

Letters to the Editor: 'Eichmann in Jerusalem'

HANNAH ARENDT'S book, "Eichmann in Jerusalem," has caused controversy since its first appearance as a series of articles in *The New Yorker*. In her book Miss Arendt is harshly critical of the Eichmann trial and its cast of lawyers, judges and witnesses. She finds Eichmann a small-minded bureaucrat who functioned as a cog in the vast machine of German totalitarianism. But her real concern is not with one man but with a system that made it possible for him to do what he did.

Judge Michael A. Musmanno—of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, a witness at the Eichmann trial, and a judge at the Nuremberg trials—reviewed the book for this section. He supported the legitimacy of the trial, which Miss Arendt had questioned, and concluded that the book was a virtual defense of Eichmann. He also called attention to a number of inaccuracies, which, he felt, invalidated the work as scholarly history.

Judge Musmanno's appraisal brought *The Book Review* well over 100 letters. The majority attacked the review and defended the book. Many of these correspondents thought that Judge Musmanno had misread the book, either mistaking or ignoring Miss Arendt's ironies. Defenders of the review, on the other hand, felt with the Judge that Miss Arendt, in accepting Eichmann's contention that he was merely a cog in the machine, had mitigated his guilt.

Below is a statement from Miss Arendt, a reply from Judge Musmanno, and a selection from readers' letters.

A Statement From Miss Arendt

TO THE EDITOR:

YOU asked for a statement on Judge Musmanno's review of my book "Eichmann in Jerusalem." I find it hard to comply for two reasons: One is that the interesting point of this matter is your choice of a reviewer rather than the review itself. And the other reason is that the predictable result of your choice produced a "criticism" of a book which, to my knowledge, was never either written or published.

The choice of the reviewer was bizarre, because I had characterized Mr. Musmanno's views on totalitarian government in general and on Eichmann's role in it in particular as "dangerous nonsense."¹ Mr. Musmanno, even though he is a judge, chose not to mention the fact that he was writing *pro domo*. But this was no secret, and it is hard to understand why you did not supply this information. You mention yourself that the reviewer was "a witness at the Eichmann trial," hence he was likely to be mentioned in a report on it. The book's index could have shown you in a few minutes all you needed to know. If, on the other hand, you chose your reviewer in full *connaissance de cause*, this would constitute such a flagrant break with normal editorial procedures as to make it much more interesting than the review itself.

I shall assume that you were ignorant of the pertinent facts in your choice. Still, I find it hard to understand that the review itself did not surprise you. Obviously, you never read the book and therefore could not be aware of the over-all misrepresentation.² (I realize that no book editor can read, or even glance at, all books which are reviewed in his magazine, but to

¹ The reasons for the selection of Judge Musmanno are stated accurately by Judge Musmanno in a letter that follows.
² Miss Arendt is wrong. The book was read by the Book Review editor and one of his assistants before the assignment was made.

spot elementary falsifications—distortions, which are not matters of opinion—belongs, perhaps unjustly, among his normal duties.) However, the review contains a number of statements, so startling as to arouse editorial curiosity even in an editor who knows nothing about the book, or its author, or his reviewer. Eichmann, your reviewer wrote, was represented by me as a "Zionist" who "loved Jews" (sic!) and "was ignorant of the *Kristallnacht* or Night of Broken



Hannah Arendt.

Glass, even though the whole world knew of" it. (My italics.) (The truth about the last point is that Eichmann said he had not been informed of the preparations for the pogrom of November, 1938. We possess a great many documents dealing with the *Kristallnacht*. Eichmann's name is nowhere mentioned. The Jerusalem court cleared him on this count.)

If the editorial offices of *The New York Times Book Review* had taken the trouble to check such obvious fantasies, it might even have recognized its reviewer's curious habit of lifting whole sentences out of the book, of rephrasing them slightly to avoid quotation marks, and of thus saying with great emphasis against the author what in actual fact was said by the

author. Thus, your reviewer's point that Eichmann's "guilt did not depend on personal physical annihilation" and the qualifying quotation from the district court's judgment is not at all your reviewer's viewpoint but the point of the author.

It would be too tiresome to list even the most flagrant falsifications of your reviewer. Instead, I shall give you an example of one of the more subtle distortions. Your reviewer states that I "solemnly announce" that "Eichmann did not know Hitler's program when he joined the Nazi party." I said: "When Eichmann told the Jerusalem court that he had not known Hitler's program he very likely spoke the truth: 'The Party program did not matter, you knew what you were joining.'" The point here is that totalitarian movements do not depend upon their program—in contrast to Continental parties. But even a reader who is unable to understand that the second part of my sentence, which is a quote from Eichmann, reveals Eichmann's totalitarian mentality, should be able to see that the first part of the sentence is qualified by its second part. This is a matter of grammar.

To repeat: The point of the matter is not the review, but the fact that a paper like *The New York Times* published it. After having printed and, presumably, read the biographical sketch of the author, it is inconceivable that you could believe that the review said—that I "sympathized" with Eichmann and had written his defense. Moreover, do you really think it very likely that *The New Yorker* would have run a series in defense of Eichmann of all people, or that *The Viking Press* would have published it as a book?

HANNAH ARENDT.

Rome, Italy.

A Reply From Judge Musmanno

TO THE EDITOR:

I WILL comment on Miss Arendt's letter point by point. Where she refers to the same subject more than once I will make but one observation.

There was nothing "bizarre" about *The New York Times Book Review* asking me to write the review on "Eichmann in Jerusalem." Everyone knows that the Book Review endeavors to select as reviewers those individuals who are, because of profession or experience, more generally familiar than others with the subject of the book to be reviewed. The editors assumed that I qualified in this respect because I was a judge at three of the war crimes trials in Nuremberg. I testified at the Eichmann trial, have been a judge for 32 years, and for 18 years have studied the documentation on war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Miss Arendt errs as to what her book contains. She did not

characterize "views on totalitarian government" and "Eichmann's role in it" as "dangerous nonsense." In fact the subject of totalitarian government was not even mentioned. What she characterized as "dangerous nonsense" was a feature of the decision of the Israel Supreme Court on the subject of "superior orders" and they said that my testimony supported it. In the first place, Miss Arendt is not qualified to condemn so crassly the solemn judgment of the highest court of a nation. In the second place, I did not testify that Eichmann never had superior orders. I testified that Eichmann dealt with Himmler and others of the murderous oligarchy.

My review was not *pro domo*. It was *pro bono publico*. It was imperative that the public know of Miss Arendt's many misstatements of facts in the Eichmann case, because that case has taken an important place in the history of the world and the human spirit. Thus, I pointed out, for instance, that Miss Arendt said that Eichmann never attended a mass execution by shooting, when he actually described such an attendance himself. She says my review contained misrepresentations, but she has made no attempt to support her utterance that Eichmann did not attend an execution.

There were no misrepresentations of any kind in my review. I merely picked up a long ruler and pointed to the blackboard of evidence and showed where Miss Arendt departed from the facts. Every statement made by me is verifiable from the official record.

I did not say that Miss Arendt said Eichmann loved the Jews. The plain purport of my statement on this subject was that I contested her statement that Eichmann did not hate the Jews. I now declare categorically that the official record proves beyond any syllable of contradiction that Eichmann hated the Jews and put his hatred into sanguinary fulfillment by murdering them—the old, the crippled, the maimed, the young, the babies—at every chance.

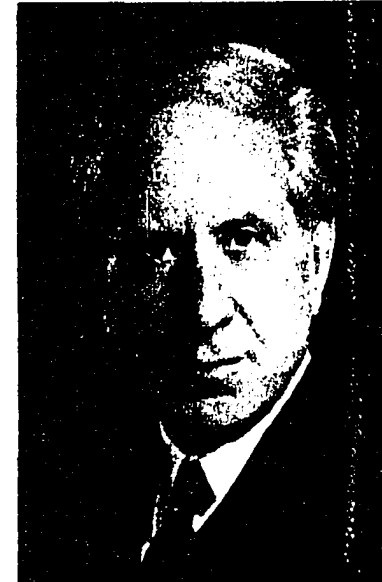
Miss Arendt gives further evidence of forgetting what is in her book when she indicates she never said Eichmann was a Zionist. Here are her words (p. 36): "A certain von Mildestein . . . required him [Eichmann] to read Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat*, the famous Zionist classic, which converted Eichmann promptly and forever to Zionism." (Italics throughout mine.)

Miss Arendt accuses me of misrepresenting her statements regarding the *Kristallnacht* or Night of Broken Glass when the Nazis smashed 75,000 Jewish shop windows, burned down synagogues and drove 20,000 Jews into concentration camps. She says now that Eichmann was not informed of

the "preparations" for the dastardly affair and defends him on that basis, but in her book she said he was wholly ignorant of it. Here are her words (p. 189): "He [Eichmann] certainly knew nothing at the time [of the *Kristallnacht*] and, even in Jerusalem knew considerably less than the least well-informed student of the period." My comment was: "The author [Miss Arendt] supports Eichmann's incredible claim that he was ignorant of the *Kristallnacht* or Night of Broken Glass, even though the whole world knew" of it.

If Miss Arendt did not take up Eichmann's view that he was not guilty of physical murder, why did she say (p. 19), after referring to the message, "Eichmann proposes shooting," "This turned out to be the only order to kill, if that is what it was, for which there existed even a shred of evidence"? To refer to the mountain of proof of Eichmann's orders to kill as a "shred of evidence" is like referring to the Atlantic Ocean as a brook.

Miss Arendt says that Eichmann "very likely spoke the truth when he said that he did not know Hitler's program when he joined the Nazi Party." Miss Arendt must be rather undiscerning if she cannot see in this Eichmann statement one of his most blatant falsehoods.



Michael A. Musmanno.

To say this Hitler idolater did not know of Hitler's mania on the subject of Jews is simply ludicrous and not worthy of any extended discussion. Eichmann was introduced into the party and the S. S. by Ernst Kaltenbrunner, his fellow-townsmen, who was hanged at Nuremberg as one of the most vicious of all the Nazi murderers.

In her letter Miss Arendt says I said she "'sympathized' with Eichmann and had written his defense." I did not put it that way. But I will accept her challenge and assert that that is exactly what her book is. She says in her book that Eichmann "'personally' never had anything against the Jews." Commenting on this she said: "Alas, nobody believed him." Is that not sympathizing?

She says that Eichmann was misjudged, misrepresented, misunderstood, that he was a victim of "hard luck." Is that not sympathizing?

MICHAEL A. MUSMANNO.
 Pittsburgh, Pa.

The Review Attacked

TO THE EDITOR:

I FEEL compelled to protest most forcefully against Justice Musmanno's gross misreading of Miss Arendt's major thesis. She demonstrates, with great incisiveness, one of the most horrifying aspects of Germany's crimes against humanity, namely, that genocide can be reduced to an almost purely mechanical, bureaucratic routine. And that it is entirely possible for nonentities such as Eichmann to become the tools of genocidal policies, almost by inadvertence, with only the faintest interest in their victims. Indeed, Eichmann and his ilk appeared far more concerned with their pride in the efficiency of their organizations, and their own status in the bureaucratic hierarchy. That loyalty to an organization can be such a facile substitute for the individual conscience, while by no means a unique event, is, indeed, the largest horror. . . . It is a warning against complacency and inaction in the face of tyranny.

ROBERT G. HAYDEN.
 Philadelphia, Pa.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . The most incomprehensible thing about the Nazi phenomenon to anybody who, like the undersigned, saw it repeatedly and at close range, was the fact that it was carried out by the small-minded man, the half-educated, the uninteresting man. Such a man was Eichmann, the salesman who had read two books on Zionism and therefore considered himself an expert on the Jewish question. Miss Arendt follows this small mind through his involvement with Nazidom with subtlety and a sure touch that makes her book a true achievement. It may not shed new light on the horrors, but it speaks to all those who saw in Nazidom not only the triumph of evil, but evil brought about and supported by masses of people whose superficial education made them open to Hitler's fantastic ideas, while leaving their conscience and moral sense completely untouched, undeveloped, twisted. Education, if it does not reach and develop our sense of values, our conscience, may become a danger; and wherever in the world ready-made education can be had, this danger exists. To guard against it, we must understand it. Miss Arendt's book is a most valuable contribution to this understanding.

HEDWIG JUST.
 Maplewood, N. J.

TO THE EDITOR:

I am sure a point by point refutation could be made of

Judge Musmanno's review of Miss Arendt's "Eichmann in Jerusalem." I don't feel I am a suitable authority to do this, and want to say merely that my impression of her book is almost the reverse of his. Her portrayal of Eichmann's character, deeds and moods is built on hundreds of factual observations, each morally unraveled and judged. I cannot think of a more terrifying character in either biography or fiction or one conceived in quite this manner. That Eichmann is no monster on a heroic scale, but only a strangely numb and nerve-wrung part of our usual world makes him all the more appalling. Mediocre, banal, unable in the end to speak or even think the truth, he moves through his inferno, now wriggling in his confusion, now flying on his "gusts of elation." His life is as close to living in hell as I can imagine, and I am able to see it as such because Miss Arendt has refused to simplify the picture with melodrama or blur it with clichés. I suspect Judge Musmanno's comprehension fails before so much detail, profundity and intuition.

ROBERT LOWELL.
 New York City.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . The Justice deals with a terrible and disturbing question — the cooperation of Jews in their own destruction. He says, "But none of the author's arguments in this respect can dim the luster of martyrdom of the defenseless millions. . . ." Unfortunately, this self-advertisement of his compassion does not answer the question which Miss Arendt quotes Israelis as asking at the trial: "Why did you not resist?" . . .

ALFRED RUSSEL.
 New York City.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . The Nazi "final solution" and its attendant horrors characteristically elicits extreme reactions. But as Miss Arendt argues, justice demands a different climate, something Justice Musmanno should be well aware of. His review, however, shows no such awareness, suggesting rather an all-too-human need on his part to locate the source of the Nazi guilt in individual aberration. . . .

ROBERT GRIFFIN.
 Storrs, Conn.

TO THE EDITOR:

I should like to offer a corrective to what I am sure is a misunderstanding on the part of Judge Musmanno in his review of "Eichmann in Jerusalem." The review leaves the impression that the book is a defense of Eichmann's innocence, whereas of course far the opposite is the case. Far from being sympathetic to Eichmann, Miss Arendt points out the peculiar danger inherent in his "innocence" (i.e., his lack of understanding) of the crimes which his conduct facilitated.

As one cannot tell from the review, the book raises major

moral questions, not about the Eichmann case alone, but also about public and private responsibility of all kinds. Judge Musmanno . . . has unintentionally misled potential readers of the book. "Eichmann in Jerusalem" is no apology for either the man or the deed, but a sober and unflinching effort to deal with the truth of Eichmann's specific guilt and to point to other truths about the total crime and about criminal society. Like Alice, Miss Arendt looks at her gruesome problem through both ends of the telescope, which in part accounts for the irony (which Judge Musmanno evidently read "straight") and for her refusal to take refuge in what might be called concentration-camp sentimentalism. . . .

ROSALIE L. COLIE.
 Middletown, Conn.

TO THE EDITOR:

Rarely can a reviewer have missed the point of a book as widely as Judge Musmanno did. . . .

CHARLES O'NEILL.
 Greens Farms, Conn.

TO THE EDITOR:

Justice Musmanno's review is a new low in reviewing. . . . SYLVIA MARLOWE.
 Greenwich, Conn.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Miss Arendt's examination of a small heart in a malevolent organization makes her study of Eichmann a classic. . . . NORMAN SILVERSTEIN.
 Flushing, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Musmanno lifts an eyebrow, as well he might, over Miss Arendt's "suggestion that Eichmann loved the Jews." She suggested nothing of the sort, as his own text makes clear; she merely quoted Eichmann's statement that he "had no hatred for the Jews." It was the reviewer who converted "no hatred" into "love." Miss Arendt's point, of course, reiterated through her book, is that Eichmann was a monster precisely because he had no special animus against the Jews, because he had no sense he was doing wrong, since he was a loyal and conscientious servant of the state. That the final result of the forms he correctly filled out and the orders he dutifully executed was genocide — this simply was not present to his conscience. It was a non-event, officially speaking.

This is admittedly a very different view from that of Mr. Musmanno—or of Hausner, the Israeli prosecutor. It stems from a theory, the evidence for which Miss Arendt gave years ago in her "Origins of Totalitarianism," about the actual, as against the generally accepted, nature of totalitarian bureaucracies. One may disagree about the theory and about the interpretation of Eichmann that follows from it—I myself think

at least, honest enough to summarize Miss Arendt's views with some semblance of accuracy, whatever his own comment upon them might be. . . . GEORGE E. AGREE.
 North Tarrytown, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . One cannot quibble with Justice Musmanno's position of authority, but one can seriously

question his denunciation of a book which at long last explores the moral, legal, psychological and sociological meaning of the greatest crime of all time in clear and convincing detail, which is couched in equally lucid and cogent prose. . . .

GEORGE E. CORO.
 Jacksonville, N. C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Justice is blind — at least some justices are. Judge Musmanno's misguided review of Hannah Arendt's masterful analysis of the Eichmann case shows him to be blind to her gift of irony. But, worse than that, his insistence that the Eichmann case conform to a melodrama of virtue and vice shows him to be blind to the full tragedy of Eichmann and the Jews. . . .

PETER H. DAVIDSON.
 Cambridge, Mass.

TO THE EDITOR:

Justice Musmanno's review



Adolf Eichmann, in the glass booth, listens as his lawyer, Robert Servatius, addresses the court, May 16, 1961.

ignored the basic theme supporting the trial—revenge. The so-called drama was produced and directed by a people, now a nation, whose persecution gave them the opportunity to prosecute their bondage-master. . . .

DAVID LYON HERZOG.
 West Nyack, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . One cannot quibble with Justice Musmanno's position of authority, but one can seriously

(Continued on Page 22)

Letters to the Editor: 'Eichmann'

(Continued from Page 5)

TO THE EDITOR:

... Justice Musmanno simply feels that Jews, Israel, Zionists, Gideon Hausner, the administration of justice in Israel, Ben-Gurion, the Israel Supreme Court and Justice Musmanno are above earthly criticism. . . .

J. PETER WILLIAMSON.

Hanover, N. H.

The Review Defended

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.

IRVING J. WEISS.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

... It is hard to penetrate the psychology of a person who would write a book in the style of "Eichmann in Jerusalem." I suppose there is something of the scholar's attempt to "lean over backwards" in order to be absolutely fair. . . . This may also be the result of the relativity of moral ideas—a misapplication of Einstein's theory from a field where it belongs. At all events, I am grateful to Judge Musmanno for his clear-sightedness and his extraordinary skill in literary and judicial vivisection.

SHELDON GLUECK.

Cambridge, Mass.

TO THE EDITOR:

It was good to see Justice Musmanno's review on the front page of the Book Review. He expressed so very well what I thought and felt. . . .

CELIA SOMERVELL.

Cambridge, Mass.

TO THE EDITOR:

I wish to thank you and Justice Musmanno for the review of Hannah Arendt's book about the Eichmann trial. It points out masterfully and with judicial impartiality Miss Arendt's disregard for, or ignorance of, historical facts. . . .

JENNY STRICKER.

New York City.

TO THE EDITOR:

After reading the excellent review by Justice Musmanno I want to thank him for all the

people who still hope in some human decency. . . .

MARTHE ELKANN.

New York City.

TO THE EDITOR:

Justice Musmanno's review is an important contribution to the field of critical inquiry. He succeeded masterfully in dispelling a host of wrong conclusions, which had been based on misconceived original premises. . . .

RICHARD W. STAHL.

Forest Hills, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for your inspired choice of a reviewer for "Eichmann in Jerusalem." Justice Musmanno's review is a powerful rebuttal of an appallingly ugly and vicious work. Like Miss Arendt, I, too, was at the Jerusalem Trial as an observer, but unlike her I came away sick and nauseated by the massive evidence. Undoubtedly she has the stronger stomach. . . .

EDITH SAMUEL.

New York City.

TO THE EDITOR:

Miss Arendt's report of the Eichmann trials is characterized by the same scrupulously compulsive obsession with reporting every last document and detail she attributes to Eichmann and other German civil and military bureaucrats. Since the most evil of men have some virtues, she cannot desist from a complete catalog of Eichmann's acts of goodwill. This temperament of mind will, of course, analyze a legal process

in terms of its legality and could not help but find that the trial was a miscarriage of justice in the strict technical sense. . . .

SAMUEL SALZMAN.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

TO THE EDITOR:

... Miss Arendt's book should give comfort to Eichmann's family and his numerous accomplices and be well received in Germany.

ESTHER BROMBERGER.

New York City.

TO THE EDITOR:

... Miss Arendt, of course, is entitled to her opinions; and it is her privilege to write what she pleases—even though one may not be in sympathy with her viewpoint, and may indeed question the morality of making that viewpoint so public. It is no one's privilege, however, to misrepresent and to distort facts. I am grateful that Judge Musmanno has attempted to set the record straight so clearly and unemotionally. . . .

ARTHUR LAURENTS.

New York City.

TO THE EDITOR:

... The publication of Judge Musmanno's views simultaneously with the book should forestall a rewriting of history of the type which became so popular in Germany during the period between the two world wars. His statement will do much to prevent the development of an Eichmann myth.

HENRY M. HEYMANN.

Palm Beach, Fla.