

Letters to the Editor

'Eichmann in Jerusalem'

TO THE EDITOR:

YOUR error in asking Judge Musmanno to review Hannah Arendt's book is explained by the fact that "Eichmann in Jerusalem" deals with the trial of a Nazi criminal and Judge Musmanno has extensive experience in this particular judicial field. However, the sub-title—"A Report on the Banality of Evil"—forewarned that Miss Arendt did not intend to limit herself to a discussion of the legal aspects of the case. Indeed, the main subject of her book is a psycho-sociological analysis of Eichmann. No intellectually sensitive reader will deny that this analysis is going into depth. The far-flung debate which it ignited is evidence of its interesting and provoking quality. Judge Musmanno's review contributed to the provocation, and the reaction of your readers enabled you to publish a most interesting confrontation between what we may call the "intellectual" and the "pragmatic" approach.

The pragmatists found relief from the strain of reading Miss Arendt's book in Judge Musmanno's review. To their understanding she unnecessarily complicated the simple fact that Eichmann was guilty of mass murder; a searching investigation of his motives seems to them to be irrelevant as they have no bearing on the question of his guilt. All that was required was the re-affirmation of the Nuremberg Doctrine of the criminality of the Nazi regime and the rejection of the defense of having acted under superior order.

So far Judge Musmanno and his supporters may be right, but they miss the level on which Miss Arendt presents the result of her painstaking search when they accuse her of defending an indefensible man; they try to simplify facts while Miss Arendt tries to show their complexity. The small team of men capable of fanatical leadership in Germany needed inferior elements willing to follow but unfit for leadership.

As shown by Miss Arendt, Eichmann was a prototype of a Nazi bureaucrat, the man without a soul, without a conviction of his own, over-zealous to serve the leader who offers him a position far more elevated than his mediocre gifts would ever have attained in a normal world. While there might be some grandeur in the horrible deeds of a great criminal, Eichmann and his ilk demonstrate the "banality of evil." From the viewpoint of criminal justice such findings may be superfluous; from the viewpoint of the sociologist they are helpful in explaining the evil of totalitarian government and possibly in avoiding its recurrence. . . .

While Miss Arendt's knowledge of facts is impressive, she is also not free from error. Three witnesses of the murder of a Jewish group are catechised for having failed to give

to the world an example of everlasting value by choosing to protest aloud and die. But, apparently, Miss Arendt has forgotten that according to her great teacher, Karl Jaspers, "thousands of Germans have sought death in resistance against the Regime" (address at Heidelberg University, Aug. 15, 1945). Miss Arendt also is careless in blaming the Federal Republic of Germany for keeping five thousand judges in office who had served under the Hitler regime. More thorough research would have revealed that at all times the majority of German judges have been dealing with civil cases only and that there is substantial evidence of antagonism to the Nazi regime among the civil judges in Germany.

It is also inaccurate to hold against Adenauer that he continues to keep in office Dr. Globke, without mentioning that, according to sworn testimony of high dignitaries of the Roman Catholic church, Globke remained in the service of the Hitler government only upon their urgent request, and as an informer served the cause of resistance to the regime. Miss Arendt emphasizes that there was no merit in Hitler's claim of a monolithic structure of his realm. But the sarcastic vein in which she talks of the German people leaves the uninformed reader with the impression that the non-monolithic

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pattern consisted in a variety of Nazi types. Fairness should have required Miss Arendt to avoid this result by giving some serious attention to non-Nazi and anti-Nazi groups of the German people.

JOSEPH KASKELL,

New York.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Miss Arendt can take care of herself and Judge Musmanno's rather childish piece clearly showed him to be so vastly inferior to Miss Arendt intellectually that no one of intelligence who read her remarkable book could take him seriously. . . .

GEORGIANA REMER,

New York.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Miss Arendt failed to make the point she says she wished to make. When capable, competent minds such as Judge Musmanno fail to see her purported end, how can the average reader be expected to find it? . . .

PASQUALE VACCARO.

Westwood, Mass.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Miss Arendt's whole philosophy attacks abstract systems and social trends which lack the recognition that the human spirit can transcend social evils. At the final moment of responsibility the individual chooses and if his choice is inhuman he is guilty. The vague "mentalities" which according to Miss Arendt are "responsible" for totalitarianism are as obscure and poorly generalized as the Nazi conceptions of the corrupting effects of Jews within a nation. The real problem is lack of human responsibility. . . .

P. RICHMAN.

Bronx, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

The straightforward virtue of the Danish rescue described in "Rescue in Denmark" (June 23) is an interesting contrast to the vicious quibbling of Hannah Arendt on the nature of evil. I find it at least curious that it was just those peoples whose statistics on matters of popular morality are always so distressing that reacted with clarity and authenticity to the Nazi challenge.

RABBI GERALD J. BLIDSTEIN.

Brooklyn.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Perhaps we are no longer taking time to read carefully if we miss irony and subtle distinctions, and perhaps then we must agree with Miss Arendt when she says that Judge Musmanno's review was "of a book which . . . was never either written or published." . . .

CLAIRE STEIN.

West Copake, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . I think it of considerable interest that Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* ("The Representative"), without question in my mind the outstanding drama about Nazi attitudes to appear since World War II, in-

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dependently confirms Hannah Arendt's thesis regarding "the banality of evil" under Hitler. Eichmann and his cohorts, far from being ideological anti-Semites, were dehumanized marionettes prepared to accept any set of orders enveloped in a mystique of absolute power. At one point in his drama *Hochhuth* brilliantly suggests that today they would not make good neo-Nazis inasmuch as neo-Nazism in the Adenauer era is symptomatic of disorder. Himmler's hopes for marching against Russia with the Western allies after he had ordered the concentration camps blown up indicates a deep-rooted sickness of our age. . . .

GEOFFREY CLIVE

St. Louis, Mo.

TO THE EDITOR:

I HAVE received numerous telephone calls about my letter concerning Judge Musmanno's review of Hannah Arendt's "Eichmann in Jerusalem" from readers who were perplexed at its appearance under the heading "The Review Defended", (Book Review, June 23) since it seemed to them that its praise was ironic. I wrote the letter as a cooled expression of my outrage at the review, at its blindness to the philosophical substance of the book. You were kind enough to print my letter, which might (I had hoped) quietly enough have made its between - the - lines point to humor those who were as astounded by the review as I was; but by making me the first defender you put both yourself and me on the spot. It serves me right. I ought to have bellowed instead that a front-page review in *The Times* should miss the point of so profound a book is unthinkable. But I couldn't find the words. . . .

IRVING J. WEISS.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

[Here is Mr. Weiss' original letter as printed:

I was personally relieved to read the review by Justice Musmanno of Hannah Arendt's "Eichmann in Jerusalem." It certainly pulled no punches in putting the blame for the murder of Europe's Jews directly on Adolf Eichmann. . . . Miss Arendt casts her accusations of participation in evil so wide and spreads them so thin not only among Germans, Europeans and even us Americans, but also among Israelis and Jews themselves, that there is simply no point in attending to her seriously. It is as if each of billions of us human beings in the world were somehow implicated — including her readers! How much more satisfying to read a forthright, unmisguided thinker like Musmanno, who is able, with confidence, to direct the blame for such evils not toward certain evasive qualities in our common humanity but toward a single, transfixable human being in his own right who is now, thank God, dead and buried.]