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Hannah Arendt and the Law and
Ethics of Administration.
Bureaucratic Evil, Political Thinking
and Reflective Judgment

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Hannah Arendt and the Law and Ethics of Administration

Bureaucratic evil, political thinking and reflective judgment

Abstract: After the absurd terrorism and violence of the totalitarianism and bureaucratic administrative and legal systems of the 20th century it does not give any meaning to rationalize harm as meaningful evil that even though it is evil may have some importance for the development of the world towards the good. Rather, evil is incomprehensible and as radical and banal evil it challenges human rationality. This is indeed the case when we are faced with instrumental and rationalized administrative and political evil. Therefore, we must analyse the banality of evil in politics and in administration in order to understand the concept of evil. Moreover, as proposed by Hannah Arendt, we need to fight this evil with political thinking and social philosophy. The only way to deal with harm and wrongdoing is to return a concept of responsibility that is closely linked to reflective thinking. In this paper, we will on the basis of a discussion of the banality of evil explore this in relation to Hannah Arendt's analysis of the administration of evil, as expressed by the personality of Adolf Eichmann. Finally, we will place this concept of administrative evil in Hannah Arendt's general political philosophy.

Introduction

How do we explain the horrors of modernity, Auschwitz and the death camps, the Gulag or more recently the terror of September 11 and in Iraq and Afghanistan and all over the world? On the one hand we ascribe this evil to willed demonic human actions. On the other hand our concepts of evil become insufficient and we are confronted with the radical incomprehensibility of evil actions.¹ In this paper I will address Hannah Arendt's philosophy of responsibility and reflective judgment as way to deal with political and administrative evil as one of the many faces of evil in contemporary society. I will begin with a discussion of the banality of evil. Then I will explore this in relation to Hannah Arendt's analysis of the administration of evil as an example of political evil in administrative and legal systems, as expressed by the personality of Adolf Eichmann. Finally, we will place this concept of administrative evil in Hannah Arendt's general political philosophy.

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¹ Susan Neiman: *Evil in Modern Thought, An Alternative History of Philosophy*, 2002, xii-xiii.

I. Hannah Arendt: The banality of evil

The German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt, who had to flee from the Nazis to the United States, published in 1951 one of the most important works on the terrors of systems in the 20th century, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt (1951), 1964) which was later developed in her work in *Eichmann in Jerusalem. An Essay on the Banality of Evil* from 1964. I think that Arendt's concept represents a new way to approach the problem of evil that goes beyond classical concepts of. Arendt's philosophy contains in this connection a critical evaluation of the concept of evil as a result of a demonic and devilish evil spiritual force.² Looking closely on Arendt's conception of evil in relation to political philosophy we may argue that it represents a revolt against the implicit theodicy in the political ideology that was dominating during the Iraq war. After the terror action against World Trade Center in New York President Bush has several times emphasized that the War on Terror and the fight against Osama bin Laden was a fight between good and evil. Although they finally emerged as miserable and somewhat insignificant men Saddam Hussein and Kaddafi were also portrayed as the incarnation of evil and the war against Iraq had similarities with a crusade against evil powers in the world. With terrorism we come as close as possible to "intentionally willed evil". The actions of the terrorists in Spain as in Russia and the evil of Bin Laden, Hussein and Kaddafi have been compared to the crimes of Hitler, Stalin and other totalitarian regimes in the 20. Century as an expression of "absolute evil".

Arendt asks the question, how Holocaust, that is the killings of six million Jews in concentration camps was possible. She does not think that such evil was beyond every human understanding.³ But none the less, evil requires that we try to understand it and thereby creates a defence against it. Arendt stated that evil in Nazism should be understood as a historically conditioned modern political phenomenon, which is essentially different from earlier forms of tyranny and despotism. According to Arendt, totalitarianism is characterized by the fact that technically rationality and calculation of utility is used to realize an irrational ideology that often is based on anti-Semitism or racism. Totalitarianism as a political system reaches the character of nightmares, when it uses technology to make change radically human beings and society by the use of systematic murder or ideologically organized madness. Terror creates constant insecurity and unsafe feelings among individuals in society. In totalitarianism elites are sanctioning their power by the use of secret police.

Concentration camps and death camps are essential to establish total power to military leaders. The function of the camps is, with the sharp insights of Arendt, to make human

² Richard J. Bernstein: *The Abuse of Evil. The Corruption of Politics and Religion Since 9/11*, 2005.

³ Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1964.

beings superfluous and meaningless.⁴ Arendt argues that radical evil in the totalitarian regime consisted in its attempt to become master over human nature and accordingly in its attempt to form human nature according to its own will. Arendt continued in the 1950s and 1960s as one of the most important American political philosophers to be captured by the problem of evil in totalitarianism. It was in this context that she in 1963 accepted by the week newspaper *The New Yorker* to report from the court case in Jerusalem against the Nazi criminal Adolf Eichmann, who was considered one of the major responsible bureaucrats for the transport of Jews to concentration camps.⁵

Arendt argued ironically and satirically against the predominant view, that Eichmann who had been presented as a symbol of intentionally willed evil, rather as the incarnation of the devil, was nothing special. Contrary to world public Arendt reduced Eichmann to be a banal and petit bourgeois bureaucrat.⁶ He had not deepness or moral imagination and his evil came from his lack of ability to himself in the place of the other. Contrary to the fascination of Eichmann's devil personality, Arendt argued that his evil consisted in his incapacity to distinguish between good and evil.

In this sense the banality of evil is the frightening consequence of radical evil that made every human being superfluous and meaningless. The personality of the terrorists, the Nazi soldiers or Stalin's butchers may be said to be characterized by the same mediocrity and ideological blindness. There is no reason in evil. It is meaningless and incomprehensible. This radical evil as the banality of evil is at the limits of our imagination and it is this radicalism which may make it difficult for us to understand that evil is banal that is the result of actions of people who are not able to have moral reflection. This kind of radical evil emerges in different ways. While Eichmann was a bureaucrat who killed at distance and never himself met with his victims it was different with the soldiers in Serbia or the rebels in Rwanda. They did not stop with killing at a distance, but they were confronted directly with the sufferings of the victims and in some cases they were raping their victims from civil population. In some case they may even feel that they are victims and have sadistic enjoyment of their acts and therefore have a feeling of enjoying evil as a good. The "willed evil" of different forms of terrorists is often presented a consequence of a consequence of a rationally justified religious or nationalistic hate to their oppressors. And still one is marked by the meaningless and lack of goal in their actions. The essence of the concept of banality of evil is that regardless of whether it is close or at distance evil is nothing else than stupid people's

⁴ Arendt, note 3, 441.

⁵ Hannah Arendt (1964): *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 1992

⁶ See Arendt, (note 5).

violent ideology and lack of capacity of moral reflection. The reflections of Arendt join Kant's problems of understanding how it could be possible with thoughtful action to challenge the universal language of morality. Evil actions are committed by people without deepness or conscience. This is why it does not give any meaning to ascribe to terrorists or "rogue states" like North Korea, Iraq, Iran or Syria as representatives of the demoniac axe of evil.

Such banalization of evil is very provoking, because it makes it difficult to give a traditional psychological explanation of the sufferings of the victims and give them moral rehabilitation by the fact that they were confronted with monstrous evil personalities. Like Eichmann, the Serbian politicians, who were convicted of war crimes or the suicide bombers of September 11, appeared to be "ordinary men" and it is difficult to see them as representatives of complex psychological personalities. It is a characteristic aspect of Arendt's doctrine of evil that it refuses the insights of the explicatory power of psychoanalysis to understand the complex motives of evil personalities. Even though concepts of double personality and perverse precision may apply to the totalitarian personality, they are not really present in the work of Arendt.⁷

However, this lack of psychoanalytic explanation and dependence on existentialist philosophical anthropology helps us avoid the deadlock of saying that Eichmann or other criminals cannot be ascribed responsibility for their actions, because morally they did not know what they were doing. In fact, courts and legal authorities cannot ignore the moral and legal responsibility of such criminals, because they were morally free to do otherwise. In fact, the hate and moral incapacities of the perpetrators gives us the difficult challenge within penal law that it is to make people who do not have capacities of moral reflection to think ethically, regret, understand the monstrosity of their actions and honestly seek forgiveness.

It is a misunderstanding to think that Arendt's doctrine of the banality of evil takes away the direct intentions from the actions of the perpetrators. On the contrary. In order to respect the victims, we have to maintain that terrorists and war criminals are causes of evil, because it is not possible to refer to a higher more powerful evil that they are determined by. The perpetrators have no escape because they are existentially responsibility for their violence and brutality. One of the most worrying aspects of the banality of evil is that the perpetrators have lost the moral awareness of this responsibility and it is this lack of responsibility that makes it possible for them to do their evil actions. If they had had a capacity of moral reflection, they

⁷ See Arendt, (note 5).

would be able to follow the moral law of respect for the eternal value of human beings as well as for their integrity and dignity.

We may conceive Arendt's approach as a criticism of the tendency of rationalization of evil that was dominating Western reflections about evil, where it has been attempted to justify evil as having a meaning as a necessary opposition to the good from the perspective of the will of God, human freedom or necessary movement of history. As mentioned, the contemporary version of this is the concept of the demoniac will of destruction, a clearly sinful will that consciously has chosen to confront the good and nihilistically destroy the whole world and itself.

However, we may argue that even if Eichmann or some contemporary terrorists or soldiers are not really evil, other criminals like Göring or Hitler were real demoniac persons. Moreover, don't we have moral responsibility to maintain that fanatic terrorists are incarnations of evil? In this context, Arendt's thesis was provocative because it was in full contrast to the concept of the enemy of its time, where it was supposed that there must have been some ice cold, calculating brain behind the killings of Jews in concentration camps. What is so frustrating and unbearable for the victims about the thoughtlessness of Eichmann combined with his dutiful commitment to the extermination of the European Jews is exactly the fact that many of the German soldiers and officers like Eichmann were nothing but ordinary human beings that were following orders in a large military system without thinking on their own.⁸

II. Detailed analysis of Eichmann's banality of evil

But how can we characterize the political and administrative evil of Adolf Eichmann if we look at it in detail. It can be argued that Hannah Arendt show us the institutional set-up and organizational dimensions of moral indifference and this is why this kind of evil can be described as an indication of the banality of evil. Accordingly, from an institutional perspective we can argue that the figure of Eichmann is not only a psychological figure, but the institutional dimension of this figure as the prototype of the morally indifference of administrative and legal bureaucracy is very present. We can say that Arendt describes the essential dimensions of this kind of personality that characterizes agency in legal and administrative systems. In fact, role playing as described by social psychology of Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo is an important element of understanding how Arendt's

⁸ See Arendt, (note 5), 42.

interpretation of Eichmann provides us with the dimensions of an institutional analysis.⁹ As social psychology emphasizes role expectations in social system are important for compliance to the logic of the system. Institutional action is characterized by such expectations and obligations in social action patterns in modern society. As it is implicit in Arendt's analysis there is certain blindness in the role agency because genuine human action is replaced by role behavior. The role behavior is a kind of system-based discipline behavior where the individual is submitted to the constraints of the system. It is on this foundation that we can go deeper into the definitions of moral blindness and banality of evil as defined by Hannah Arendt in her book on *Eichmann in Jerusalem. Essay on the Banality of Evil*. As close look on her way to describe Eichmann leads to the following structural features of moral indifference or moral blindness in Eichmann that relates to his existence as a role-player in a social system that carries the banality of evil with him through his agency:

1. *A concept of the administrator an obedient bureaucrat*. Eichmann argued that he was only following orders and therefore he was not guilty in any legal sense, but maybe in a moral sense, but this would not have any significance in a legal trail. Because on the existing legal system he had done nothing wrong. "Eichmann feels guilty before God, not before the law".¹⁰ Eichmann plied "Not guilty in the sense of the indictment".¹¹

2. *A concept of the bureaucrat with no personal involvement in his work*. Eichmann argued that he was not personally committed, but that he only did his work as an objective and neutral bureaucrat following the orders that was given to him. Eichmann said "With the killings of Jews I had nothing to do. I never killed a Jew, or a Non-Jew, for that matter – I never killed any human being. I never gave an order to kill a Jew or a Non-Jew. I just did not do it".¹²

3. *The bureaucrat had no bad conscience and no evil will*. Eichmann insisted that there was no inner bastard in him. And there was agreement that he was no psychopath. It was shown that half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as "Normal" and his attitude towards his family was "not only normal, but most desirable". It was difficult to say that Eichmann had a "perverted sadistic personality"¹³ or that he was characterized by a strong anti-Semitism.

⁹ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An experimental View*, 1974; Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 2007.

¹⁰ See Arendt, (note 5), 20.

¹¹ See Arendt, (note 5), 25.

¹² See Arendt, (note 5), 22.

¹³ See Arendt, (note 5), 26.

4. *The bureaucrat is not necessarily intelligent or clever.* There is no deep personality behind his actions. He is rather ordinary and mediocre. Eichmann was for example doing rather poorly in school.¹⁴ Eichmann didn't really know what he wanted to do with his life and it was a kind of coincidence that he entered into the SS. It was without any real deep decision-making that he acted in his life. And he is therefore an illustration of the existential archetype of inauthentic man.

5. *The bureaucrat is often from the middle classes.* Arendt said that Eichmann appeared as a typical member of the lower middle classes, even though he came from a middle-class family. "In Court Eichmann gave the impression of a typical member of the lower middle classes, and this impression was more than borne out by every sentence he spoke or wrote while in prison. But this was misleading; he was rather the déclassé son of a solid middle-class family."¹⁵ This is an indication of the bureaucrat as someone who chooses the job out of necessity rather than personal wish.

6. *The bureaucrat may show ambition and engagement within the system.* Arendt emphasizes that though the career of Eichmann before entering into the SS and Nazi system was rather insignificant, his engagement in the Nazi-system made him very soon flourish as an expert in the Jewish question. He became an efficient administrator and he was very good in implementing the policies that came from the top. He was committed to solving the "Jewish question" and he contributed significantly to the Madagascar Plan suggesting that the Jews should be removed to Madagascar. Eichmann advanced very quickly in the Nazi-system from *Untersturmbannführer* over *Hauptsturmführer* to *Obersturmbannführer*.¹⁶

7. *The bureaucrat has no ethical formulation competency that goes beyond following the rules of the system.* Even though he seemed to be efficient Arendt emphasizes that Eichmann had no ability to think from the standpoint of somebody else. In fact, his whole relation to the world was marked by self-invented clichés and he was unable both to think and speak. "The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the reliable of all safeguards against the worlds and the presence of others, and hence the reality as such".¹⁷

¹⁴ See Arendt, (note 5), 29.

¹⁵ See Arendt, (note 5), 32.

¹⁶ See Arendt, (note 5), 35.

¹⁷ See Arendt, (note 5), 49.

8. *The bureaucrats who do acts of moral blindness cannot be considered as an ordinary criminal.* Arendt emphasizes that the case of Eichmann could not really be considered as a case of bad faith and of self-deception because he felt in total harmony with his surroundings and he thought that he was following the rules of the system. This behavior may be seen as a part of his existence as a cliché and of his role in the system.

9. *Objectivation is an integrated part of the bureaucratic attitude.* Eichmann was a part of a system that was characterized by the attitude of objectivation and compartmentalization. Compartmentalization is indicated by the fact that Eichmann only was responsible for organizing the final solution, but he never actually saw the killings. Objectivation implied the objective relation to the killing of the Jews. “This “objective attitude” – talking about concentration camps in terms of “administration” and about extermination camps in terms of “economy” – was typical of the SS mentality, and something Eichmann was very proud of. By its objectivity (*Sachlichkeit*), the SS officers dissociated itself from such “emotional” types as Streicher, that “unrealistic fool”, and also from certain “Teutonic-Germanic Party bigwigs who behaved as though they were clad in horns and pelts”.¹⁸

10. *The bureaucrat does not take responsibility for political decisions but implement decisions.* Eichmann said that he had doubts about the final solution and preferred a more peaceful and not so bloody outcome. But when it was said that the final solution had to be implemented he did not protest. Arendt cites Eichmann: “At the moment I sensed a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling, for I felt free of all guilt”.¹⁹ She continues “Who was he to judge? Who was he to “to have [his] own thoughts in this matter”? Well, he was neither the first nor the last to be ruined by modesty”, Arendt sarcastically comments.²⁰ Instead, Eichmann started the operation by the necessary legislation to make victims stateless and negotiate with Jewish councils on transportation and other matters.

11. *The victims collaborate in their own extermination.* Arendt emphasizes in the book how the Nazi used the Jews to collaborate in their own extermination. The Jews in the ghetto used police to have order and this police was as rough as the Nazis. The former chief Rabbi of Berlin, Leo Baeck did not tell people that Auschwitz was dead and therefore people volunteered to go to Auschwitz.²¹ Moreover, the Jewish authorities die Judenräte wanted to keep law and order and in some cases they also prevented people from escaping. But could they have done otherwise being forced to it by the Nazis. This shows the complexity of the

¹⁸ See Arendt, (note 5), 69.

¹⁹ See Arendt, (note 5), 114.

²⁰ See Arendt, (note 5), 114

²¹ See Arendt, (note 5), 119.

relation between perpetrators and victims and how the victims were used to fulfill their own execution.

12. *The duty of obedience is the first virtue of the bureaucrat.* Eichmann emphasized his admiration for Hitler as *der Führer*. He saw himself as a law-abiding citizen who followed the orders of society as a requirement of being faithful to society. But for Eichmann this very soon turned into total obedience: “Since, in addition to performing what he conceived as the duties of a law-abiding citizen, he had also acted upon orders – always so careful to be “covered” – he became completely muddled, and ended by stressing alternately the virtues and vices of blind obedience, or the “obedience of corpses”, *Kadavergehorsam*, as he himself called it”.²²

13. *The bureaucrat considers the norms of the system as the universal morality.* Eichmann shows this commitment to the norms of the system by a reference to the Kantian definition of duty. He argued that he followed the categorical imperative of the Führer. Arendt cites that Eichmann said: “What I meant by my remark about Kant that the principle of my will must always be such that can become the principle of general laws”.²³ Eichmann said that he had read Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* and had tried to live according to it, but had stopped when he was going to carry out the final solution. Arendt says that Eichmann may have transformed the categorical principle to the Führer principle of “Act in such a way that the Führer, if he knew your action, would approve it”.²⁴ Eichmann contribute to change “Thou shalt not kill” in to its opposite “Thou shall kill” so that not to kill became a temptation.²⁵

14. *It is a characteristic of the bureaucratic system that it makes opposition look useless and meaningless.* The Nazis did not allow the opponents to be heroes, but they gave them an anonymous death. Moreover, they tried to make opposition look impossible and useless so that all victims would give in. In this sense, it seems stupid to try to oppose the destiny. However, as Arendt emphasizes it was not everywhere that the killings and the final solution was accomplished. So resistance was possible.²⁶ Moreover, the system wants to strip every human dignity of the victims and therefore it tries not to make any victim appear as a hero.

15. *The bureaucrat may be so devoted to his task in the system that he over performs even when opportunistic leaders want to stop.* This is the result of the relation

²² See Arendt, (note 5), 135.

²³ See Arendt, (note 5), 136.

²⁴ See Arendt, (note 5), 136.

²⁵ See Arendt, (note 5), 150.

²⁶ See Arendt, (note 5), 233.

between Eichmann and Himmler who towards the end of the war ask Eichmann to slow down because he wants to cover up of the actions. But Eichmann is not happy with this and he wants to continue his mission and accomplish it. He is so devoted to his mission in the system and he cannot stop when it is required of him.

With these dimensions of the actions of the bureaucratic administrator as the originator of administrative evil in the totalitarian system Arendt ends by sarcastically describing Eichmann going to the gallows “with great dignity” and performing all his clichés of the Nazi-system. Arendt ends the description by saying “It was as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that his long course in human wickedness had taught us – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil”.²⁷ It is an important part of the epilogue of the book that Arendt wants to argue that the trial in Jerusalem in some sense was inappropriate because an international tribunal and trial was needed because Eichmann’s crime was not only a crime against the Jews but indeed a crime against humanity. Therefore it should an international tribunal that should be responsible for trial against Eichmann. Arendt writes that the crimes that we deal with are a new sort of crime which can be seen as a crime against the human status as such.²⁸

In the postscript Arendt sums up her analysis of Eichmann in order to understand his totalitarian personality as an agent of the banality of evil. She emphasizes that the problem with Eichmann was that he had no other motives than personal ambition. He would not have killed at close hand, e.g. His superior, but he was able to kill at distance because of his ambition of being a good administrator and bureaucrat, i.e. to fulfill the task and role of being a bureaucrat. Arendt says: “And this diligence in itself was in no way criminal; he certainly would never have murdered his superior in order to inherit his post. He merely, to put the matter colloquially, *never realized what he was doing*. It was precisely this lack of imagination which enabled him to sit for months on end facing a German Jew who was conducting the police interrogation, pouring out his heart to the man and explaining again and again how it was that he reached only the rank of lieutenant colonel in the S.S and that it had not been his fault that he was not promoted. In principle he knew quite well what it was all about, and in this final statement to the court he spoke of the “revaluation of values prescribed by the [Nazi] government”.²⁹ With this Arendt show how his principal concern was promotion and to accomplish is role in the system.

²⁷ See Arendt, (note 5), 235.

²⁸ See Arendt, (note 5), 257 and 275.

²⁹ See Arendt, (note 5), 287.

Arendt continues in her description of Eichmann as the incarnation of the banality of evil: “He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness- something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period. And if this is “banal” and even funny, if with the best will in the world one cannot extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from Eichmann, that is still far from calling it commonplace.”³⁰ Here we see an important distinction between commonplace and the banality of Eichmann. Even if he looks like ordinary man and is a kind of ordinary man we may still say that his crime is extraordinary exactly due to its extreme banality. Arendt shows that the banality of Eichmann makes him different from the common place morality of every man. The fact that he is not able to say other things than clichés at the time of his death shows the high degree of banality of existence. And Arendt continues: “Such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreck more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man – that is in fact the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem.”³¹

Arendt goes on to discuss that the crime committed was a crime of genocide. Moreover, she insists on the fact that Eichmann still has full responsibility for his actions and should be sentenced accordingly. Moreover Arendt insists that an international court is needed to deal with the kind of crime against humanity that Eichmann is responsible for.

What kind of consequences for institutional analysis of the understanding of the banality of evil and for the political philosophy of evil can we draw from this analysis of Eichmann? Maybe we can say that the different element of the description of the bureaucratic personality illustrates the institutional dimensions of roles in systems that constitute the bureaucratic personality. We can use these elements as the basis for analysis of bureaucratic mentalities and the creation of evil in different context of human action in organizational systems and social and political institutions.

III. Responsibility and reflective judgment

What is fascinating about Arendt’s thesis of the banality of evil is in this context that evil is nothing but was is made by social and institutional administrative political and legal systems and this helps us to be liberated from radical evil as an absolute power in the universe. We do not have to survive existentially and ethically by making the demoniac by inventing pictures of our strong enemies or changing human beings like terrorists or dictators into cynical brains of intelligent and exiting criminals, as it is the case with the production of myths and symbols

³⁰ See Arendt, (note 5), 288.

³¹ See Arendt, (note 5), 288.

as it is proposed by many movies and fictive representations of evil. It is important to recognize the fact that by being aware of the banality of Eichmann's behaviour, it became possible for Arendt to understand Holocaust as the result of human failure rather than the expression of an evil force in history or nature beyond our possible control.

Evil is not primarily based on evil motives, because it has no depth and only what is good can fully exist, as Arendt says in her references to the philosophy of Augustin. In fact, looking back on Arendt's early work about the concept of love in Augustin's philosophy we may find the key to her critical reflections about the concept of evil.³² We could argue that Arendt in her concept of evil presupposes a universe where evil cannot exist in it-self because it is always a privation with regard to the almighty power of God. With this concept of evil we are close to the metaphysical philosophy of Augustin.

As indicated evil does not have an independent existence, but originates in mediocrity and dogmatic blindness in administrative, legal and political systems and it is this intellectual inferiority that characterizes terrorists and ideological fanatics. We perceive that Arendt may be influenced by Heidegger's concept of thought and thinking according to which real thought is the capacity to go beyond the established boundaries of systems and science.³³ Arendt argues that the people who do evil have not reach the level of thinking as reflective interrogation as mentioned by Heidegger. However, Arendt goes beyond Heidegger by linking the concept of thinking to moral judgement and the capacity of compassion, of putting one-self in the place of the other.³⁴

It may be easier to understand Hannah Arendt's concern for the criticism of the absolute concept of evil as many people regard as the logical consequence of the barbarian totalitarianism of modern society. It would be impossible to live in a world where evil is determined by a thoughtful evil force that is absolute. And Arendt's philosophy is attempt to escape from the threat of such a world be reinterpreting the concept of evil from the point of view of banality of evil as radical evil.³⁵ As an expression of a new conception of the problem of evil, we are desperately in need of in this time of anguish and nervous pictures of enemies, the reflections of Arendt are good examples of creative political thought that in its method is both different from empirical political science and sociology. This philosophy is critical towards builders of systems in the tradition from Plato to Hegel and Marx. Political

³² Hannah Arendt (1929), *Love and St. Augustin*, 1996.

³³ Jacques Taminiaux, *La fille de Trace et le penseur professionnel, Arendt et Heidegger*, 1996 .

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, Vol. 1-2, 1978.

³⁵ Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question*, 1996.

thought starts out with respect for human dignity and freedom and it seeks to fight for a human world building on respect for individuality and difference.

It is important to understand that Arendt focuses on the significance of the banality of evil for our social institution.³⁶ The institutional dimensions of Holocaust are emphasized, for example the incapacity of Eichmann to refuse the moral blindness implied in his institutional socialization. It concerns the capacity to give possibility and space for thinking and judgment, when human beings are parts of collective responsibility in institutions. In this context the problem of Eichmann is not only an issue for individual responsibility but it also includes responsibility for collective actions in different forms of modern institutions and organizations, that is schools, hospitals, ministries, military organizations, companies etc.

In this context, the philosophy of Hannah Arendt may be presented as an extenuation of European humanism that includes aspects of Greek and Roman culture. Arendt also emphasizes the independence of USA in 1776, because it in opposition to the French and Russian revolutions implied the creation of real democratic political community, where the constitution was based on human freedom and moral sense. This democracy was oriented towards equality, because it was opposing a strong separation between those in power and the citizens. The political thought of Arendt represents a challenge to hierarchical totalitarianism and it is supposed to avoid the banality of evil by fighting for a classical republicanism, where free and autonomous citizens in mutual respect and reciprocity are searching to work for the common good.

The great conceptual and philosophical gain and also existentially liberating consequence of the thesis of the banality of evil is the statement that evil is not founded in the inherited subconscious desire of humanity. We have the possibility to deal with evil through human sensitivity, moral imagination and capacity of put one self in the place of the other.³⁷ Human responsibility is exercised through the capacities of reflective judgement. Arendt was working on the concept of judgement through her whole life, but she died before she could finish the third book of the trilogy *The Life of the Mind: Willing, Thinking Judging*, which should have addressed the problems of judgement. It was the intention of Arendt to conceptualize judgement from Immanuel Kant's maxims as they were developed in *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1794).³⁸ However, we can reconstruct Arendt's concept of judgement from the book *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* that was published in 1982 after she had died. In this book political and ethical judgment is conceived as an independent capacity of consciousness,

³⁶ Larry May & Jerome Kohn, *Hannah Arendt, Twenty Years Later*, 1996.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt: *Responsibility and Judgment*, Edited and with an Introduction by Jerome Kohn, 2003.

³⁸ Immanuel Kant: *Kritik der Urteilkraft* (1794), 1973.

which is different from both will and thinking.³⁹ Judgment is first and foremost the capacity to judge about human actions and political activity. Judgment is based on the feeling of community (*sensus communis*) and it opens for the human capacity of ethical reflection. Judgment is based on human capacity to be conscious of plurality and think for him or herself and with this to be able to put one self in the place of the other. In judgment we incorporate moral sensibility and we follow critically and impartially the course of history.

IV. Conclusion: Evil in modern philosophy

In this paper I have presented an alternative view to the traditional concept of evil as expressed in the theodicy of modern philosophy where evil is rationalized as something reasonable and purposeful understood as an expression of God's plan with the universe or as an intentional demonic will that aims at destroying the world. I have tried to propose an alternative critical conception of evil that explains harm and destruction as with the concept of banality of evil as proposed by Hannah Arendt.

After this I went into a detailed analysis of Arendt's description of the administrative evil of Adolf Eichmann in order to demonstrate the different dimensions of Arendt's institutional and organizational concept of evil. As such this concept is terrible because it shows how human beings become agents and role-players in bureaucratic systems, but it also shows how evil is not created by individual monsters but by human institutions that can be improved and changed in order to prevent evil from happening.

After the absurd terrorism and violence of the totalitarianism of the 20th century it does not give any meaning to rationalize harm as meaningful evil that even though it is evil may have some importance for the development of the world towards the good. Rather, evil is incomprehensible and as radical and banal evil it challenges human rationality. Therefore, as proposed by Hannah Arendt, the only way to deal with harm and wrongdoing is to return a concept of responsibility that is closely linked to reflective thinking.

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³⁹ Hannah Arendt: *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*, ed. R. Beiner, 1989.