

Hannah Arendt Without Politics

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Abstract: Margarethe von Trotta's *Hannah Arendt* (2012) does not represent well the life and work of its protagonist. The focus on thinking in the film fails to reflect how Arendt connected it to judging, especially in the midst of modern mass society and in light of political catastrophes. Arendt's reflections on statelessness are not explored in the film. Finally, the elimination of Karl Jaspers from the storyline results in an incomplete picture of Arendt's stance toward the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem court. A politically relevant Arendt is obscured in the making of a personal Arendt.

Keywords: HANNAH ARENDT, INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT, JUDGING, STATELESSNESS, THINKING

Introduction

"Philosophers don't make deadlines." In the 2012 biopic directed by Margarethe von Trotta, this is the final objection that straight-talking Frances Wells lodges against the decision by *New Yorker* editor William Shawn to have Hannah Arendt write a report of the trial of Adolf Eichmann. And as it turns out, she was right. The trial began in April 1961, adjourned in August 1961, and a guilty verdict was returned in December 1961. But Arendt's articles were not published until February and March of 1963. What delayed Arendt's writing of her trial report?

The film offers a partial answer. Several scenes in the film show Arendt dodging calls from Shawn, who is looking for an update on her work. These scenes appear in the midst of Arendt trying to organize and work through mountains of files pertaining to the trial, and her frustration over having to cover a course for a colleague experiencing some sort of "American problem" like an illness or a divorce. Then, Arendt's husband, Heinrich Blücher suffers an aneurism in the fall of 1961. In a scene after Blücher has come home from the hospital, Arendt's delay is fleshed out further. First, we are reminded of an earlier scene where Arendt refused to give Shawn her articles before the verdict came down. Blücher indicates that she has no remaining excuse to avoid Shawn. Though she suggests that she has already written some notes, Arendt offers a second reason: she will not attend to the work until his health has really improved.

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl's biography of Arendt fills in the details for the delay.¹ In the fall of 1961 Arendt was teaching at Wesleyan and commuting back to New York City, while also finishing what would eventually be *On Revolution*, which she was under contract to complete. In the first few months of 1962, she offered a series of lectures at The University of Chicago, came down with a cold, and suffered an allergic reaction to antibiotics prescribed for the cold. Then, while traveling through Central Park on March 19, 1962, Arendt's taxi was struck by a truck. Young-Bruehl reports that the injuries she sustained left her "disabled for two months: contusion,

concussion, hemorrhages of both eyes, broken teeth, right shoulder bruised, abrasions and lacerations, especially on her head, fractured ribs, and—worse for Arendt’s later life—heart-muscle damage secondary to shock.”ⁱⁱ Arendt reported to friends that she experienced “a fleeting moment” wherein she decided to live; she indicated that, while death felt natural, life was still beautiful. The full story behind Arendt’s delay in completing the report on the Eichmann trial is, in a word, astonishing. Needless to say, it contains all the necessary ingredients for a gripping storyline on the big screen.

The absence of these details calls to mind the fact that the interpretation offered by the film is, inevitably, selective. However, we should attend to what is lost in the particular selections that constitute the film. For instance, in the film’s third scene Arendt is shown supporting her friend, the celebrated novelist Mary McCarthy, who is upset that her husband is trying to prevent their divorce. The focus on friendship in the film was a well-chosen theme to explore along with “the controversy”—as Arendt referred to it—that erupted after the publication of her report on the Eichmann trial.ⁱⁱⁱ But Arendt’s response to McCarthy’s frustration at her husband’s intransigence is unbelievable: “under such situations, people imagine or at least hope to have some possibility of power.”^{iv} Since at least *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) Arendt conceived of power in very different terms. Following Burke, Arendt understood that power arose when people act in concert with others; it is a momentary phenomenon that vanishes as soon as actors disperse.^v Arendt theorized that power comes into being when people “bind themselves through promises, covenants, and mutual pledges.”^{vi} The way that a personal Arendt is presented in this scene misrepresents her political thought.

The film’s presentation of a personal Arendt might be construed as a hagiography. Reviewers correctly claim that Arendt’s critics are not represented well in the film, but the portrait of Arendt sketched by the film cannot be described as uncritical veneration.^{vii} I do not share the view that the movie was “superficial”^{viii} or that it suffered from “tastelessness”^{ix}. My objection is that a political Arendt is obscured in the way this film constructs a personal Arendt. In order to develop this argument, I first attend to Arendt’s insistence on the importance of judging, especially under the conditions of modern political life. I then take to task the exclusive focus on thinking in the film, and highlight the shortcomings of not appreciating its relationship to judging. Finally, I address a few issues of particular contemporary concern: Arendt’s treatment of statelessness and her stance toward the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem Court. I suspect that their inclusion would have resulted in a film that was both more relevant and more representative of Arendt’s life and work.

I

In the Director’s Statement, von Trotta claims: “Like Arendt, I never want to judge, but only to understand.”^x If von Trotta is using words loosely, then it is unfortunate because judgment and understanding play a central role in Arendt’s thought. In appealing to the director’s description of her aims and understanding of Arendt, my

intent is not to explain why the film has the character that it does, but rather to indicate that the statement does not capture Arendt's purposes. For Arendt, understanding is a necessary precursor to judgment, and judging is a valuable though largely misunderstood and unappreciated human activity. She was frustrated by "the reluctance evident everywhere to make judgments."^x In preparation for a public discussion of her articles at Wesleyan University before the book was published, Arendt wrote: "For conscience to work: either very strong religious belief—extremely rare. Or: pride, even arrogance. If you say to yourself in such matters: who am I to judge?—you are already lost."^{xii} Arendt thought that the practice of human judgment is an essential feature of living together in common due to the role it plays in meeting the demands of justice.^{xiii} For Arendt, a world entirely devoid of justice would not be able to sustain human cooperation and human achievement.

These themes of understanding, judgment, and justice come together at the end of the "Epilogue" of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, where Arendt rewrites the judgment of the court regarding the nature of Eichmann's crime. In reply to Lionel Abel's criticism that she aimed to substitute her judgment for the court's, Arendt characterized it as "an imaginary summation of how the judges might have spoken."^{xiv} Importantly, Arendt emphasizes reasons for the extent of Eichmann's guilt that any political community could and should invoke in passing judgment over a person who performs actions like the ones Eichmann readily admitted he performed.

Roger Berkowitz characterizes Arendt's criticism at the heart of her rewriting of the court's judgment thus: "the Israeli judges should have dared to judge politically rather than legally."^{xv} This characterization hangs on an Arendtian sense of 'political' and thus can be easily misunderstood. His characterization also rests on the idea that judging legally and judging politically are mutually exclusive, but this is not the case when judging is conceived in the Arendtian sense.^{xvi} In the non-Arendtian and more common sense, their mutual exclusion can be understood as the difference between judging someone according to the laws of man and judging someone in light of partisan ideology. The former is committed to the belief that the legitimacy of judgment is due to the fact that it was made on grounds that were justified by or could be justifiable to all of humanity or to a particular political community, but the latter rests on no such consideration. For this reason, judging politically is widely recognized as antithetical to the proper role of a judge in civil or criminal proceedings.^{xvii}

But this common distinction is not what Arendt invoked in her 'political' rewriting of the judgment against Eichmann. Instead, her rewritten judgment seems to be based on an understanding of the laws of man (i.e. the basis of judging legally), or more specifically one of its basic conditions. In *The Human Condition*, published only a few years before the trial, Arendt linked 'the political' with a certain kind of action. And action relies upon the condition of plurality for its performance.^{xviii} By plurality, Arendt meant living and interacting with other people in a condition that is marked by distinction and equality—the idea that humans are "one among many, but never

more than one". Unlike state of nature theorists Hobbes, Locke, and to a lesser extent Rousseau, whose conceptions of politics arise from a vision of man unsullied by life in common, Arendt took the fact of plurality as a starting point for the human condition. However, she readily admitted that the horrible originality of the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews, Stalin's gulags, and the atomic bomb suggest that plurality does not condition human life absolutely. Arendt relied upon this conception of plurality to motivate Eichmann's death sentence in her revision of the judge's statement:

just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations—as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and should not inhabit the world—we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you.^{xix}

This explanation can be used in any judicial system because it relies upon an understanding of what the practice of law is based upon. This explanation can also be invoked by partisan positions arguing from any point on the ideological spectrum.

Thus judging legally and judging politically are not mutually exclusive in the Arendtian sense of these terms. A system of law is not possible without the condition of plurality. In this sense, judging politically calls attention to a particular feature of judging legally. A more accurate characterization of Arendt's criticism would be to say that the original judgment did not go far enough in its legal assessment of the nature of Eichmann's crimes. This interpretation also undermines critics who claimed that she repudiated the original judgment in offering her own.^{xx} According to Arendt, Eichmann was *not only* guilty according to the laws of the land, but he was *also* guilty according to the laws of man: he and his superiors had presumed that the condition of plurality could be bracketed without consequence. In this sense, Arendt could fault the judges for failing to judge politically; that is, they did not appreciate how Eichmann's actions violated what she called *the condition of politics: plurality*.

This ground for judgment is important for contemporary efforts to prosecute genocide within the fullest extent of the law; it is also useful for watchdogs who seek to prevent such catastrophes. Arendt thought that an accurate description of the nature of the crime—one that she considered unprecedented (on this point she was probably historically wrong), but one that once it appeared could "become a precedent for the future"^{xxi}—was necessary in order to levy a proper judgment. The series of subsequent genocides, and the continued inability of modern politics to see it for what it is before too many lives are lost, testifies to the horrible truth of Arendt's realization. Any accurate description has to include an account of the violation of the condition of plurality.

II

The film also fails to capture the relationship between judging and thinking in Arendt's work. Reviewers have noted how the movie and Barbara Sukowa's excellent acting aim to capture an otherwise ephemeral, perhaps even fundamentally anti-representational, phenomenon: the activity of thinking.^{xxii} The problem of representing what thinking looks and feels like—or the difference between what it looks like and what it feels like—evoke Plato's own efforts. In the beginning of the *Symposium*, Socrates becomes lost in thought, and after begging off his friend to go ahead to the party they were headed for, he stands motionless under a neighbor's porch, alone, and unresponsive to calls for his attention.^{xxiii} Meanwhile, he leaves his friend to show up uninvited to the party and offer excuses on his behalf. The whole portrait is a bit comical, perhaps because the witnessing of thinking—or catching someone in a thought—cannot help but make one feel uncomfortable. In Arendt's language, privacy is being invaded.

The comedy and discomfort are gone in von Trotta's representation. Several scenes show Arendt reclining on a chaise longue, drawing deeply from a cigarette, with her eyes closed or intent upon an indeterminate point in front of her. Arendt is also shown caught up in thought while watching the court TV in the pressroom during the trial. Though other reporters are around in these scenes, Arendt is experiencing an otherwise private moment. The impression is that thinking is lonely and inert. This stance toward thinking is also represented in the film in a flashback to the young Arendt visiting Heidegger's office where he tells her that "thinking is a lonely business" and in flashback where Heidegger lectures: "Thinking does not produce usable, practical wisdom. Thinking does not solve the riddles of the universe. Thinking does not endow us with the power to act."^{xxiv} In an interview released with the film's press kit, von Trotta affirmed these intentions to represent thinking: "The film shows Arendt as a political theorist and independent thinker set against her precise opposite: the submissive bureaucrat who does not think at all, and instead chooses to be an enthusiastic subordinate."^{xxv} The film captures something important about Arendt's thought in the contrast between an individual and a "joiner" or a conformist. Moreover, the contrast between thinking and thoughtlessness is pervasive in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Finally, a focus on thinking is appropriate given the fact that the film's explicit subject is Arendt's trial report in which her principle objection was Eichmann's inability to think. By implication, Arendt suggests that thinking (or at least the absence of it) can play a crucial role in politics.^{xxvi} But the film does not convey the full bloom of Arendt's political thought in at least two ways.

First, Arendt understood the connection between the mentality of joiners and the mentality of "spectators" who refuse to pass judgment because they were not there or because of the extraordinary nature of the circumstances. Both types fall back on clichés that short-circuit the capacity for thinking and thus the capacity for judging, and eventually the capacity for action. Spectators can be all too ready to say: "who

am I to judge?”^{xxvii} A joiner like Eichmann feels like life is meaningless unless he has a job to perform, a job that demands expertise and that leads to advancement in one’s career. This is exactly what Eichmann found by working in Himmler’s *Sicherheitsdienst* (also known as the S.D.) and taking an oath to the Führer which, according to Eichmann, made him bound to send his own father to his death.^{xxviii} He reported that his decision to join the S.D. was not “out of conviction” (in Arendt’s words) but rather, “happened so quickly and suddenly” and felt “like being swallowed up”^{xxix} (in his words). These are the sorts of clichés that joiners fall back on. And yet, joiners get something very real out of participation: a sense of meaning or purpose that perhaps is not fully appreciated until it is taken away. According to Arendt, Eichmann identified the significance of Germany’s defeat in personal, existential terms: “I sensed I would have to live a leaderless and difficult individual life, I would receive no directives from anybody, no orders and commands would any longer be issued to me, no pertinent ordinances would be there to consult.”^{xxx} Arendt believed that judgment was most needed in these particular circumstances faced by joiners in the Third Reich and spectators trying to understand the events retrospectively. Importantly, she did not accuse those in the Jewish leadership who chose to collaborate with the Nazis with lacking judgment.^{xxxi} Mistaken judgments are judgments nonetheless.

Second, Arendt identified herself as a political theorist, a profession she sharply distinguished from philosophy.^{xxxii} According to Arendt, philosophy requires a disinterested and universal point of view, whereas this is impossible in politics. In her own reflections on politics, she sought to cultivate “eyes unclouded by philosophy.”^{xxxiii} This distinction is essential to identifying her intellectual debts and the novelty of her ideas. Von Trotta mentioned the juxtaposition of Arendt and Eichmann, but the film also includes Heidegger, which raises the vexed question of the relationship between the ideas of Arendt and Heidegger. This is not the question of the nature of their personal relationship (melodramatically represented in the film by Heidegger burying his face in Arendt’s lap), which was explored in Kate Fodor’s play, *Hannah and Martin*.^{xxxiv} Rather, it is a question of ‘how much of Heidegger’s views on thinking, for example, does Arendt share?’. I have argued that the film represents thinking as lonely and inert, and that these views coincide with the representation of Heidegger’s views in the film. Arendt understood Heidegger as a quintessential philosopher; and calling herself a political theorist was a way of distancing herself from his project. A phrase by Cato appears with some regularity in Arendt’s works: “Never is a man less alone than when he is by himself, never is he more active than when he does nothing.”^{xxxv} Arendt did not believe that thinking is lonely, but rather it implies company, a “two-in-one”—the dialogue between me and myself following the example of Socrates. She also indicated, in line with Heidegger, that thinking is a “resultless enterprise.”^{xxxvi} The activity of thinking is not a means to another end; it is its own end. Moreover, for Arendt thinking implies inaction or “the interruption of all other activities,” because it requires us to “stop and think.”^{xxxvii} However, in political catastrophes, thinking ceases to be a neutral activity and the typical withdrawal of the thinking ego is simply not possible: “When

everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding because their refusal to join in is conspicuous and thereby it becomes a kind of action.”^{xxxviii} Eichmann’s “decisive” flaw, according to Arendt, “was his almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view.”^{xxxix} For Arendt, Eichmann’s reliance upon clichés was “connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else.”^{xl} In another work, Arendt referred to this as “representative thinking.”^{xli} Thus, the relationship between Arendt’s and Heidegger’s ideas is much more complex than the film suggests; and this complexity arises from the connection between thinking and politics in Arendt’s conceptual universe, a connection entirely absent in Heidegger.^{xlii}

These views on the activity of thinking add a new dimension to Arendt’s distinction between individuals and joiners, and to the relationship between judging and politics conceived as sharing the world with others. Individuals—people capable of thinking from the standpoint of others—are conspicuous because they appear as blockages in an otherwise well-oiled machine. This portrait of individuals as people who refuse to join in is amplified in her reflections on ‘the controversy’, where she added that such nonparticipants are people “who dared judge by themselves”, a crucial “precondition” of which is thinking from “the disposition to live together explicitly with oneself.”^{xliii} In stopping to think about whether they could live with themselves, individuals keep bureaucracies from functioning as smoothly as they would with only joiners. *Eichmann in Jerusalem* provides several examples worth remembering, which suggest that representative thinking can provoke resistance when it is possible. For instance, Arendt mentions the Belgian railway men leaving the doors of transit trains carrying Jews unlocked and open,^{xliv} the Danish people’s successful non-violent resistance to Nazi efforts to identify and deport Jews within their midst,^{xlv} and the forged papers and transportation provided to fleeing Jews by the German sergeant Anton Schmidt.^{xlvi}

The way in which the film turns attention to the activity and importance of thinking, and leaves it there, fails to appreciate the link between Arendt’s portrait of Eichmann and her “imaginary summation” against Eichmann. Arendt accused Eichmann of “not wanting to share the earth”—of violating plurality, the fundamental condition of political life. According to Arendt: “Judging is one, if not the most, important activity in which this sharing-the-world-with-others comes to pass.”^{xlvii} While the film appropriately valorized thinking, it failed to convey the need to also valorize judging. Though it is difficult to represent thinking on screen effectively, I take it that representing judging is no less of a worthy challenge.

III

It has been suggested that von Trotta’s film about Hannah Arendt is really directed toward a German audience.^{xlviii} The question of responsibility for the Holocaust seems only to be open, at this point, in Germany and among professional historians

of the Holocaust. I'm not totally convinced of this view, as the film does not emphasize the official West German concern about protecting Hans Globke, who was serving as one of Adenauer's closest advisors during the trial but who during the Nazi period was crucial to the implementation of—among other things—the 1935 Nuremberg Laws that revoked the citizenship of German Jews. The Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion struck a deal with German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to protect Globke from being summoned to trial as a witness, concerned that he might also be brought up on charges and thereby ignite a national debate about the sufficiency of the post-war denazification process. In exchange, Young-Bruehl reports, “West Germany was to supply Israel with military equipment and arms.”^{xlix} But the suggestion does raise an important question. What would be included in a film about Arendt's report of the Eichmann trial that was directed more explicitly at Israel? At the United States? At the world? Answering these questions brings to the fore additional themes of contemporary political significance from the trial report that did not appear in the film.

First, Arendt's discussion of statelessness might be particularly valuable to audiences in Israel and the United States. Arendt drew a parallel between the *de jure* statelessness of the Jews, which allowed for their detention and extermination under the Third Reich, and the *de facto* statelessness of Eichmann, which allowed for his successful kidnapping from Argentina and eventual trial in an Israeli court. No doubt, a critic of this equivalence could argue that the Jews in Nazi controlled territory did nothing to deserve their condition of statelessness, whereas Eichmann did. But such an argument fails to appreciate how a political agenda produced even Eichmann's statelessness. Three moments in the film that eluded to the problem of statelessness could have been developed to greater effect. First, early in the film when Arendt, Blücher, and Lotte Köhler are watching news coverage on the television, Arendt voices some frustration that West Germany will not try to extradite Eichmann. I would have liked to see the politics of why that was the case unpacked a little more. Second, Arendt mentions in class to her students that she was stateless for 18 years, between when she lost her German citizenship and when she was finally granted a passport (not just a visa) by the U.S. government. Finally, when Arendt returns to her Riverside apartment and faces the stack of letters from her readers, she resolves to respond to each of them for fear of being deported.ⁱ What exactly she feared could have been made more explicit in the film, perhaps through flashbacks to the hardships and uncertainty she faced as a stateless person. The theme invokes the condition of prisoners held at Guantanamo Bay and similar facilities around the world, and the continued statelessness of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Most recently, the contrast between Israeli attempts to target Hamas in the Gaza Strip often at the expense of noncombatants who have no official government to petition for the injustice of their treatment and the response to the (possibly unintended) downing of Malaysian Flight 17 by a surface-to-air missile launched by pro-Russian separatists in the Ukraine is striking. In the latter case, most victims of the jet crash came from the Netherlands and Australia, whose governments coordinated an international effort to recover and identify

remains (as much as possible given the instability of the area) and hold the separatists and those who supplied and trained them (and only these actors) accountable for the crime. No collective punishment of the people in the Donetsk or Luhansk regions of the Ukraine, the seat of the insurgency, was even on the table as a response. Thus, statelessness produces a series of 'unseen' injustices. The general point is that stateless people continue to exist in the international system and amount to some of the most insecure and vulnerable people in the world today. This fact is a pressing topic that the film does not encourage its audience to stop and think about.

Second, the film does not represent Arendt's final stance toward criticisms of the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem Court. When she is pictured in the film first discussing Eichmann's abduction with Blücher, she expresses concern that it is not right to try him in Jerusalem. The legality of the trial comes up again in a disagreement between Blücher (who thinks it is illegal) and Jonas (who defends it); Arendt indicates that she thinks Eichmann should be tried in an international court. But this discussion has to share the screen with the little comedy and drama that develops between Mary McCarthy, Thomas Miller (the head of the German Department who can't follow conversational German), and Lotte Köhler (who refuses to translate for them). Arendt's letters with Karl Jaspers touched upon this matter, and excising him from the film allowed for this issue to recede into the background. Jaspers argued for the need of an international tribunal (perhaps one hosted by the United Nations) to try Eichmann if the indictment was going to be not merely crimes against the Jewish people but also crimes against humanity. Jaspers was also concerned about the right of Israel to prosecute on behalf of all the Jews as if the Israeli state and the Jewish people were the same thing. In a letter to Jaspers, Arendt pointed out that the vast majority of Holocaust survivors were living in Israel, so that location for Eichmann's trial made a lot of a sense.^{li} In her trial report, Arendt mentioned another objection to the court's jurisdiction: since Eichmann's crimes did not occur within Israeli territory, Israel had no authority over their prosecution. In presenting Arendt's support for an international court, the film does not acknowledge the extraordinary way in which she eventually defended the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem court. She argued that the objection was based on an unjustifiably narrow and exclusively geographical understanding of the term 'territory'. Arendt offered what she took to be a clarification of the existing "political and legal concept."^{lii} She did not think she was offering a meaning that was against the traditional understanding, but only an elaboration of what was already assumed by the geographical sense of the term. According to Arendt, 'territory':

relates not so much, and not primarily to a piece of land as to the space between individuals in a group whose members are bound to, and at the same time separated and protected from, each other by all kinds of relationships, based on a common language, religion, a common history, customs, and laws. Such relationships become spatially manifest insofar as they themselves constitute the space wherein the different members of a

group relate to and have intercourse with each other.ⁱⁱⁱ

Arendt applied this conception of territory to the state of Israel, and argued that it would not exist if the “in-between space” of Jews in the diaspora had not been maintained and cultivated over thousands of years. This “in-between space” is what Arendt referred to as worldliness in *The Human Condition*. Arendt’s defense of the court’s jurisdiction could have been included in the final large lecture in the film, perhaps in response to a follow-up on the question of how a crime against the Jewish people could amount to a crime against humanity. The need for an international criminal court continues to remain misunderstood and largely unsupported by the public at large (more so in the United States than in, say, Belgium of course). Drawing greater attention to Arendt’s reflections could have revived the debate.

These features lead me to think that the film leaves us with a depoliticized Arendt. In so narrowly focusing her film on the Eichmann trial and the controversy that erupted in light of Arendt’s reflections on it, von Trotta has left the door open for another film (even several) on Hannah Arendt. A.O. Scott is right to think that Arendt’s life deserves a “mini-series.”^{iv} If von Trotta’s biopic is for Germans, then a focus on Arendt’s “Reflections on Little Rock”^v is the potential sister seed of a biopic for Americans, one that could get to the heart of contemporary debates about racial justice, continued white privilege, educational inequality, and discriminatory marriage laws.

Notes

i Young-Bruehl, Elisabeth. *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982. 334-5.

ii Young-Bruehl 335. Arendt died of a heart attack on December 4, 1975.

iii 1965/1992. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil*, revised and enlarged edition. New York, NY: Penguin. 282. For helpful and even-handed introductions to the nature of the controversy over Arendt’s trial report, see Rabinbach, Anson. 2004. “Eichmann in New York: The New York Intellectuals and the Hannah Arendt Controversy.” *October Magazine* 108 (Spring): 97-111 and Young-Bruehl (1982, chapter 8).

iv *Hannah Arendt*. 2012. Directed by Margarethe von Trotta. Perf. starring Barbara Sukowa. Cologne, Germany: Heimatfilm. Streaming online video.

v Arendt, Hannah. 1951/1994. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, new edition with added prefaces. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace & Co. 474. 1958/1998. *The Human Condition*, second edition with introduction by Margaret Canovan. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. 200.

vi Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. 1963. New York, NY: Penguin. 181.

vii To be clear, I do not agree with Austerlitz’s (Austerlitz, Saul. 2013. “A New Movie Perpetuates the Pernicious Myth of Hannah Arendt.” *The New Republic*, May 30.

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/113317/hannah-arendt-film>) claim that the film

advances a “myth” that Arendt developed in her own defense: the idea that her critics did not read the articles or the book. Amos Elon reported that Isaiah Berlin and Edmund Wilson accused each other of not reading the book in the midst of a heated argument about it (Elon, Amos. 2006/2007. “The Excommunication of Hannah Arendt.” *World Policy Journal* 23(4): 93-102. Adapted from the introduction to the Penguin Classics 2006 edition of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*). But I do believe that her most worthy critics—for instance, Gershom Scholem—did not get a remotely fair say in the film. In Scholem’s case, he was entirely removed from the film.

A moment in the film captures well the valid concerns voiced by some of Arendt’s critics, a scene that counts against Austerlitz’s claim that the film is nothing more than hagiography. During the party to celebrate Blücher’s health, Hans Jonas objects to a draft of Arendt’s thoughts. He says that she is offering “a philosophy lesson”, but the readers of *The New Yorker* “have to know what the Nazi Eichmann did” (von Trotta 2012). Arendt’s final lecture in the film also mentions this criticism. I appreciated the attention to the nature of one’s audience, and the need to craft a message tailored to one’s audience. In his contribution the controversy published in *Commentary* in 1963, Irving Howe wrote: “How many *New Yorker* readers...had ever before cared to read anything of the vast literature about Jewish resistance, martyrdom, and survival during World War II? How many would ever read anything about it again?” (cited in Rabinbach 2004, 103). To the care of the needs of one’s audience, Shlomo Grodzensky would add that one should consider the medium. Arendt’s articles were published amidst advertisements for products like lady’s garments and jewelry (cited in Elon 2006, xx). Though she is hardly responsible for the choice of the ads, she was a well-published author with connections to multiple publishing houses. I would have liked to film to attend to her decisions about how to get to Jerusalem and where to place her reflections on it. But I would reject the dichotomy implied by Jonas’s remarks in the film: attention to the details of Eichmann’s crimes and their philosophical significance are not mutually exclusive. The articles offer painstaking detail about exactly what Eichmann was—and was not—responsible for doing (see, especially 1965, 211-19).

No doubt von Trotta and Katz had a difficult task of representing a controversy that engaged in heated terms. Rabinbach draws on Irving Howe’s memoir to conclude, “there were polemical excesses on both sides” (2004, 103). Howe described the controversy, and his criticism of Arendt, in his memoir: “Overwrought and imbalanced, we at least cared. To say that one cares can easily become an excuse for self-indulgence or theatrics, and that did happen in this dispute—on both sides. But not to care is surely worse” (1982, 274). But even this retrospective assessment engages in polemical exaggeration. The charge against Arendt seems to be that she did not care about the impact her writings would have on Holocaust survivors and the wider Jewish community. But that takes the matter too far. Gershom Scholem stated the claim in its most accurate and least polemical form: Arendt’s failure was not that she did not care *at all*, but rather that she did not take *enough* care in what she said and how she said it. Arendt’s stance amounted to the claim

that *too much* care came with its own negative consequences, though this does not get her off the hook.

viii Scott, A. O. 2013. "How it Looks to Think: Watch Her." *New York Times*, May 28. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/29/movies/hannah-arendt-with-barbara-sukowa-and-janet-mcteer.html?_r=0

ix Lilla, Mark. 2013. "Arendt and Eichmann: The New Truth." *New York Review of Books*, Nov 21. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/nov/21/arendt-eichmann-new-truth/>

x von Trotta, Margarethe. 2013. "Director's Statement" and "An interview with Margarethe von Trotta." In press kit released by Zeitgeist Films.

<http://www.zeitgeistfilms.com/hannaharendt>

xi Arendt 1965, 297.

xii Quoted in Young-Bruehl 1982, 399.

xiii See, for instance, Arendt 1965, 294-295.

xiv Adolf Eichmann File, "Private reply to Jewish critics" 1963, 1 (*The Hannah Arendt Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Washington, DC. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/mharendtFolderP03.html> (accessed on June 24, 2014)). It is hard to reconcile how she could admit this point and at the same time insist: "I wrote a report, nothing else" (Adolf Eichmann File, "Private reply to Jewish critics" 1963, 1); a characterization that also appears in the film during her final lecture

xv Berkowitz, Roger. 2011. "The Power of Non-Reconciliation—Arendt's Judgment of Adolf Eichmann." *HannahArendt.net: Journal for Political Thinking* 6(1/2).

<http://www.hannaharendt.net/index.php/han/article/view/11/8>

xvi Berkowitz's article goes on to develop how this might be the case through an appeal to the concept of reconciliation in Arendt's thought. It is beyond the scope of the present article for me to address fully why I disagree with him. In brief, I do not believe that he attends to the difference between what is needed for action and what is needed for politics according to Arendt. He is not the first commentator to treat these as virtually synonymous; see for instance, Kateb, (*Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld. 1984. Ch.1), who argues that all action is fast political action for Arendt, and that the true mode of political action is speech (and not also deeds). Kateb finds it difficult to think that deeds can truly qualify as politics in the Arendtian since. But I think he treats the scope of deeds too narrowly (or too much in a Greek vein) when he locates them mostly in the context in war, often involving the use of violence. He admits, but does not take seriously enough, the place of civil disobedience as a sort of deed in Arendt's theory of action.

xvii In offering this distinction, I am glossing over some crucial ambiguities and ignoring the actual practice of judges. For an account of how some ideological (though not partisan) commitments might not be objectionable and in fact are inevitable in judicial reasoning, see Zeisberg, Mariah. "Should we elect the US Supreme Court?" *Perspectives on Politics* 7(4): 785-803. 2009. For recent accounts of how partisan ideologies arise in actual judicial decision-making, see Glynn, Adam

N. and Maya Sen. "Identifying Judicial Empathy: Does Having Daughters Cause Judges to Rule for Women's Issues?" *American Journal of Political Science*. First published online on May 9, 2014.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ajps.12118/abstract> and Canes-Wrone, Clark, and Kelly and Canes-Wrone, Brandice, Tom S. Clark, and Jason P. Kelly. 2014. "Judicial Selection and Death Penalty Decisions." *The American Political Science Review* 108(1): 23-39.

xviii Arendt 1958, 7.

xix Arendt 1965, 279.

xx Reported in Young-Bruehl 1982, 372.

xxi Arendt 1965, 273.

xxii See Berkowitz 2013a; Brody, Richard. "Hannah Arendt and the Glorification of Thinking." *New Yorker online*, May 2013.

<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/movies/2013/05/hannah-arendt-and-the-glorification-of-thinking.html>; LaChance, Naomi. 2013. "Hannah Arendt: banality of evil revisited." *The Berkshire Eagle*, Aug 14.

http://www.berkshireeagle.com/berkshiresweek/ci_23862560/hannah-arendt-banality-evil-revisited; Macdonald, Moira. n.d. "Hannah Arendt': ferocious portrayal of a blazing intellectual." *Seattle Times*.

http://seattletimes.com/html/movies/2021418502_hannaharendtxml.html; Rieff, David. 2013. "Hannah and Her Admirers." *The Nation*, Nov 19.

<http://www.thenation.com/article/177277/hannah-and-her-admirers>; Scott 2013, and Steinhauer, Jill. 2013. "Hannah Arendt's Passionate Thinking." *Guernica: A Magazine of art & politics*, June 19. <http://www.guernicamag.com/daily/jillian-steinhauser-hannah-arendts-passionate-thinking/>.

xxiii Plato. "Symposium," translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff. In *Plato: Complete Works*, edited by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing. 1997.

174d-175b.

xxiv Von Trotta 2012.

xxv Von Trotta 2013.

xxvi I am grateful to George Kateb for emphasizing this point to me.

xxvii This connection between lack of action and refusal to judge is present in Irving Howe's reflections on the controversy included in his personal memoir (1982). In the midst of summarizing Lionel Abel's polemic against Arendt using the case of the Ukraine where there were no Jewish Councils but where the Nazis were able to round up and kill hundreds of thousands of Jews in only eight months, Howe writes: "in truth nothing the Jews did or did not do could have made any large difference, so helpless were they before the Nazi conquerors" (1982, 273). Howe cites approvingly Gershom Scholem's open letter to Arendt on the issue of Jewish cooperation: "I do not know whether they were right or wrong. Nor do I presume to judge. I was not there" (quoted in 1982, 273). See Howe, Irving. 1982. *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

On a related note. Abel, among others, also accused Arendt of relying too heavily on one source: Raul Hilberg's *The Destruction of the European Jews*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1961). Less regularly mentioned is that Abel's criticism of her relied heavily upon Jacob Robinson's *And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative*. (New York, NY: Macmillan. 1965). Arendt discusses the Ukraine in chapter 13 of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and her treatment of the case demonstrates the different approach that she took to it than that of the prosecution (including Robinson who had served on the prosecution). According to Arendt, while the prosecution wanted to convict Eichmann for the suffering of the Jewish people and thus used the occasion to paint a general picture of the events in the East which Arendt noted included only infrequent reference to Eichmann (1965, 209), the judgment of the court was "a rewriting of the prosecution's case" and focused "on what had been done instead of on what the Jews had suffered" (1965, 211).

xxviii Arendt 1965, 42.

xxix Arendt 1965, 33.

xxx Arendt 1965, 32.

xxxi In a response to Abel's criticism, Arendt clarified that "the *institution* of the Jewish Councils, not the individual members, was irreplaceable; and if Eichmann was replaceable, the *institution* for which he worked...was not" (Adolf Eichmann File, "Private reply to Jewish critics" 1963, 1, emphasis original).

xxxii See Arendt 1994.

xxxiii Arendt 1994, 2.

xxxiv Fodor, Kate. 2004. *Hannah and Martin*. New York, NY: Dramatists Play Service.

xxxv The phrase appears in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951, 476), *The Human Condition* (1958, 325), and on the title page of *The Life of the Mind* (1971).

xxxvi Arendt, Hannah. 2003a. "Thinking and Moral Considerations." In *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited and with introduction by Jerome Kohn, 160-190. New York, NY: Schocken Books. Originally published in *Social Research* 38 (Fall 1971): 417-46, 177.

xxxvii Arendt 2003a, 177, emphasis original. Von Trotta and Pam Katz indicated that the final lecture Arendt offers in defense of herself in the film is a concatenation of several of Arendt's writings. One source, "Thinking and Moral Considerations", ends with similar memorable lines as the film's lecture. In the printed source, Arendt writes: "The manifestation of the wind of thought is no knowledge; it is the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. And this indeed may prevent catastrophes, *at least for myself*, in the rare moments when the chips are down" (2003a, 190, emphasis added). In the film, Arendt says: "The manifestation of the wind of thought is not knowledge, but the ability to tell right from wrong, beautiful from ugly. *And I hope* that thinking gives people the strength to prevent catastrophes in these rare moments when the chips are down" (von Trotta 2012). The italicized words indicate what I take to be equivalent ideas in the printed source and film, but the significance of their difference comes to light when they are considered with another moment in

the film: the scene between Arendt and William Shawn when they first talk about her trial report at her dining room table. My sense is that this scene with Shawn was written to demonstrate how Arendt could be arrogant. When Shawn reminds Arendt that few *New Yorker* readers will know Greek, Arendt responds that they should learn. When Shawn voices concern over her interpretation of the actions of the Jewish leaders, Arendt rejects the characterization by indicating that she “purposefully tried not to analyze or explain their behavior” (von Trotta 2012). To support his assessment Shawn then reads her a line as it actually appears in the book: “To a Jew this role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of their own people is undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story” (1965, 117). Arendt responds in the film: “It’s a fact” (von Trotta 2012). According to Austerlitz, this is supposed to represent Arendt “puzzled that anyone could take umbrage at her line of argument. Her work is in the service of truth, where others’ is presented as nefarious and self-interested” (2013). And one can hardly blame him for this interpretation given what the film provides as clues to understanding how Arendt could respond like that. Let me hazard an alternative interpretation. When the text reads “To a Jew” Arendt might take this as a fact because she is writing *from her own perspective*. She does not write: “To *the* Jews” or “To Jews”—as if to assume a more general perspective. And if “*at least for myself*” had remained in the final speech, the film’s audience would have had better (though admittedly quite subtle) grounds to understand the nature of Arendt’s judgments. The same line of thought appears in the volume on thinking in *The Life of the Mind*, but with yet another twist: “And this, at the rare moments when the stakes are on the table, may indeed prevent catastrophes, at least for the self” (1978, I.193). The claim became utterly impersonal by that point, and much less well phrased.

On this issue, Young-Bruehl accuses Arendt of failing to appreciate how “many Jews” would respond to that claim and of failing to offer reasons or rhetoric that would lead them to agree when they otherwise would not (1982, 344). I cannot help but agree that Arendt’s thoughts are solipsistic. I don’t know what to make of the idea that Arendt thinks *from her perspective* that catastrophes can be prevented when thinking actualizes its two by-products: conscience and judging. Isn’t the question—at this moment—a matter of what *actually* prevents catastrophes? I believe that Arendt’s stance can be explained in terms of existential motives. But spelling that out is beyond the scope of the present endeavor.

xxxviii Arendt 1978, I.192.

xxxix Arendt 1965, 47-8.

xl Arendt 1975, 49, emphasis original.

xli Arendt, Hannah. 1968b. “Truth and Politics.” In *Between Past and Future*, revised edition, 227-64. New York: Penguin. Originally published in *New Yorker*, February 25, 1967: 49-88, 241.

xlii See especially Villa, Dana R. 1996. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press and (*Politics, Philosophy, Terror: essays on the thought of Hannah Arendt*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1999. 81-86), and also Berkowitz, “Lonely Thinking: Hannah Arendt on Film.” *The*

Paris Review blog, May 30. <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/05/30/lonely-thinking-hannah-arendt-on-film/>

xlili Arendt, Hannah. 2003b. "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship." In *Responsibility and Judgment*, edited and with introduction by Jerome Kohn, 44-45. New York, NY: Schocken Books. Originally offered as a lecture in 1964. See Kateb (2006,166) for a compelling argument that the resister's judgment was fundamentally aesthetic for Arendt.

xliv Arendt 1965, 166.

xlv Arendt 1965, 171-5.

xlvi Arendt 1965, 230-1.

xlvi Arendt, Hannah. 1968a. "The Crisis in Culture." In *Between Past and Future*, revised edition, 197-226. New York: Penguin. Part of this chapter was originally published as "Society and Culture" in *Daedalus* 82 (Spring 1960): 278-87.

xlvi Arendt, Hannah. 1968a. "The Crisis in Culture." In *Between Past and Future*, revised edition, 197-226. New York: Penguin. Part of this chapter was originally published as "Society and Culture" in *Daedalus* 82 (Spring 1960): 278-87.

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