Milgram 1974, 605). They believed that the responsibility for what they were doing rested upon the experimenters who gave them their orders, so that even those who felt the shocks were wrong obediently carried out the orders they were given. When the subjects did not directly administer the shocks, but rather read the questions while another person administered the shocks, the test subjects were even more willing to comply. “37 of 40 adults... continued to the highest shock level on the generator” (606). They rationalized their participation by assigning responsibility to the person who pressed the button. In other words, when put in the place of the administration, the test subjects denied responsibility on the grounds that they did not push the button, but when they were required to push the button, they denied responsibility on the grounds that they were following orders (606). Because of the way the task was divided, the participants never felt the full weight of what they were asked to do.

The results of this test led Milgram to conclude that when WWII ended and, as Arendt observed, many Nazis claimed to be helpless cogs, it was not a “thin alibi concocted for the occasion,” but a “fundamental mode of thinking for a great many people once locked into a subordinate position in a structure of authority” (605). A similar attitude emerged in Milgram’s test subjects, even in the absence of the “intense devaluation of the victim” that was so central to Hitler’s ideology (606). The professional clinical setting and the systematic approach used by the experimenters encouraged the test subjects to attribute “an impersonal quality” to the orders they received. They were told that “the experiment *require[d]*” that they issue the shocks, a mission they took very seriously. Though the experiment was a human creation, from the perspective of the test subject it assumed greater authority than any one individual. Evil orders issued by a faceless system or institution, within a professional setting, appear as if no human is responsible (606).

Philip Zimbardo’s 1971 Stanford prison experiment cast 24 male students in the roles of prisoners and prison guards to investigate the sources of conflict between the two groups (1973, 72). Using the basement of the Stanford psychology building to simulate the prison and recording approximately 12 hours of video and 30 hours of audio, Zimbardo, acting as the “prison warden” watched as the participants adapted to their assigned roles (73-77). Zimbardo hypothesized that the personality of the individuals involved would determine the nature of the relationship between guard and prisoner. The volunteers had completed three personality tests prior to the experiment: the scale of Authoritarian Personality, the Machiavellian Scale, and the Comrey Personality Scale, which measured a number of secondary virtues including trustworthiness, orderliness, and conformity. All participants were found to be “perfectly normal”

and “emotionally stable” (78, 81). Once the experiment began, however, the participants quickly “ceased distinguishing between prison role and their prior self-identities” to fully internalize the authoritarian aspects of their position (89).

The relationship between the prisoners and guards turned out to be much more antagonistic than anticipated and the study was stopped a mere six days into its intended two-week duration. Though the participants were selected carefully to avoid any criminal predisposition, one-third of the guards acted sadistically, taunting and harassing them throughout the experiment and waking prisoners throughout the night to be counted so that they could not get sufficient rest (Zimbardo 2000, 7). The guards were disappointed when the study was cut short, while the prisoners were delighted to see the study come to an early end, five of which had already been sent home “because of extreme emotional depression, crying, rage and acute anxiety” (1973, 81). Zimbardo concluded that the behaviour of all involved was situational, noting that “simply as a consequence of assigning college students the role of guard or prisoner, the former became increasingly brutal while the latter became passive and began to show signs of psychological disturbance” (Reicher and Haslam 2006, 3). Some guards were indeed kinder than others, but there had been no evidence gleaned from the prior tests to suggest which would be most cruel. Overall, the differences in personality “accounted for an extremely small part of the variation in reactions,” while the difference in assigned roles promoted clear behavioural patterns (Zimbardo 1973, 81).

Recently, Zimbardo inspired a similar experiment, the 2002 BBC Prison Study. The BBC sought to replicate Zimbardo’s experiment and televise the results, a process they described as “original science filmed” (6). Producers Steve Reicher and Alex Haslam selected 15 men to act

as prisoners and guards over an eight-day period. They questioned Zimbardo's negative findings of the effect of group membership and his conclusions regarding group antisocial behaviour (4). They hypothesized that "people do not automatically act in terms of group memberships (or roles) ascribed by others. Rather, whether they do so depends upon whether they internalize such memberships as part of the self-concept" (5). They found that the prisoners developed a group identity more quickly than the guards, leading to a "collapse of the prisoner-guard system" after three days and the establishment of a "single self-governing 'commune.'" However, by the end of the study the commune had dissolved and the group, despondent after a lacklustre breakfast, agreed to a tyrannical hierarchy (13, 19, 22).

Haslam and Reicher conclude with the observation that depending on the identity of the individuals, their group behaviour "may be either anti- *or* prosocial" (33). It is not merely the existence of an authoritarian dynamic that causes tyranny, but rather the failing of groups of individuals to organize and the resulting feeling of powerlessness (33). As long as there is a sense of solidarity within the group the behaviour of individuals is prosocial. "It is when people cannot create a social system for themselves that they will more readily accept extreme solutions proposed by others" (33). Though Haslam and Reicher's findings are less dramatic, their observations regarding solidarity are closer to Arendt's political theory than Zimbardo and Milgram's less nuanced emphasis on the power of the situation. What Haslam and Reicher discovered within their prison study appears quite similar to Arendt's emphasis on the importance of public life for political action.

There are a number of limitations to Zimbardo and Milgram's experiments of which to be wary. For example, Zimbardo may have inadvertently selected more aggressive individuals by

the way he collected his pool of volunteers. In 2007 Carnaghan and McFarland performed an experiment where they ran two newspaper ads simultaneously. One was a general call for participants in a psychological experiment, the other, borrowing Zimbardo's wording from the Stanford Prison Experiment, requested participants for "a psychological study of prison life." They found that the individuals who responded to the advertisement worded by Zimbardo "were much more likely to believe in the harsh and hierarchical world that exists in prison" than those who responded to the general call (Haslam and Reicher 2007, 18). Zimbardo's sample expected despotic conditions which may have influenced the way they acted.

Similarly, Milgram's analysis of his experiment augmented the power of the situation by evoking a caricature-like vision of Eichmann to suggest a detachment that simply was not observed in either the experiment participants or Eichmann himself. In Arendt's view, totalitarianism facilitated thoughtlessness. It did not brainwash individuals to the point where their personal characteristics were altogether lost. The participants in Milgram's study were hardly expressionless "organization men" of the William Whyte variety, nor did they exhibit Eichmann's unmitigated aggression. Rather, they were clearly distressed at having to carry out their orders, remaining traumatized long after the experiment ended (Miller 2005, 232). One participant, having not been sufficiently debriefed, went home and combed through obituaries to see if he had killed the learner (Brannigan 2012, 6). Contrary to what Milgram suggested, there were a variety of reactions to the experiment that revealed differences in personality and the agency of individuals.

Despite their shortcomings, the popularity of these studies both in university classrooms and research facilities (Milgram's in particular has been the inspiration for dozens of other

studies, including, once, with robots) suggests that banal evil, which in 1963 Arendt “felt shocking because it contradicts our theories concerning evil” has become one of the primary ways to think and talk about evil (Spiegel 2013; Arendt 2003, 18). It is difficult to say whether these experiments have been of greater benefit or detriment to overall understanding of Arendt. On one hand, they undoubtedly increased the validity of her argument on certain counts. Write Haslam and Reicher, “when it came to their impact on popular consciousness, neither Milgram’s nor Arendt’s account had precedence. It was their combination that proved crucial” (2007, 616). On the other, they fail to capture the complexity of Arendt’s depiction of Eichmann, overemphasizing situational factors to discount Eichmann’s personality altogether. History makes it clear that resistance is possible, while Arendt argues that it is something to be demanded of every human being (1981, 13). Admirers of these experiments in social psychology ought not lose sight of that fact.

While the experiments examined above revealed authoritarian elements, groups can sway people to do the right thing as well. Being in the company of others can also cultivate a “common sense” of what is real. Arendt’s commitment to politics was based in part on the importance of appearing in public to have one’s existence affirmed by others. It is only when one begins to speak and act that “who” they are, not merely “what” they consist of, becomes knowable to other men (179). Arendt describes this “who” as “like the *daimon* in Greek religion,” more readily revealed to others than to the individual himself and thus only fully realized in the company of others (179, 180). This “disclosure of the agent” is what makes action essential for political interaction. To act, humanity’s primary political faculty, people must be able to organize and break the “general laws of behavior,” (Arendt 1998, 8). As Ronald Beiner (1989) writes, “politics

is something inherent to the wonderfully human intersubjectivities of language, debate, deliberation and judgment” (xii). A solitary existence would be far from Arendt’s ideal.

Elsebet Jegstrup (1986) argues that the Danish resistance during the Second World War is an example of the political action Arendt admired. It also makes a striking example of positive group influence. The root of resistance in Denmark is difficult to pinpoint, though it was partially due to the fact that the Danes’ patriotism meant that “‘Danishness’ took precedence over their religious and racial heritage.” The Jews were well integrated into society, and the anti-Semitism of the Nazis was assumed to be a “personal obsession” of Hitler. The Danes “generally failed to understand the principles of anti-Semitism” (263). At the beginning of the war when the Germans invaded Denmark, the Danes reacted peacefully, living together as best they could (261). As long as the Germans did not threaten the Danes physically, they did not fight back. It was only when the Germans began their aggressive campaign against the Danish Jews that the general population resisted (262). The Nazis treatment of the Jews, “became a symbolic barometer for the Danes. The German authorities soon noticed that “as long as the Jews were not bothered, the Danes would remain calm” (264).

On May 23, 1943 the Danish election became an expression of solidarity and independence from the Nazi regime. The five coalition parties put forth a declaration which stated that the election did “not concern the usual party divergencies,” rather it was to “confirm the will of the people to defend that freedom which is our thousand-year legacy, and that popular rule Danish men and women refuse to give up” (265). The voters came in droves to demonstrate their loyalty to Denmark and opposition to Nazi Germany. Two months later on August 29, the Germans surrounded the palace and took the King prisoner. The Nazis planned to target Danish

Jews on October 1st and 2nd during the Jewish New Year when families would be together, but “a sympathetic German official managed to relate a warning to a Danish politician who in turn advised the Jewish leadership” (265). Most Jews were informed to avoid their homes and were thus saved. In total, two hundred and eighty-four Jews were captured. Shortly after the raid “7220 Jews and 686 non-Jewish relatives” escaped to safety in Sweden (266).

In *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Arendt writes that the resistance of the people permeated every level of society so that the Nazis could no longer trust “the Danes nor the Jews nor the German troops stationed in Denmark” to follow their commands. “Not only did General von Hannecken, the military commander, refuse to put troops at the disposal of the Reich plenipotentiary,” but the S.S. units “frequently” refused to follow the orders they were issued (173). Stationed in Denmark, the Nazi Generals recovered the perspective necessary to make political judgments. The Danish King also refused to cooperate with the Nazis. Though there is little evidence to confirm Arendt’s anecdote where the King, when asked that the Danish Jews distinguish themselves with a yellow star, replied that he would be the first to wear it, there is evidence that he bolstered the resistance effort by continuing his public duties and refusing to relinquish symbolic control to the Nazis (Arendt 2006b, 171; Jegstrup 1985, 270). His actions and authority helped fortify the rest of Denmark and influence all within their borders, even the German officials.

3.4 Controlling Bureaucracy

Groups of people are undeniably powerful. The question is how we can best organize ourselves to promote thoughtful, ethical behaviour. There are three ideas that will be explored below, two of which Arendt touched upon; the benefits of hierarchy and the importance of

identifying with humankind, and one more recent phenomenon, that of providing the channels within organizations to facilitate external and internal whistleblowing. Ultimately, individuals are morally responsible for their actions. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, the autonomy of the individual is essential to preserving a sense of what is right when institutions go astray.

3.4.1 Efficiency

Thirty-five years after Arendt published the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Guy B. Adams and Danny L. Balfour tackled the problem of evil in public bureaucracies in their book *Administrative Evil*. Between the first and second publications (1998 and 2009), they saw a further disintegration of bureaucratic morality in North America. “Administrative evil has reappeared with a vengeance,” write Adams and Balfour, to form “a clear and present danger in twenty-first-century America, as well as the rest of the world” (xxxii, xxxiv). They argued that the technical, procedural rationality so common in large bureaucratic organizations not only “diffused individual responsibility,” it *required* that civil servants compartmentalize their lives to perform satisfactorily (4). Because of the size and insular structure of contemporary bureaucracy, civil servants could feel that they acted ethically provided they met the requirements of a particular institution’s code of conduct. They lost sight of all independent standards of morality which could have provided the needed perspective to judge their own institutions. Instead, their consciences were sated by the shallow mores of normality.

The observations that Adams and Balfour made regarding the ethical challenges of contemporary bureaucracies were similar to those made by Arendt. They were concerned with the dominance of amoral technical rationality, which they believed made moral inversions like those in totalitarian regimes “more likely” (5). They believed that when governing is based on

implementing scientific models, there is a tendency to interpret past policy failure as a result of uncontrolled variables rather than an inadequacy of the methods themselves. As far as the bureaucrat is concerned, “if events did not turn out as planned, the problem is not with the policy, but a result of uncontrolled deviations from it” (112). The answer to these problems is always more planning, more statistical analysis, and a more focused approach, rather than a closer reading of reality.

Furthermore, while the scientific approach can be useful, when applied to political organization it contributes to thoughtless behavior within the bureaucracy (112). Mathematical language draws a clear line between the experts and the regular people charged with carrying out the chosen procedures, thus impeding communication and exacerbating the reluctance of ordinary people to judge administrative rationale. Even among experts, the mathematical language is sufficiently complex, and the terminology sufficiently nuanced, to hinder communication between groups. The various schools of political, economic and social science have developed their own language and methods to approaching the same topic, stymying communication and skewing the perspective within each discipline (30).

Finally, the questions quantitative methods are used to answer often have some moral weight to them, an aspect that cannot be adequately addressed without considering the unquantifiable. As long as governments control the police force and the military, moral questions will be of critical importance to good government. The “right” answer should never be wholly determined by its efficiency, nor should people be regarded as mere variables. There is a dehumanizing aspect to statistics where people are transcribed into numbers and exceptions into outliers.

3.4.2 Hierarchy

Bureaucracy functions best as an “organized hierarchy of skills and authorities, within which each office and rank is restricted to its specialized tasks” (Mills 2000, 236). Hierarchies improve both efficiency and the moral accountability of large bureaucracies. They ensure a clear delineation of who is responsible for what, delegating tasks so that each worker has an understanding of what is required of him or her, and who they are to report to. They help facilitate communication between otherwise isolated departments, allowing for a greater specialization of labour and therefore an increased work output (Martinez and Richardson 2008, 61). In public administrations, hierarchies provide a degree of democratic control over bureaucracies, as long as the elected official charged with overseeing a particular portfolio rises to the challenge.

Additionally, hierarchies may provide a greater incentive for reporting wrongdoing. There is evidence that “team structures can be more powerful and more difficult to resist than traditional hierarchical or bureaucratic controls” (Miller and Thomas, 2005, 317). In their 2005 study, Diane L. Miller and Stuart Thomas presented one hundred and fifty-one undergraduate management students with three workplace vignettes and a series of questions created to gauge how likely the students would be to report unethical behaviour if they were to find themselves in similar scenarios (319). They found that the students were least likely to report unethical behaviour from team members, though nearly equally as loathe to report their superiors when they had cultivated a close relationship with them (323). The fact that the students were more likely to report their superior than their team members suggests that the increasingly popular

“progressive human resource practices” that stress lateral control, teamwork and empowerment may decrease the chance that employees will report wrongdoing (315).

Group norms produce the “strong social controls” that effectively discourage whistleblowing. When the majority of the members in any given group agree unethical behaviour is permissible it becomes very difficult to dissent (323). Solomon E. Asch (1956) conducted an experiment where a small group of male college students, seven to nine individuals where all but one was a confederate, were asked to state the relative lengths of 18 illustrated lines aloud (3). The confederates were instructed, unanimously, but incorrectly, to assess the length of certain lines to introduce “a sharp disagreement between one person and an entire group when the task was that of judging a clear perceptual relation” (3). Their intentionally incorrect judgments erred by three-quarters to one and three-quarters of inch (8). Though the group clearly contradicted what the one uninformed individual saw with his own eyes, the individual was inclined to agree with the group over the data provided by his senses. “Whereas the judgments were virtually free of error under control conditions, one-third of the minority estimates were distorted toward the majority” (69). Groups influence the dissenter’s decision-making and “offer a degree of diffusion of responsibility.” They encourage groupthink and form stronger cohesive bonds between individuals than one-on-one relationships because of a draw to “increase conformity to group norms” (Miller and Thomas, 317, 318).

3.4.3 Whistleblowing

Though theoretically one of the most straightforward ways to add accountability within organizations, the right of employees to report wrongdoing without fear of reprisal is difficult to protect. Guy B. Adams and Danny L. Balfour note a number of challenges unique to large

organizations that most bureaucracies face when attempting to promote ethical behavior. For example, when a task is divided between a large number of people, it is possible that no one person fully comprehends the broader purpose of what they are doing. Further, in some cases “not knowing may be replaced by ‘strategic ignorance,’ in which the organizational actors may decide that is the safer approach” (2009, 85). Few people wish to take responsibility and present a negative report to their superiors. It is much easier to turn a blind eye to the problem than to be the one who calls out another’s mistakes. Therefore, even if a public servant suspects wrongdoing it may not be in their best interest to look beyond what they have been assigned and risk uncovering something damaging about the organization that employs them.

Another incentive to ignore problems within one’s own organization comes from what economists call “sunk costs.” Writes Adams and Balfour, when questionable behavior begins “each step along the way in which such activity is not halted becomes an additional commitment to that trajectory” (85). Reporting a problem that has already taken root in an organization inevitably leads to a certain amount of “undoing,” an apparent step backwards for the “progress” of the project in question. Whereas “allowing normal processes (the status quo) to continue requires no action at all - momentum alone becomes a very powerful social force” (85). Further, when the wrongdoing comes to light, the guilt and shame experienced by the bureaucrats who oversaw the project from its early stages and could have done something to stop it, forms “a powerful psychological incentive to deny the harm or evil” (86). There are few barriers to prevent an administrator, dedicated to the rules of the organization, who “internalizes agency values and obedience to legitimate authority, from “abdicating any personal, much less social, responsibility for the content or effects of decisions or actions” (168).

Finally, regardless of what policy institutions have created to protect whistleblowers and other conscientious individuals, “If legitimate authority leads in the direction of administrative evil, it will certainly not provide legitimate outlets for resistance” (169). Those who are able to resist the pull of administrative evil have little choice but to leave the bureaucracy entirely. It is simply impossible to retain one’s moral integrity while acting as a civil servant in an evil regime.

There are therefore many disincentives against whistleblowing within the bureaucracy that cannot be altogether avoided. However, there are also a number of things that can be done to encourage whistleblowing. Managers can communicate to their employees that they value ethical practices. They can support “moral identity and moral agency,” establish investigative procedures to rule out spurious complaints, ensure that concerned employees do not face retaliation, reward whistleblowers that identify indiscretions, and provide channels for whistleblowing such as confidential hotlines (383, 388). These measures not only benefit the people the organization employs, but the organization itself.

In their 2009 literature review, Miceli, Near, and Dworkin write that Warren Buffet, after implementing a whistleblowing hotline for his company Berkshire Hathaway, which employed around 180,000 people, wrote that “Berkshire would be more valuable today if I had put in a whistleblowing (hot)line decades ago” (380). To effectively lead a large group of people managers need data, and internal whistleblowing is one way to get it. Establishing internal whistleblowing channels can also create a more positive atmosphere by demonstrating that the organization takes ethical indiscretions seriously and is willing to work with employees to ensure their concerns are addressed. Any costs associated with the program would pale in comparison to

the damage caused by the public scandal that accompanies external whistleblowing (Miceli, Near, Dworkin 2009, 380).

Whistleblowing is equally as important, though perhaps even more difficult to protect, within the public service. Lorne Sossin (2005) argues that bureaucratic independence from the political executive is one of the most important principles to encourage if one wishes to promote ethical behaviour within the Canadian government (58). Whistleblowers within the public service must be able to report wrongdoing even when it is politically disadvantageous without fearing reprisal. Maintaining this independence is difficult as the bureaucracy is characterized by a number of competing loyalties and principles.

For example, bureaucrats are supposed to be apolitical servants of the state, yet they are citizens with the constitutionally protected right to express their political opinions. They are expected to implement policy without deliberation, yet they have a level of expertise that makes them sought-after advisors to more temporary ministers. They are supposed to be anonymous, yet ministers increasingly compromise their anonymity by shirking responsibility and drawing the bureaucrat into the public eye. They are expected to respect the institutions for which they work and maintain a level of secrecy, yet they are also expected to report wrongdoing, at times publicly. Finally, they are to “remain loyal to the Crown and the public interest” yet at the same time remain loyal to the “government of the day,” two interests that do not always align (10, 58).

Whistleblowers within the Canadian Public Service are somewhat protected, provided the wrongdoing they report is sufficiently serious. In *Fraser v. Public Service Staff Relations Board* (1985), Dickson C.J. ruled that whistleblowing was protected when “governments were involved in illegal acts,” when their “policies jeopardized the life, health, or safety of the public servants

or others” and when “the public servant’s criticism had no impact on his ability to perform effectively the duties of a public servant or on the public perception of his ability to do his job” (Sossin 2005, 38). External whistleblowing is therefore strongly discouraged though there is a common law basis for protection in extreme circumstances. The problem with these guidelines is that what constitutes appropriate external whistleblowing is often in the eye of the beholder (13).

Individuals who partake in external whistleblowing often face reprisal. It difficult to discern the legitimacy of whistleblowers or anticipate their reception by the public before the implications of their actions are fully revealed and understood. For example, from 1998 to 2004 Shiv Chopra, Margaret Hayden and Gérard Lambert were reprimanded and eventually fired from their positions at Health Canada after a number of incidents, including questioning the integrity of Canada’s drug review process, testifying before the senate that the bovine growth hormone might not be safe, publicly denouncing the use of carbadox, a growth promoter for pigs, and suggesting that Canada ban the practice of feeding animal tissue to farm animals (Fitzpatrick 2011, Sossin 2005, 26). In *Haydon v. Canada (2001)* the head of their bureau wrote that their public criticism was “incompatible with a public servant’s employment relationship” and they were thus dismissed for insubordination (26). However, their whistleblowing efforts influenced public health policy across the world, and have been lauded by the public, including FAIR (Federal Accountability Initiative for Reform), a charitable organization founded to protect whistleblowers in Canada. In 2011 The Public Service Labour Relations Board ruled that Lambert had been unfairly dismissed and he was reinstated, but Chopra and Hayden were not (Fitzpatrick 2011). The value of their efforts remains controversial.

Since 2007 Julian Assange's WikiLeaks group has leaked hundreds of thousands of confidential cables and other materials regarding the U.S. military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The leaks revealed that the U.S. government was engaged in a number of controversial practices, including "spying on United Nations diplomats, covert military action against terrorists, [and] negotiations with regimes that are corrupt or guilty of human rights abuses" (Roberts 2011, 20). Yet the effect of the leaks was minimal. Not all the information gathered was significant, nor even secretive, and the public had difficulty interpreting the "impenetrable forest of military jargon" (18). In other words, the leaks lacked the context needed to lend them significance (19). WikiLeaks, which at first was heralded as bringing about "the end of secrecy" soon lost much of its credibility due to indiscriminate leaks as well as rape and sexual assault charges levelled at Assange.

Without the ability to discern what was significant about the material they released, WikiLeaks's primary goal appeared to be generating publicity rather than promoting transparency or accountability. This perception was enhanced by events like the internationally broadcast 2011 "Democracy Now!" conference where Assange appeared onstage alongside Amy Goodman and Žižek, who was "introduced as 'the Elvis of cultural theory'" and was asked if "he and Lady Gaga were dating" (Castronovo 2013, 431). Instead of anonymous informers with compelling stories, WikiLeaks seemed to represent celebrity-hungry attention seekers. Furthermore, as an organization whose sole purpose was to leak government documents, WikiLeaks used the "preeminent mode for spreading and scattering" information: propaganda (435). Their narrative was "appropriately feudal," writes Russ Castronovo, wherein "power is held on high by a small set of agents conspiring to keep the veil drawn over state secrets. Meanwhile, WikiLeaks is

outside the castle, battering at the firewalls for the truth” (433). The reality was far messier. Most of the documents released were ignored and the identity of the primary informant, Bradley Manning, was discovered, leading to his arrest and trial for 22 charges including “aiding the enemy,” a charge that could result in the death penalty (Roberts 2011, 21; Mader 2013). Alasdair Roberts notes that while citizens should be vigilant, journalists empowered, and state secrets subject to close scrutiny, “all of these steps involve hard work. There is no technological quick fix” (2011, 21).

Technology provides a medium for both wrongdoing and whistleblowing on a larger scale than was previously possible. On June 6, 2013, Edward Snowden blew the whistle on the National Security Agency of the Government of the United States domestic surveillance program, PRISM. He revealed to *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* that the government was collecting data from internet search engines, email and telephone records and credit card companies to monitor the general population, not just those under suspicion. Though these surveillance measures were made legal by the *Patriot Act*, its author Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner, came forward to criticize PRISM as an abuse of the Act, writing that “Congress intended to allow the intelligence communities to access targeted information for specific investigations... How can every call that every American makes or receives be relevant to a specific investigation?” (Sensenbrenner 2013).

While citizens were initially outraged, editorials in support of PRISM soon gained popularity. The *Wall Street Journal* argued that surveillance programs of this kind are “a core part of the war on terror,” and therefore warranted. In their opinion, concerns that the government had overstepped its authority “only weaken our counterterror defenses.” Furthermore, they

argued that the existence of PRISM was unsurprising, though it is worth noting that the Pentagon Papers, as Arendt wrote in “Lying in Politics,” were subject to the same criticism. That is, that they “revealed little significant news that was not available to the average reader of dailies and weeklies” (1972, 45). Like Wikileaks, the legacy of Snowden’s whistleblowing efforts may be resignation rather than outrage if the surveillance program proves to be what “Americans already suspected had been going on and were therefore prepared to tolerate” (Roberts 2011, 21).

Part of the difficulty of encouraging and evaluating whistleblowers is that the circumstances under which they blow the whistle are “uneven and incommensurate” (Castronovo 2013, 426). There is no clear precedent for the public to consider when weighing the actions of Chopra, Hayden, Lambert, Assange or Snowden. The nature of whistleblowing means it reveals something previously unknown or unnoticed to the general public. The actions of the whistleblower are new, and challenge the already established institutions that citizens have learned to trust. Whistleblowing is an example of a “totally unexpected” action, a phenomenon that happens frequently and yet is inevitably difficult to judge as we are left without bannisters on which to lean (Arendt 1998, 300).

In the Canadian Public Service there are a number of documents intended to protect internal whistleblowing, though their effectiveness has been questioned. Federally, The Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act (Bill C-11) provides an anonymous avenue for public employees, including most crown corporations, to report wrongdoing. However, the Act has been criticized for being too secretive, offering meagre protection from reprisal, and failing to establish the public interest as paramount (FAIR 2012). Sossin notes that several provinces have cogent internal whistleblowing policies. The Official Standards of British Columbia states that

employees are duty-bound to report wrongdoing, and guarantees that they will be protected from “discipline or reprisal” (36). Likewise, the Code of Conduct of the Northwest Territories states that employees are obligated to report wrongdoing, and lists a number of officials whom they may report to. It too promises to protect employees from reprisal (36). At the same time, it warns against external whistleblowing, requiring that public servants first seek permission to go public from their Deputy Minister (36).

It is worth noting that the goal of encouraging whistleblowing behaviour can be overshot. Tsahuridu and Vandekerckhove point out that framing whistleblowing as a duty may be problematic, as it shifts too much responsibility away from executives and towards employees. Unless employees have a role in determining policy, whistleblowing becomes yet another “duty imposed,” and a failure to report wrongdoing is seen as “a violation in itself” (2008, 114, 108). Mandatory whistleblowing, they argue, is an unnecessarily heavy-handed approach that limits the individual autonomy that is the root of truly moral action by giving organizations another way to control individuals, holding employees responsible for “what they do and what they fail to do” (113, 116). Autonomy and imposed obligation cannot coexist, and ultimately what is most important to maintaining moral institutions is preserving personal autonomy (114).

If the power of the bureaucracy to ensure its own ethicality seems limited, it is because while not amoral, the institution is subject to certain restrictions. The bureaucracy is limited to what can be achieved within the social realm, an area that is ultimately reliant upon the public to set its course. Like the King of Denmark, the executive sets the tone for behaviour within the public service. The King did not force the Danes to save the Jews, rather he set an example of autonomy that inspired free thought and action within the greater population. This spirit of

freedom and solidarity among individuals can do more to promote moral institutions than any one set of policies. A moral bureaucratic structure is one that allows individuals to act according to their principles. The sense of duty cultivated by bureaucratic codes of conduct ought to be that of a duty to society broadly defined, rather than a duty to loyally follow the already overwhelmingly influential interests of their department. The evidence of group influence, particularly in professional bureaucratic settings, that has accrued over the years suggests that the dominance of groups may be taken for granted, rather than continually enforced through team building and collaborative exercises. Rather than further encourage the primacy of groups, efforts could be made to balance their power with the clarity of hierarchy and demonstrations of autonomy. Arendt was prescient in her theory of thoughtless evil and the bureaucratic “sterile passivity” of the modern age (1998, 332). To create the conditions for freedom Arendt believed essential for both moral action and thought, plurality and individuality as opposed to duty and loyalty ought to be promoted, or at least not actively discouraged, by the bureaucracy. Otherwise, they present the same temptation to evil as totalitarianism once did. That is, thoughtlessness.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Arendt’s theory of thoughtless evil and her analysis of totalitarianism appeals for the protection of basic freedoms. Freedom to associate publicly and meet one’s fellow citizens, to write about controversial ideas, and to judge publicly and independently those in authority. What differentiates Arendt from the myriad of other political thinkers who espouse the same virtues is her diagnosis of the evil that threatens those freedoms and her prescription for contemplative thought to guard against it. Understanding that the evil of totalitarianism was perpetuated by a modern government, that the mass murders were legal, and that their function

was to kill not only their enemies, but “innocent people who were not even potentially dangerous, and not for any reason of necessity but, on the contrary, even against all military and other utilitarian considerations”; and that all of this was not done “by raving sadists, but by the most respected members of respectable society” is the first step towards gleaning a “moral point” from totalitarianism (2003, 42-43).

If one walks away from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* with the idea that nothing could have been done, that the ideology was total and the bureaucracy powerful so that no person could be expected to resist, they have surely missed that point. The inner conversation of contemplative thought that cultivates the sense of identity that bolsters moral judgment sounds immaterial upon first hearing, but in the stories of the rescuers Monroe interviewed, it is revealed to be a formidable opponent to even the most radical political evil. Exemplars in their own right, the individuals who resisted are as ordinary as the individuals who cooperated, with one key difference: a deeply ingrained understanding of who they were and thus what they could tolerate. It was not rules, nor religion, nor, as bystander Beatrix demonstrates, shared family values, it came down to the individual. In Arendt’s words, “Morally the only reliable people when the chips are down are those who say ‘I can’t’” (78-79).

While totalitarianism may not be an active threat in the western world today, the clash of duty and integrity within the bureaucracy that is all too effortlessly reconciled by adopting institutional values as one’s own remains. Navigating the conflict between loyalty to the organization and one’s personal integrity has many practical challenges but ought not be ignored. The picture of a moral person that emerges from Arendt’s study of totalitarianism is vastly different from the law abiding good citizen, consistent ideologue or religious follower. The world

needs more exemplars of independent moral judgment to illustrate that though breaking from convention to face reality and make decisions outside of any familiar framework is difficult and risky, it is above all admirable.

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