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Arendt, Thinking, and the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

This paper explores Arendt's thoughts on morality and the problem of evil. It examines her argument on thinking as a basis for moral judgement and action. The paper argues that although thinking plays an important role in making moral judgement, it is not a sufficient condition in order to avoid evil. The paper will proceed in five steps. Firstly, the birth of the moral question in Arendt's thought will be traced, most particularly in the event of totalitarianism where a total moral collapse took place. As a second step, Eichmann and his thoughtlessness – which leads him to commit evil deeds – will be discussed. Thirdly, Arendt's arguments namely the destructive character of thinking and the voice of conscience in thinking will be presented. This will be followed in the fourth step by an exploration of the problematic implications of Arendt's position. The last step is the conclusion.

Keywords: *Arendt, evil, politics, total moral collapse*

Hannah Arendt, one of the important yet highly controversial philosophers of our time, has been mostly associated with her thoughts on the political. It is in the political, Arendt says, where the human beings through their action and speech reveal or appear to others. It is where the fullness of human potentialities can be realized.¹ Yet, despite her focus on the political, Arendt

¹ Hannah Arendt, "Philosophy and Politics," in *Social Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Spring 1990), 87. Cf. also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* 2nd edition with Introduction by Margaret Canovan (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1958), 175-181.

never relegated to the side line the moral question and the problem of evil. These issues did not leave Arendt's thought, instead, they haunted her for the rest of her life. Her experience of horror and terror during Nazi Germany's totalitarianism pushed her to ask questions about how a "total moral collapse" could befall a supposedly highly civilized nation. Arendt was particularly intrigued by the case of Adolf Eichmann who orchestrated the Final Solution to the Jewish Problem. Eichmann engineered the extermination of the Jews and performed this task as if he was simply acting *ordinarily*. According to Arendt, totalitarianism reduced Eichmann into a state of thoughtlessness, blinding him from seeing the wrongness of his actions. Drawing from this insight, Arendt argues, then, that thinking and moral judgement are intimately connected such that when persons use their capacity for thinking evil can be avoided.

A Total Moral Collapse

Arendt's confrontation with the moral question can be traced back to her experience of totalitarianism in Nazi Germany. The mass extermination of Jews and their being treated like animals in the death factories provided Arendt with the compelling facts of how totalitarianism can haplessly destroy every trace of what we commonly call human dignity. Totalitarianism – anchored in the principle that everything is possible and therefore everything is destructible – reduces all human beings into superfluous objects that a society can get rid of for whatever reason – medical or ideological, among others. In such a situation, Arendt claims, there is only one discernible thing – the emergence of radical evil, an absolute evil neither punishable nor forgivable.² It is an evil which could no longer be explained and understood through the evil intentions of the actor such as "self-interest, greed, covetousness, resentment, [or] lust for power" and

² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1951), 459 & Hannah Arendt, "Responsibility Under Dictatorship," *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 21.

which no anger, love, or friendship could ever avenge, endure, and forgive. Indeed, the radical evil born through totalitarian domination shatters our normative categories rendering them inadequate for judging what is right and wrong. Consequently, Arendt says, there is but “speechless horror.”³

What further troubles Arendt is the fact of how easy it was to carry out the mass killings, which became a “normal” acceptable behaviour in a highly civilized society. According to Arendt, the most disturbing moral questions originate not from the Nazi behaviour but from the behaviour of ordinary respectable people. She writes:

Ruthless terror...was terrible and dangerous but it poses no moral problems. The moral issue arose only with the phenomenon of ‘coordination,’ that is, not with fear-inspired hypocrisy, but with very early eagerness not to miss the train of History, with this, as it were, honest overnight change of opinion that befell a great majority of public figures in all walks of life.⁴

Here, Arendt intends to highlight what is deeply troubling her – the unbelievable yet condemnable behaviour of ordinary respectable people who, although were educated on what is right and wrong, had effortlessly adapted to the evil system. These people, supposedly educated and civilized, relinquished the old moral maxim “thou shall not kill” and readily replaced it with the rule that killing is a moral duty for the sake of race, for the sake of a “good” society. They never questioned the evil nature of the new system and instead co-opted themselves with it as if it was the most ordinary thing to do.

For Arendt, this reversal of moral “allegiance” or moral categories precisely calls into question traditional moral philosophies most particularly that

³ Arendt, “Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” 23.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

of Aristotle.⁵ While virtue and character can be taught and learned by constant and proper education and training, they can be actually unlearned and forgotten even in an easy manner when change in manners and patterns of behaviour is demanded by new circumstances.⁶ To recall, for Aristotle, it is in the *polis* or community where virtues can flourish, and that moral knowledge – unlike technical, theoretical and practical knowledge – cannot be easily forgotten and unlearned.⁷ However, according to Arendt, through totalitarian terror and violence, the conditions necessary for the realization of the moral virtues can be easily disturbed. When the social (and political) conditions promote, encourage, and even incentivize distorted versions of truth and the good, moral virtues can be given up and subsequently replaced by a despicable desire to do what is wrong and evil. This is precisely what happened to Nazi Germany.

More controversially, Arendt does not only attack the perpetrators of a totalitarian system. She also directs her criticism at the victims themselves, that is, the Jews. She claims that the Jewish councils collaborated with the Nazis in the destruction of its people, “undoubtedly the darkest chapter of the whole dark story.”⁸ Arendt remarks:

Wherever Jews lived, there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized

⁵ Richard J. Bernstein, “The Banality of Evil’ Reconsidered” in *Hannah Arendt and the Meaning of Politics*, edited by Craig Calhoun & John McGowan, afterword by Martin Jay (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 303-304. Cf. also Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 157-178.

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg Limited, 1978), 5.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall, 2nd edition (New York: Continuum Publishing, Company 1999), 307-324.

⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 2d. Ed (New York: Viking Press, 1965), 117.

and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.⁹

Certainly, this provocative statement has led some of Arendt's commentators to criticize and even attack her. Gershom Scholem, Arendt's long-time friend and a leading Jewish scholar, accused her of being "flippant" and lacked any sense of love for her own people and sympathy for their suffering.¹⁰ However, contrary to their views, this is not really the case. Arendt neither passes a moral judgement on the members of the Jewish councils nor does she deny that millions of Jews would have been annihilated even if there were no Jewish Councils.¹¹ The reason why she has said such a statement is because she wants to portray the immensity of the moral collapse the Nazis had caused, conquering not only the persecutors but even the victims themselves. In this condition of total moral collapse, according to Arendt, there is a complete dissolution of the moral fibre that holds a community together, which could eventually lead to a transformation of human nature itself. This is how "radical" radical evil could get brought about by totalitarian domination.

With this, Arendt is confronted with the question that haunts her for the rest of her life: What could have led to such a total moral collapse? What led the educated, law-abiding, and ordinary individual incapable of seeing and confronting evil? Indeed, Arendt wants to comprehend what seems to be incomprehensible. In the Preface to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she writes:

⁹ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 125.

¹⁰ Gershom Scholem, "Eichmann in Jerusalem: An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arent," in *The Jew as Pariah*, 240-5, cited by Leah Bradshaw, *Thinking and Acting: The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 65.

¹¹ Cf. Bernstein, "The Banality of Evil' Reconsidered," 302.

Comprehension does not mean denying the outrageous, deducing the unprecedented from precedents, or explaining phenomena by such analogies and generalities that the impact of reality and the shock of experience are no longer felt. It means, rather, examining and bearing consciously the burden which our century has placed on us – neither denying its existence nor submitting meekly to its weight. Comprehension, in short, means the unpremeditated, attentive facing up to, and resisting of, reality—whatever it may be.¹²

In her attempt to comprehend the evils of totalitarianism, Arendt intends to confront reality – the total moral collapse the latter has generated.

Eichmann and Thoughtlessness

Chronicling the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, Arendt discovered some lessons about what happened during the Holocaust. (She clarifies that lessons are not the same as explanation, not even a theory, of the phenomenon.) After being kidnapped in Argentina, Eichmann was brought to Israel to face the crimes he had committed during Nazi Germany, foremost of which was that he engineered the Final Solution – the Jewish people’s extermination. What terrified Arendt were not Eichmann’s perverted or sadistic tendencies, for he never showed to have possessed them but instead, it was his abnormally “normal” disposition. He never realized that what he was doing was wrong, saying that he was simply acting out of “duty.”¹³ This Arendt calls the “banality of evil.”

¹²Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, viii.

¹³Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 276.

Here, Arendt captured the most egregious effect of totalitarianism. While it isolates men, thereby destroying their capacity for action, totalitarianism destroys men's capacity for thinking.¹⁴ Eichmann was never able to judge right action from wrong action because of his inability to think, that is, his thoughtlessness. (Later I will discuss more elaborately the relation between thinking and judgement, more particularly moral judgement). Note that Arendt is not suggesting here that Eichmann should be exonerated from personal guilt or moral responsibility because of his thoughtlessness. Ignorance, insanity, or passive obedience to political authority are not acceptable excuses or defence for one's evil deeds. Instead, what struck Arendt most was Eichmann's "absence of thinking" leading him incapable of judging in those circumstances where (moral) judgement is most needed. Arendt asks: "Is evil-doing...possible in default of not just 'base motives'...but of any motives whatever... Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty for telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought?"¹⁵

As regard to the action-intentionality model of moral and legal deliberation, Arendt maintains that the intention of action does not have to be proven in order to establish guilt, as in the case of Eichmann. The fact that one committed a crime that goes against some laws – moral or legal – is a sufficient ground for moral condemnation. As Leah Bradshaw points out, the justness or unjustness of an action does not depend on the subjective intentions of the actor.¹⁶ Justice, the good, or moral principles for that matter are transcendent or objective which retains their universal validity even if people fail to recognize and adhere to them. This implies that for Arendt there are certain "truths" which cannot be changed at will like changing table manners, and that these "truths" are discoverable only by thought. These moral principles constitute the fundamental bases upon which human actions are judged as right or wrong,

¹⁴ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 474 & *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 48.

¹⁵ Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, vol. 1, 4-5.

¹⁶ Bradshaw, *Acting and Thinking*, 66.

thereby, putting limits to what humans can do. Drawing from this view, Arendt found Eichmann's execution justified because he failed to recognize what we can do and not do as humans.

Furthermore, Arendt contends that thoughtlessness can wreak more havoc for mankind than evil intent.¹⁷ What she means here is that the individual who does an action with evil intentions at least knows that what he is doing is wrong, so that at the back of his mind there is a recognition of the good. But the thoughtless person can neither judge nor distinguish the difference between the two. So, if he does evil deeds, he is as if just doing an ordinary thing like it is part of his daily routine. As such, the extent of the possible evil deeds that a thoughtless person can do would be greater than those done by someone who is motivated by evil intent. As such, the thoughtless or ignorant criminal is more dangerous than the cold-blooded criminal.

One question that can be raised here is whether or not Arendt is correct with this view. Is it not the case that the cold-blooded criminal – or the cunning, scheming evil person – more dangerous than the thoughtless criminal? We can take for example a politician who is only motivated by an evil intent so as to protect his own political interests or desire for vengeance against those who have erred against him. Or think of someone who has a perverted mind thinking that black lives do not matter and that it is fine for them to be tortured, assaulted, or killed. Perhaps, in defence of Arendt, what can be said here is that when we speak of practical consequences, the cold-blooded criminal may be more dangerous. But, morally speaking, the case of the *thoughtless* criminal—someone who seems to think that what he/she is doing is just a routine, part of ordinary life – may be more worrying. When evil becomes so ordinary, when it is accepted as “just normal” and which something that cannot be questioned at all, something is utterly wrong. When the killing of suspected criminals is treated as ordinary as butchering a pig or a chicken that does not disturb the moral

¹⁷ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 288.

sensibilities of people, something is absolutely wrong. This situation could even become more worrying when instead of questioning, the very people who are supposed to be educated, civilized, and intelligent try to justify such evil deeds. Indeed, these deeply trouble Arendt for such attempts amount to transforming human nature itself.

For Arendt, the capacity for thought is a prerequisite for the exercise of moral judgement. She asks: Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining whatever happens to come to pass or to attract attention, regardless of results and specific content, could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil doing or even actually ‘condition’ them against it?¹⁸ Arendt is interested to find out whether or not there exists:

[A] human faculty which enables us to judge rationally without being carried away by either emotion or self-interest, and which at the same time functions spontaneously, that is to say, is not bound by standards and rules under which particular cases are simply subsumed, but on the contrary, produces its own principles by virtue of the judging activity itself?¹⁹

Let me now proceed to discussing Arendt’s answer to these questions namely the 1) the *destructive* character and 2) the voice of *conscience* in thinking.

Thinking As “Destructive” and the Voice of Conscience

Referring to Kant, Arendt holds that thinking is different from knowing. On the one hand, knowing is the possession of certain, verifiable knowledge, like

¹⁸ Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 5 & Hannah Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” in *Responsibility and Judgment*, 160.

¹⁹ Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” 27.

what a scientist does. On the other hand, thinking is the urge to understand that which can never be fully captured but always sought.²⁰ Open to everyone, thinking is a quest for meaning and its results are uncertain and unverifiable, even self-destructive in some ways. Arendt says: “The business of thinking is like the veil of Penelope: it undoes every morning what it had finished the night before.”²¹

According to Arendt, this destructive character of thinking plays a crucial role in how thinking can avoid evil doing. In her view, thinking as destructive makes one critical of the moral conventions, dogmas, or one’s previously held beliefs and values, so that one no longer accepts anything without subjecting it to close examination.²² Arendt likens this to Socrates’s “job” as a gadfly, examining and disturbing the Athenians, that is, waking them up from their “dogmatic slumber” and making them realize their own ignorance. Thinking, therefore, unfreezes frozen thoughts and stops people in the midst of action. In these respects, thinking is fundamentally subversive in that it undermines existing sets of beliefs, turning them upside down and even sideways.

Applied to the problem of evil doing, being critical or doubtful of the rules, moral codes or principles of one’s action can help to “think twice” from doing immoral and unjust deeds. By exposing the validity of the rule, the underlying evil character of the rule and action will be eventually exposed. According to Arendt, unquestioning people hold fast to prescribed rules under which particulars are subsumed, and therefore, they “get used to never making up their minds,” that is, of deciding independently.²³ Consequently, such persons would be easily converted or persuaded when a new value replacing the old is offered. This was what happened in the reversals or switch of moral laws among civilized,

²⁰ Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 163.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 166.

²² *Ibid.*, 176.

²³ *Ibid.*, 180.

educated Germans during Nazism. Arendt was surprised how effortless it was to reverse the basic command: “Thou shall not kill.”

Possessing the attitude of being critical liberates the faculty of judging what is right and what is wrong, the faculty which allows us to judge particulars without subsuming them into general rules. Arendt writes:

Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgments, and they did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by, under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no rules existed for the unprecedented.²⁴

Borrowing from Kant who applied the principle in aesthetic judgment, this faculty is what Arendt calls reflective judgment, that is, judging the particular without the guidance of some universal pre-existing rule. The critical or questioning attitude can help bring this about. Nevertheless, a question remains: how does this reflective judgment become connected to morality (and politics too)?

Here, Arendt points to the pluralistic character of judgment in that judging is linked to taking others’ viewpoints into account. It places the individual into a certain relation with others, a particular way of being with others, which according to John McGowan, “distances” the person “from the evil of denying others a place in a world alongside and in relation to us.”²⁵ Thus, for Arendt, the recognition of plurality, of judging from other’s viewpoints is essential for

²⁴ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 295. Cf. Also Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, edited and interpretative essay by Ronald Beiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

²⁵ John McGowan, *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 123.

morality because it offers us a mode of existing that takes *others* into consideration. By taking into account the perspective of others, it fosters not only critical discourse but more importantly “reconciliation” with others in that the latter – not only the views of other human beings but more so their own being as persons – are ultimately given value. After all, as Arendt puts it, radical evil “is an attack upon human diversity as such.”²⁶

Arendt’s attribution of value to human diversity is connected to her second argument as to how thinking can avoid evil. She makes mention of two Socratic propositions namely: 1) it is better to be wronged than to do wrong; and 2) it is better to disagree with a multitude of people like that of a discordant chorus or lyre than be “out of harmony with myself and contradict me.”²⁷ The first proposition is mainly about integrity while the second is about psychic harmony.²⁸ To live in integrity to live in consistent and uncompromising adherence to moral principles and values, that is, to do the morally right thing no matter the circumstances even when it is extremely difficult and tempting. Meanwhile, to live in psychic harmony is to be at peace with oneself just as the experience of being able to sleep well at night.

The two propositions have a special relationship in that the second justifies the first. This means that insofar as I appear to or am together with others, *I am one*. Otherwise, the others would not recognize me. However, because I am not only for others but also for myself, I am not just one. *I am two-in-one*. There is also another voice which can be experienced in self-consciousness, in an inner dialogue with oneself. The voice of conscience always accompanies me wherever I go and whatever I do. It is the eternal witness of all my thoughts and deeds. Adulterating Freud, conscience is my (punishing)

²⁶ Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 268-269.

²⁷ Arendt, “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 181.

²⁸ Joseph Beatty, “Thinking and Moral Consideration: Socrates and Arendt’s Eichmann” in *Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays*, edited by Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman (Albany: State University New York Press, 1994), 61.

superego that awaits me when I am all alone. That is why in order to live at peace with oneself, it would be better to be wronged than to do wrong. An individual who chooses to do evil deeds will be forever tormented by his conscience even when no one except himself knew what he did.

How exactly is conscience related to (moral) judgement? According to Arendt, although both faculties are related to questions about right and wrong, conscience is more internal while judgment is more external. As the side-effect of thinking, conscience allows human beings to evaluate their actions in an internal sense. Its direct object is the self. Meanwhile, as the by-product of the liberating activity of thinking, judgment refers to the external manifestation of our capacity for thinking critically. Its direct object is the world. In this respect, judgment makes possible what Arendt calls “the manifestation of the wind of thought” in the sphere of appearance.

Arendt says that conscience played a crucial role in the decision of those individuals who retired from public life in Nazi Germany. They refused to cooperate with Nazi Germany not because of their fidelity to the moral law “Thou shall not kill” but because their conscience told them that they cannot live with a murderer. Their action did not change the political situation dramatically, but it was extraordinary, morally speaking, because those who did so listened to the voice of their conscience.

Nevertheless, one question that can be raised here is: In the inner dialogue of oneself, does the voice of the other also include the voice of *others*, for instance the perspective of the society? And if it does, what actually is the content of this voice of others? This could prove to be problematic. The danger here lies in the possibility that the interiorised viewpoint of others may be an otherness that supports and reinforces evil doing rather than opposing it. This is seen, for example, in Eichmann who thought that he was following his conscience which spoke of respectable society.

Some Blind Spots

To recall, Arendt's use of Socratic thinking as a model is connected to her hesitation to provide any normative content about what she means by "right" and "wrong" actions. In making moral judgement, she does not want that a person does so simply on the basis of accepted and established norms, as if one particular action is merely subsumed under a universal law. As Arendt puts it, the independent faculty produces the moral principles themselves by virtue of the activity of judging. Her discussion on conscience further reinforces this view. For Arendt, conscience does not provide moral prescriptions unlike the voice of God. As a by-product of the inner dialogue between me and myself, conscience only tells me what I am not supposed to do, what to avoid in my actions and dealings with people. Arendt puts it perspicuously: "[O]nly under this assumption can we risk ourselves on this very *slippery moral ground* with some hope of finding a *firm footing* [my emphases]." ²⁹

Notwithstanding the power and veracity of Arendt's thoughts, I would like to argue that thinking – in Arendt's sense – may not be sufficient to ascertain that an evil deed is avoided. Although thinking and a questioning attitude may help prevent a person from merely accepting those rules, values, among other things that are introduced to him, evil doing may not be completely ruled out. This is because critical thinking – which primarily refers to Socratic thinking – yields no positive results. It does not produce moral prescriptions and norms about what ought to be done.

By refusing to specify the moral principles as a basis for a person's action and judgment, one could wonder if Arendt is treading on an indefensible and dangerous ground. It might be too presumptuous to say that just by the process of critical thinking or by having that questioning attitude one can always arrive at the insight on what ought to be done. Shouldn't it be necessary that at some

²⁹ Arendt, "Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship," 27.

point one has an idea about what the right or the good is, no matter how crude? Of course, one can draw from Arendt's position of living in integrity – of choosing to be wronged than to do wrong. But, it is perplexing how far can Arendt treat this as a legitimate moral principle to serve as a basis for moral decision-making when she abhors the idea of preconceived moral norms.

Furthermore, while having a critical eye may be used for good purposes, it may also be used for evil purposes. Arendt seems to have confirmed this danger when she points out that such endeavour can also produce licence and cynicism like what happened to Alcibiades and Critias, two of Socrates's pupils.³⁰ And, what to make of the possibility that thinking can become so twisted so that it can even be used to rationally justify evil? Take for example the case of highly educated and intelligent individuals who attempt to justify the apparent evil deeds of politicians even as it is too obvious that something is wrong with their actions. The point here is that even rational and critical thinking can be potentially used in the perpetuation of evil deeds.

One might argue that the case above is no longer considered as thinking in an Arendtian sense. After all, it is through thinking that one can also critically examine one's own position and views, including the motivation of one's actions. Arendt's position on the destructive character of thinking precisely calls into question this inevitable situation. However, if nothing escapes from the critical eye of Arendtian thinking, there remains a gap that has to be filled between critically examining an action, rule, or view and knowing what has to be actively done, morally speaking. It might be the case that even after the exercise of critical thinking, one still does not know the right or good action. As pointed out, Socratic thinking does not yield a positive result but only a state of *aporia* – that one does not know.

³⁰ Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 176.

All these worries are further reinforced by Arendt's vague description about the connection between thinking and (moral) judgement. At one time, she thinks that judging (in the sense of judging right from wrong) is a form of thinking, but at another time, she emphasizes that both are independent mental activities. No wonder Arendt treats conscience as a "by-product" of thinking, and (moral) judgment as a "by-product" of the liberating activity of thinking.³¹ The repercussions of these are serious because it would imply that the moral effects of thinking are not the primary objectives of the thinker. Instead, they are just a secondary, if not "marginal affair."³² As such, contrary to Arendt's view, morality does not really occupy a central position in rational thinking.

Conclusion

I have discussed how Arendt comes to grip with the moral question or the problem of evil brought about by her experience of totalitarian domination. For Arendt, thoughtlessness or the inability to think is the reason why one cannot judge right action from wrong action as seen in Eichmann's case. Also, I have presented Arendt's arguments why thinking can avoid evil doing namely the destructive character of thinking and the voice of conscience in thinking. Then, I have tried to show why at some point rational thinking may not be sufficient to avoid evil doing. Indeed, like Socrates, Arendt is a gadfly who awakens mankind in the twentieth century from its "dogmatic slumber" and urges us to reflect on the moral evils of the last or present century. Typical of Arendt, she never pretends to have said the last word as regards moral questions as if to say that she knows nothing. Perhaps, this is because doing so would rather be like totalitarian domination.

³¹ Bernstein, "The Banality of Evil' Reconsidered," 312-314.

³² Arendt, *The Life of the Mind: Thinking*, 192 cited by McGowan in *Hannah Arendt: An Introduction*, 115.

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