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HANNAH ARENDT'S EICHMANN CONTROVERSY AS DESTABILIZING TRANSATLANTIC TEXT

by

Adam J. Sacks Q1

The controversy surrounding Hannah Arendt's reportage on the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem and subsequent book cannot be underestimated.¹ For Arendt personally, the trial was the decisive event in the second half of her life and amounted to nothing less than a second exile. On the world stage, it marked not only a critical turning point in international consciousness of the Holocaust, but also both initiated and reflected a decisive shift in intra-Jewish representations and expression. Arendt's book could in fact be considered as a master text for Judaic studies in the second half of the twentieth century. To mention two of many possible consequences, the controversy may be seen as a pivot point from which the culture of the public intellectuals of New York argued itself out of the spotlight, as well as a primary catalyst for two of the most significant works on the Holocaust penned by women: Lucy Davidowicz's *The War against the Jews* (1975) and Leni Yahil's *The Holocaust* (1987).

For Arendt personally, the controversy was, in her words, "my war with the Jews."² The visceral reactions against her text, in some quarters, persisted until recent years. It was in fact not until the year 2000 that the first of Arendt's books was translated into Hebrew. It can be argued that beyond Arendt's actual book on Eichmann, the controversy itself constitutes a text, and a destabilizing, transatlantic text at that. This "text" was not simply "lost in translation" among American, European, and Israeli cultures; it uncomfortably reasserted traditional intra-Jewish distinctions that were no longer applicable to a post-Holocaust refigured Jewish world. While the book was apparently an historical and intellectual debate about the appropriate conceptual framework for assimilating Eichmann's crimes and his trials, many observers at the time remarked about the distinct inner-Jewish nature of the debate.³ Rather than a direct intervention into specific aspects

1. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

2. "I think the war between me and the Jews is over," See Letter 394, March 26th, 1966, in *Hannah Arendt and Karl Jaspers, Correspondence, 1926–1969*, ed. Lotte Kohler and Hans Saner, trans. Robert Kimber and Rita Kimber (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992).

3. Marie Syrkin, "More on Eichmann," *Partisan Review*, 31 no. 2 (Spring, 1964): 253–55.

45 of the controversy itself, this investigation takes the varying contexts of the com-
46 mentators themselves as a starting point in order to demonstrate the crucial role
47 played by differences in political and cultural background. Matters of context
48 are ignored only at significant analytic peril.

49 The controversy replaced the original text of Arendt's book, and became a
50 text in its own right. Rather than a surface dispute of issues understood by all sides,
51 the controversy unleashed an echo of friction of cultural styles that has impli-
52 cations for postwar European, American, and Jewish attempts at intellectual dis-
53 course across geographical and cultural boundaries. The series of axes upon
54 which the controversy rotated were actually the restatements of misquoted and
55 misrepresented arguments and details. What is at issue here is neither the question
56 of a close reading of Arendt's report nor the issue of misstated facts and historical
57 evidence in Arendt's account, but rather the contours of her argument itself and the
58 trajectory of subsequent commentary and distortion.

59 More than just postwar transatlantic politics, the controversy had great
60 implications for the place of the intellectual in the *public* sphere operating
61 outside of institutional fealty. With greater import for the specific New York
62 context, the controversy aggravated not only a fissure between the university-
63 trained academics and the educated public, but also the culturally specific
64 divide between intellectual leaders raised and trained in Europe and those of immi-
65 grant and eastern European background who had come of age in the United States.
66 The debate around Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* may be seen as an American
67 last finale of the traditional European discord between a universalizing and cosmo-
68 politan German Jewish perspective and an ethnically-grounded national and even
69 nationalistic self-understanding, common in eastern Europe. While the mandate of
70 tradition and the immediate postwar impact of the Holocaust kept these fault lines
71 just barely under the surface during the Eichmann controversy, at times they took
72 the form of outright expression. Some of Arendt's detractors even openly wrote of
73 her striking omission and inability to hear the voice of Eastern Europe.⁴ Ulti-
74 mately, in this instance, the mediating factor of the transatlantic did little to alle-
75 viate the pressure on the misunderstandings that followed various discourses as
76 they traveled between different geographical and intellectual groupings.

77 Two clusters of issues most clearly expose these fault lines of the intra-
78 Jewish divides of cultural style and differing forms of narrating and representing
79 the Holocaust. Very much informed by her Reform and heavily culturally invested
80 north German upbringing, Hannah Arendt did not provide for any understanding
81 of the Holocaust as a sacred, mysterious event whose victims may be seen as part
82 of a religious history of martyrdom. Rather, through detailed analysis, Arendt
83 insisted on the fundamental ambiguity of the event, as well as carefully detailed
84 intra-Jewish differentiation based on class, geography, and culture. Before the
85 Holocaust had gained widespread acceptance in the cultural imaginary as arguably
86 the pivotal event in the twentieth century, Arendt was careful to puncture any
87 sacred aura that would have rendered it outside of historical analysis and thus

4. Lionel Abel, "More on Eichmann," *Partisan Review*, 31 no. 2 (Spring, 1964): 270–01.

89 inscrutable. During the controversy Arendt was accused of trivializing the role of
 90 perpetrators such as Eichmann and even of shifting blame and responsibility onto
 91 Jewish victims themselves. This maximalist insistence on responsibility and indis-
 92 pensability of the Jewish councils and the replaceable bureaucratic function of
 93 murder managers such as Eichmann was the contentious pivot around which
 94 the controversy moved. Though Arendt repeatedly disavowed expressing the
 95 reproach—"why did you not resist?"—she consistently and implicitly upheld the
 96 possibility of non-cooperation. The ambiguity of whether or not this distinction
 97 between cooperation and collaboration may amount to more than a semantic
 98 difference remained unclear and arguably aggravated the controversy.⁵

99 Arendt's reading thus obstructed a narrative of the Holocaust that would pit
 100 a mass of suffering Jews against fabulistic villains that had been common through-
 101 out Jewish history. Rather, her perpetrators were portrayed as the epitome of con-
 102 temptible mediocrity, vacant of cultural specificity, while her Jews were clearly
 103 split between a knowing elite that had more often than not placed its own needs
 104 ahead of the vulnerable masses. The critical response to Arendt spoke in the
 105 language of ethnic solidarity that she had so apparently written out of history.
 106 Due to its galvanizing effect, one may even see in the controversy the seeds of
 107 the cultural identity movements of both the New Left and the conservative reli-
 108 gious revival that would emerge out of the late 1960s and the concomitant
 109 decline of the aristocratic language of German-Jewish universalism that had
 110 wearily kept its distance from Zionism and East European diasporic nationalism.
 111 Even within the rarefied circles of the New York Jewish intellectuals, Arendt
 112 found herself isolated. With few exceptions, the only people to come to her
 113 defense were prominent Gentile intellectuals.⁶ Under the guise of both obeisance
 114 to traditionalism, Arendt's critics were in fact advocating a new form of ethnic
 115 solidarity, while essentially accusing her of having no sympathy for the attack
 116 on the collectivity of the Jewish people. Arendt sought to performatively preserve
 117 adamant forms of individualism that had been threatened by the atomization
 118 brought about by the pernicious underside of modernity.

119 Arendt's conclusions about the nation-state as elucidated in her *Origins of*
 120 *Totalitarianism* foreshadowed her implicit skepticism about collective projects
 121 of identity. The bewildering chiasma or over determined point of intersection
 122 that lies at the heart of Arendt's conclusions in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*

123 5. The exact term employed by Arendt to illustrate her understanding was the possibility of
 124 doing nothing. Quite interesting is that in delivering her explanation in a famous letter to Scholem,
 125 Arendt makes one of her very few known recourses to Yiddish: "*Es gab keine Möglichkeit des Wieder-*
 126 *standes, aber es gab die Möglichkeit, nichts zu tun. Und um nichts zu tun, brauchte man kein Heiliger*
 127 *zu sein, sondern man brauchte nur zu sagen: ich bin ein poscheter Jude und ich will mehr nicht sein.*"
 128 ("There was no possibility of resistance, but there was the possibility of doing nothing. And to do
 129 nothing, one does not need to be holy, one only needs to say, I am a simple Jew and I don't want to
 130 be anything more than that") see Marie Luise Knott, ed., *Hannah Arendt Gerschom Scholem Der Brief-*
 131 *wechsel* (Berlin: Jüdischer Verlag, 2010), 441. Interestingly that later in the letter Arendt actually does
 132 employ the English term (underlined in original) "non-participation."

6. For exceptional and anecdotal defense of Arendt coming from Jewish circles, please see,
 Marie Syrkin, *The State of the Jews* (Washington DC: New Republic Books, 1980), 411.

concerns the synchronous necessity and self-erasure of the nation-state. Much of the text is devoted to a narrative that charts the inability of the nation-state to provide and apply universal rights to the minorities in its midst. Arendt charted the decline of the nation-state but did not advocate for the viability of supra-national institutions. At the end of the narrative, she reached the startling conclusion that the State of Israel, exemplary in its exceptionalism, revealed that the apparatus of the state remains the only entity that could deliver on rights and protections. She wrote, “After the war it turned out that the Jewish question that was considered the only insoluble one, was indeed solved—namely, by means of a colonized and then conquered territory.”⁷

The case of the insolubility of this specific question is over determined for Arendt in that her universal narrative of the decline of the nation-state hinges upon its failure, which largely consisted in its inability to incorporate and secure Jews. Arendt reached this conclusion immediately after the war, when she, perhaps along with many, was still in a state of shock over the revelation of the extent of wartime atrocities. That this conclusion could change, or that the premises upon which it was based could shift, thereby demanding a different conclusion, is in fact grounded in one of the few “fundamentalist” principles espoused by Arendt. This principle claims that personal and collective projects of identity should only be decisively binding under conditions of attack and persecution. In her address given on the occasion of her receipt of the Lessing Prize in 1959, she stated that one had to “resist only in terms of the identity under attack.”⁸ This perforce insists on the contingency of identity within contexts of crisis. Arendt more or less repeated this sentence (to “resist only in terms of the identity under attack”) in her celebrated German television interview of 1964 with Günter Gaus. In this instance, she explicitly named the identity in question as Jewish: “if one is attacked as a Jew, one must defend oneself as a Jew.”⁹

Identities, often construed as projects of collective imposition, are, as banal as it may seem, not always under attack. One could also formulate the same problem differently and posit that new attacks often require new identities. In this context, one could of course challenge this Arendtian principle based on the notion that many, if not most, attacks are conceived of, and articulated as “defensive measures.” Nevertheless an attack, by its nature, is of limited duration, and therefore when it subsides so does the need for the reassertion of the identity undertaken to withstand it.

Arendt’s invocation of this principle is implicit throughout her responses within the Eichmann controversy. This consistency in her application of this principle of contingency is different from reading her career as a series of embraces followed by wild betrayals. It is the latter to which Gershom Scholem resorted

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973), 290.

8. Steven Aschheim, ed., *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California, 2001), 5.

9. Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 12.

177 after his contentious correspondence with Arendt, which must also have resulted
 178 in some degree of personal distress. The famous admonition of Scholem to Arendt,
 179 a base critique of the very premise and position from which the *Eichmann* text was
 180 written, was that she lacked *ahavat yisrael* (love of the Jewish people).¹⁰ From this
 181 perspective, it does appear to be a strange reproach from one towering Jewish
 182 intellectual to another; one would expect this between one grand *rebbe* and
 183 another, but not between Scholem and Arendt.

184 This charge by Scholem could be understood as a form of speaking in code.
 185 The assertion of national identity was for Arendt contingent on a state of crisis, and
 186 by the early 1960s, presumably for both Israel and the Jews, that transitory
 187 moment of defensive national validation had subsided. The restoration of stability
 188 carried with it the retraction of the nationally assertive. For Scholem, of course,
 189 who subscribed to no idea of contingency, the national remained an absolute
 190 and permanent position.

191 The dominant paradigm of Jewish collective identification in modern
 192 Europe is one of fracture, followed on its heels by privatization of practice and
 193 authority, denationalization, and, put briefly, other commitments ranging from
 194 conversion to reationalization. The war and its perceived concomitant collective
 195 assault on Jewish existence from a variety of powers froze, as if in midstream,
 196 those aforementioned trends. It also occurred arguably at a moment of unprece-
 197 dented and heightened fracture after new nation-states replaced old empires,
 198 when the extreme pitch of ideological conflict increased between the polarities
 199 and varieties of nationalism and communism. The flash of interpolation incited
 200 by the revelation of wartime atrocities threw the collective blanket of identity
 201 over all Jews. This coincided, or, better, overlapped, with the early stages of the
 202 struggle in the founding of the state of Israel. Paradoxically, the only previous
 203 phenomena that had come close to uniting almost all Jews, if still in the negative,
 204

205 10. Just before this statement Scholem, who himself, unlike Arendt, was against the execution
 206 of the death sentence upon Eichmann (because he did not want to lighten the burden of the past upon the
 207 German people), states that the accent of Arendt's book is only on the point of the weaknesses of the
 208 Jews: "*In Ihrem Buch ist in allem Entscheidenden nur von dem Punkt der Schwaeche der juedischen*
 209 *Existenz die Rede, gerade wo es um Akzentuierung geht.*" Scholem then poses the rhetorical question
 210 of why Arendt's book leaves behind such feelings of bitterness and shame not with regards to its con-
 211 tents but rather with regards to the author herself. Scholem's answer is then precisely the question of the
 212 tone (which he deems "...herzlose, ja oft geradezu haemische Ton") which one may maintain is a cat-
 213 egory with not unimportant gender implications. Also of interest, is that Scholem makes his accusation
 214 in the context of a larger anti-leftist statement. It is finally in this context that Scholem makes his rheto-
 215 rical leap for his key term "*Ahabath Israel*": "*Es gibt in der juedischen Sprache etwas durchaus nicht*
 216 *zu definierendes und voellig konkretes, was die Juden Ahabath Israel nennen, Liebe zu den Juden.*
 217 *Davon ist bei Ihnen, liebe Hannah, wie bei so manche Intellektuellen, die aus der deutschen Linken*
 218 *hervorgegangen sind, nichts zu merken.* See Knott, *Hannah Arendt Gerschom Scholem*, 429. Of
 219 note, is that in her letter of response about one month later, not only does Arendt dispute the claim
 220 that she "came out of the German left," but also beseeches Scholem to inform her of the history and
 origin of this "*Ahabath*" term. Finally, Arendt actually does not dispute in the slightest Scholem's
 claim, (with the implication that any kind of collective love is politically problematic) and states that
 were she to have such love, it would be "*suspect*."

221 was the emergence of the Zionist movement. Whether the ultra-traditionalists in
222 Hasidic shtetls, the classically Reform in Berlin or New York, or the committed
223 Jewish socialists or communists, whether they spoke Yiddish in Warsaw or
224 Russian in Moscow, all could find a thin island of common ground through
225 their shared opposition to Zionism. This context is necessary in order to under-
226 stand how Scholem and Arendt addressed each other not only as opinion-making
227 members of the Jewish establishment, but rather as fellow veterans of a “pariah”
228 movement spearheaded by a youth in revolt.

229 The calculated Nazi revocation of Jewish emancipation and the subsequent
230 assault on Jewish property and life triggered an international humanitarian crisis. It
231 also awakened the sleeping giant of narratives of collective myth that were brought
232 out to make sense of a new catastrophe that none of the previous frameworks had
233 the power to either predict or explain. Whether through Zionist political narratives
234 that sought to affirm the futility of diaspora existence or renewed reference within
235 religious circles to the catastrophes of the destruction of the temples and the expul-
236 sion from Spain, such collective myths emerged with particular vigor in the wake
237 of the Holocaust. Yet as this collective myth was rather readily harnessed to the
238 structure of the nation-state, as is normative in modern Europe, it could not be
239 returned from whence it came. The conditions and effects of the spread of such
240 collective myth foster a tendency to absolutize the contingent, conveniently blur
241 over uncomfortable power relations, and create or impose new identities on
242 individuals.

243 The very fact of the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in its historical
244 moment signaled that the sacral core that underpinned the new collective identity
245 project of the Jews, namely the memory of the Holocaust as a sacred discourse,
246 could be punctured. The historical significance of the book’s release in 1963 is
247 even more remarkable when bearing in mind that up until that point only one his-
248 torian, Raul Hilberg, had even ventured to cover the complete subject matter in a
249 scholarly fashion. And even Hilberg had notorious difficulties in finding a pub-
250 lisher and Jewish support. The framing of the victims as sacrificial objects in
251 some larger scheme that could not be explained invariably invokes the theological.
252 This has been the dominant form of collective memory on the part of the victims.
253 The earliest adoption of the term *Hurban* by the victims themselves is a reapplica-
254 tion of the same that traditionally designated the destruction of the ancient Temple
255 in Jerusalem. In this instance one could cite the work of the Yiddish writer Aaron
256 Zeitlin who called Arendt “the devil’s representative [who] archetypically recast
257 the Nazis as monsters and the victims as Tzadikim whose sacredness needed to
258 be preserved.”¹¹ This theological element is embedded in each generation’s rep-
259 etition of the concept of an eternal anti-Semitism that constantly seeks to make
260 sacrifices out of Jews. This naturally overlooks the specificity of historical contin-
261 gency and implicitly asserts a kind of collective innocence, even “worldlessness”
262

263 11. See Richard I. Cohen, “A Generation’s Response to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*,” in *Hannah*
264 *Arendt in Jerusalem*, 258.

of the Jews. As can be easily inferred, the framework presupposes and enforces a demonization of the Other as well as a collective culpability of the Other.

One may surmise that the temptation to surrender to a self-righteous cult of victimization is resisted only with greatest difficulty, as Arendt clearly struggled, whether in reference to the Holocaust or numerous other more recent calamities. The establishment of this discourse has reproduced itself in multiple contexts and a kind of competition or negative comparison between groups has ensued. While understandable as a response to a moral collapse as an attempt to rediscover a moral compass based on absolutizing the position of the victim, this dogma of the victim has precipitated a different moral collapse. In her rather aggressive and uncompromising analytics of the "final solution," Arendt punctured the sacral core of Jewish victimhood, as well as the demonization of the perpetrators. She took aim at the Hegelian historical theodicy implicit in the trial and the concomitant self-serving justification of the Israeli state grounded in the Holocaust.¹² Far from reproducing a sacral absolute of the Holocaust as an historical event, she delivered an innovative nation-state based narrative that conveyed the Holocaust as a multi-faceted variegated phenomena with implications far beyond the internal Jewish context. Based on Arendt's chapters on the Holocaust in different regions, using current academic standards, one could parse out various genres of regimes of murder and order them in the following tri-partite structure: murders of xenophobia (to rid the internal national context of outsiders), murders of Eurocentric imperialism (to remove foreigners from land designated for expansion), and murders of "resistance" to communism (to eliminate enemies beyond the borders of the national). Furthermore, in her revealing analyses of exceptional cases, such as France, Bulgaria, Denmark, and Italy, Arendt demonstrated that the genocidal coalition of the Nazis was by no means as essential and unstoppable as it had been rendered in retrospect.

Arendt's puncturing of the sacral core of the new collective identity of the Jews by interrogating this supposed collective innocence certainly has the effect of destabilizing imposed nationalist identifications. It should, however, not be confused with the question of social solidarity with which it was also bound up. Instead, one should keep separate her implicit call for the end of the Jewish national identification as a defense against attack and the long-standing "blind spot," which represents an historical difficulty to identify across class lines with the Jewish plight in Eastern Europe.

12. See *Eichmann* introduction (5–11, in particular) "...how the Jews had degenerated until they went to their death like sheep, and how only the establishment of a Jewish state enabled Jews to hit back..." Notably, Arendt contrasts the "lessons" Ben Gurion attached to the trial, to the entirely unforeseen (and unmentioned by Ben Gurion), yet dramatic outcome that the trial would "trigger the first serious effort made by Germany to bring to trial at least those who were directly implicated in the murder." (14) Finally in her most clear indictment of the "Hegelian" nature of the trial, on page 19 (soon after followed by a direct reference to "an allusion to Hegel and the school of historical law," Arendt states "For it was history, that, as far as the prosecution was concerned, stood in the center of the trial." She adds, "This was the tone set by Ben-Gurion and faithfully followed by Mr. Hausner..."

309 While Arendt did at times curiously resort to theological language such as
310 the “love of god,” or even references to a “literalization of Hell,” she did not
311 stray far from a position grounded in Kant that allowed for no role of private
312 faith in the public realm.¹³ While Arendt did complete her doctoral dissertation
313 on *Love and Saint Augustine* and did even engage the theological concept of
314 the “miraculous” to describe political action in *The Human Condition*, her use
315 of theological vocabulary is not equivalent to a theological argument. Allowing
316 the sacred access to the public sphere tends to validate the existing order, and
317 therefore undermines the ability of individuals as political subjects in society to
318 enact progressive change. And as the sacred is commensurate with the absolute,
319 it does not provide for the kind of plurality that Arendt valued above all.

320 When considering the role of the sacred in the transatlantic context much is
321 lost in translation. Arendt’s bold and direct look at the Holocaust derives from a
322 subject position in which the full secularization of society or the post-religious
323 is both self-evident and beyond doubt. Yet due to basic foundational factors,
324 such as the privatization of religion and its minimal role as a singular, corporate
325 institutional authority in the United States, religion fulfilled an entirely different
326 function. To some extent, religion fulfilled the role that philosophy had in
327 Europe; it persisted as discourse to which one turned when posing larger ques-
328 tions. Such discourses of the sacred therefore continued to be considered as legit-
329 imate means to secure social peace and provide a level of ethical and social
330 security. Arendt herself credited the failure of the French, as opposed to the Amer-
331 ican Revolution, to the attempt in the former to invoke a transcendent absolute in
332 the formation of a republic. The investment of an event with a sacred aura was
333 more a matter of providing it with some level of legitimate authority, rather
334 than principally a means to close off other interpretations. The association of reli-
335 gion with conflict and corruption had simply not been internalized by large sectors
336 of the educated American public.¹⁴

337 In Israel, by contrast, a kind of working truce was established between fac-
338 tions of a starkly bifurcated social order. The plausibility of such a truce between
339 openly contradictory factions was enshrined by the aura of legitimacy that the
340 sacred provided to the secular. This rather curious compromise was influenced

341 13. Susan Neimann, “Theodicy in Jerusalem,” in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, 70.

342 14. Leon Botstein claims there is an implicit America-Israel contrast running throughout the
343 Eichmann book and that her increasing sense of comfort in America is what made her even more doubt-
344 ful about Zionism. Overall, Bostein asserts that Arendt found her concept of politics vindicated in the
345 American political tradition, namely that of the flourishing of a “distinctly secular Jewish nation in a
346 democratic Christian Diaspora,” which runs counter to the historical logic of Zionism. Though
347 Bostein remain ambiguous about the precise Christian nature of the American context, others have
348 been more explicit. Please see M. Stanton Evans, *The Theme is Freedom: Religion Politics and the*
349 *American Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1994) which argues that the unique American attach-
350 ment to freedom is based on a morality inseparable from religion. More hyperbolically though evoca-
351 tive, is Norman Mailer’s statement after an anti-war march on the Pentagon, “...we are burning the
352 body and blood of Christ in Vietnam. Yes, we are burning him there, and as we do, we destroy the foun-
353 dation of this Republic, which is its love and trust in Christ.” See Norman Mailer, *The Time of Our Time*
(New York: Random House), 1239.

353 by a government run by atheists who offered subsidies for religious Jews to study
 354 Talmud in lieu of military service.¹⁵ Indeed, the Israeli struggle for legitimacy, in
 355 which the Eichmann trial represents an important moment, is bound up with suf-
 356 fusing national aspirations with an aura of the theological. If Arendt's critique
 357 implicitly involved recognizing this reality, she was by no means being led by
 358 her own imaginings. Arendt's conception of the politically contingent nature of
 359 Jewish identity would perhaps inevitably bring her into conflict with a context
 360 that framed such identity as permanent and absolute.

361 Most national narratives of self-generation inevitably engage in a certain
 362 amount of mythologization. In Israel, the state is conceived of as the entity that
 363 both negates and transcends the Holocaust that metaphorically took place on
 364 "the day before" the state's inauguration. The sacralization of the Holocaust,
 365 which Arendt punctured, as well as her own Zionist leanings, played a role
 366 here. Her work represents a move against positioning the Holocaust as the telos
 367 of Israel's history, a telos that many observed to be as powerful as the narrative
 368 of the revelation at Sinai in traditional Judaism.

369 There is much evidence in Arendt's work that moralism derived from reli-
 370 gious sources *outside* the public sphere are more or less irrelevant. For Arendt,
 371 moral emotions, such as feelings of guilt or anti-Semitism particularly related to
 372 the important question of determining intentionality, are deeply private and ulti-
 373 mately indecipherable. Internal moral feelings, even if they did exist, do not of
 374 themselves signify action or even the inclination to engage in action. One may
 375 surmise therefore that for Arendt, just as there is a distinction between cooperation
 376 and collaboration so is there also between non-participation and resistance. After
 377 all, Arendt alluded to Lessing who wrote that we, as humans, feel even something
 378 akin to passion for the evildoer,¹⁶ a point that was easily misunderstood and mis-
 379 represented by her critics. The idea that "Eichmann lives in all of us," that many
 380 people in the same circumstances could have acted similarly, that one need not be
 381 an antisemite or a German to commit the actions of an Eichmann, were construed
 382 as trivializing his role. This marginalization of intentionality ruptures narratives of
 383 inherent anti-Semitism or a uniquely corrupted German culture that claims, in
 384 short, that evil is not based on structural conditions but rather produced by the
 385 actions of individuals. One can also see here the importance of the contingent
 386 that frames actions based on specifically political circumstances rather than on
 387 trans-historical identities. As such, Arendt argued for the replacement of moral
 388 intention by judgment, with actions as the ultimate measure of judgment. The
 389 move to the "banality" of evil is the strongest deflation of the sacral aura. To
 390 assert that evil is demonic renders evil mysterious and consigns it to the realm

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 393 15. See Steven V. Mazie, *Israel's Higher Law: Religion and Liberal Democracy in the Jewish*
 394 *State* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), Tom Segev, *1949: The First Israelis* (New York: Free Press,
 395 1986) and Gershom Gorenberg *The Unmaking of Israel* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011) all of which
 396 discuss at length the history and ramifications of this fateful compromise of Ben Gurion with the reli-
 gious sector.

16. Neimann, "Theodicy in Jerusalem," 81.

397 of the religious, rather than the political.¹⁷ The many attacks on Arendt, often trig-
398 gered by her powerful position on this subject, were themselves moral demands
399 deriving from an emerging Israeli-American transatlantic position that beheld the
400 religious as the site of the moral and from narratives that still enshrined the sacral.

401 Arendt did sit in judgment of Eichmann and also condemned him to death.
402 Yet she did not speak in the name of any court and certainly not of the Jewish
403 people. The acerbic invective (or alleged acerbic invective as the very presumption
404 of such may be viewed as highly gendered) that underlies the tone of *Eichmann in*
405 *Jerusalem*, which so many found so problematic, derived from a very specific
406 form of cultural criticism. She consistently rejected the “scapegoat” approach to
407 Eichmann, and the attempts to connect him to incidents to which he had no
408 relation. Further, she also removed from her discourse the role of anti-Semitism
409 as a motivational field within Eichmann, just as she rejected the role of an over-
410 arching meta-historical narrative of antisemitism within the trial. Arendt seems
411 to have understood Eichmann based on his “social situatedness,” the idea that
412 he reflected and evolved from a particular social and cultural environment. This
413 approach certainly enabled her a measure of familiarity that contributed to the
414 alienation of readers who could not share her disposition. Indeed, Arendt spoke
415 of Eichmann as one who emerged from a generally similar cultural and social
416 sphere of German-speaking Central Europe. As with her puncturing of the
417 sacral sphere, this other dominant element in her Eichmann text is also concep-
418 tually illuminated in its widest extent when placed in a transatlantic context.
419 Beyond all other factors, Arendt’s cultural critique of Eichmann aggravated and
420 inspired troubling reactions on the part of her American interlocutors, due in no
421 small part to an inability to decipher the cultural code at work.

421 Arendt was fully a product of the historical trajectory of modern north
422 German Jewish social and political life, typified as occupying a space “beyond
423 Judaism.” According to George Mosse, the embrace of *Bildung* became a
424 secular religion that bound Jews with the striving of the near-emancipated bour-
425 geoisie and away from the popular pieties or folk traditions of the landed peasantry.¹⁸
426 In its attempt to transcend difference in the wake of Enlightenment, this
427 cultural move historicized and privatized Jewish subjecthood. This “*Bildung*”
428 model of Jewish modernity inscribed notions of personal exceptionalism as it
429 embraced a model of “betterment,” and difference based on learning and
430 culture. The generation after the “autumn” of the Enlightenment in the first half
431 of the nineteenth century fashioned new forms of Judaism, which claimed a uni-
432 versalism and a basis in reason beyond what any other religion could offer.
433 Abraham Geiger, who worked to reincorporate Jesus within Judaism, famously
434 proclaimed that for liberal Christians to be true to their own creed, they would
435 do best to become Reform Jews.¹⁹ As a cultural and educational movement, the
436

437 17. Neimann, “Theodicy in Jerusalem,” 87.

438 18. See George Mosse, *German Jews Beyond Judaism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,
439 1997).

440 19. See Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1998).

441 Enlightenment certainly spread throughout Yiddish-speaking Eastern Europe,
 442 though largely without the component of inter-cultural dialogue with Gentiles to
 443 which it was inextricably tied in Germany. This misapprehension and even
 444 subtle hostility that governed the tenuous interrelationship between Germany
 445 and Eastern Europe derived in no small part from the confused ethnic and national
 446 matrix, which often resulted in the imposition of national paradigms and finally
 447 the presence of large masses of Jews often on the margins of poverty.

448 The “blind spots” and counter-narrative of Enlightenment that developed an
 449 active discourse of bias and social practices of scorn against others was also passed
 450 down across the generations. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of the culturally
 451 German Reform Jews was a disdain for traditional Jews of Eastern Europe.
 452 What Norman Podhoretz referred to as “German Jewish arrogance,” though, is
 453 often overstated to refer to apparent disdain for any forms of organized Jewish
 454 life.²⁰ The generation after Geiger displaced such “philosophical” aspirations
 455 into political programs often framed in terms of a loyalty to social democracy.
 456 This was the generation of Hannah Arendt's parents and the milieu in which
 457 she was raised.

458 The other primary cultural and negative reference point for northern
 459 Germany was southern Germany, which includes what would later become the
 460 modern-day Austrian nation-state, a thoroughly Catholic environment without
 461 any of the historical leanings toward Protestant interiority and not anywhere
 462 nearly embedded in the legacy of the Enlightenment. Jews, one minority within
 463 an exceedingly diverse empire, lacked in this area a fully articulated stable and
 464 homogenous dominant reference group into which they could assimilate. Yet, as
 465 has become historical and even literary legend, they still possessed a great level
 466 of identification with the Habsburg monarchy as such. While in the North
 467 German context political and cultural identification were bound up with Enlight-
 468 enment, emancipation and liberalism, in the South, and especially in Austria, the
 469 period of liberalism and emancipation were truncated and severely embattled.²¹
 470 By the time of the modernist turn-of-the-century generation into which Arendt
 471 was born, the political had been subsumed by the theatrical as the progressive
 472 bourgeoisie engaged their primary energies with new developments in modernism.

473 New political movements in Vienna, referred to by Carl Schorske as “poli-
 474 tics in a new key,” reflected a new approach of aesthetic politics based in the post-
 475 rational, the visual, and the theatrical. It may be argued that this form of aesthetic
 476 politics, which after all prefigured much of Nazi visual culture, was generally more
 477 compatible and influenced by Catholic culture, as broadly defined. It is generally
 478 agreed that the political progenitors and even silent mentors of Hitlerian anti-
 479 Semitism and politics generally were Viennese, such as Karl Lueger and Georg

480 20. Syrkin, *The State of the Jews*, 254.

481 21. Hermann Broch referred to liberalism in Austria as *Gallert-Demokratie* or “gelatin democ-
 482 racy,” implying only a liberal veneer. As Michael P. Steinberg helpfully indicates, “The history of Aus-
 483 trian Jewish modernism runs through two, perhaps three generations; the history of German-Jewish
 484 Enlightenment and modernism courses through at least double that number” see his *Judaism
 Musical and Unmusical* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 24.

485 von Schönerer. Whether or not Catholicism in its theology or the Catholic Church
486 as a structure either directly influenced or benefited from the rise of such politics,
487 geopolitically speaking, the momentum of Nazism signified the “revenge of the
488 Catholic south” that had been explicitly excluded under the Bismarckian *klein-*
489 *deutsche Lösung* for unification and state formation under a Prussian Protestant
490 aegis.²² As Arendt acerbically wrote in her critique of Stefan Zweig’s *World of*
491 *Yesterday* in October of 1943, Zweig had thought the Viennese were recreating
492 Athens with their theater (i.e. a revival of democracy), but in fact it was just Holly-
493 wood (i.e. a deceptive world of appearances).²³ The strength of this pronounce-
494 ment is that it also reveals a critique of the lack of interiority of social actors in
495 that environment. (While Arendt argued against defining politics as a work of
496 plastic art, which as she wrote tends to reify human thought, she did embrace
497 the performative aspects of politics that made it for her, the exact opposite of an
498 art.)²⁴ People like Stefan Zweig were ultimately driven by careerism and fame,
499 she implied, and such personal priorities are inevitably anti-political and poten-
500 tially blinding to reality.²⁵ Using the most damning judgment in the Arendtian
501 vocabulary, people in this environment were *weltlos*, people who do not live in
502 the world.

503 This southern German or Austrian context lacks some of the culture of opti-
504 mism imbued with transformative potential passed on by the tradition of the
505 Enlightenment and Reform in the pre-war era. Theatrical, career-driven action
506 implicitly accepts the world as it is and seeks approval from the dominant
507 social standards of the day. The opposite of fame in this context is disgrace; a
508 feeling of shame and embarrassment in a theatricalized (in the sense of deceptive
509 performance) manner resulting from not living up to the social dictates of the time.
510 From this admittedly biased perspective, for the northern German, Austrian pro-
511 vincials were seen as lower class opportunists without much grounding in the
512 ideals of Enlightenment.²⁶ It is admittedly an analytical leap to include Arendt’s
513 portrayal of Eichmann with her critiques of the behavior of some of the Jewish
514 victims of the Holocaust, in this case, Stefan Zweig, Eichmann emerged out of
515

516 22. On the topic of the complications in finding state forms for the German-speaking world, see
517 Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006);
518 Sebastian Conrad, *The Quest for the Lost Nation: Writing History in Germany and Japan in the Ameri-*
519 *can Century* (Berkeley: University of California: 2010); or for titles that have themselves become his-
520 toric, Helmuth Plessner *Die Verspaetete Nation: ueber die politische verfuehrbarkeit buergerlichen*
521 *geistes* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1966) or Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus*
(Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1984).

522 23. See Hannah Ardent, “Portrait of a Period.” *The Jew as Pariah*. ed. Ron Feldman.
523 (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 112–21.

524 24. See Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*
(New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 253.

525 25. See “Stefan Zweig and Jews in the World of Yesterday,” in *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writ-*
526 *ings*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 2007), 317.

527 26. For the most astute elucidation of this pre-war North/South German (Jewish) divide see the
528 work of Michael P. Steinberg, in particular, “Hannah Arendt and the Cultural Style of the German
Jews,” *Social Research* 74 no. 3 (2007): 879–902.

529 a social context that only someone like Arendt herself, born and raised in North
530 Germany, could perceive from an up-close and personal perspective.

531 Arendt's portrayal of Eichmann as the paradigmatic expression of the
532 *Schreibtischtäter* has become iconic and is at the heart of controversy created by
533 the book. Her focus on the extreme careerism of the bookkeeper mentality and
534 her ridicule (and laughter) at Eichmann's self-professed idealism are related to a
535 certain cultural criticism (if not social snobbery) of a North German bourgeois
536 toward a South German provincial petty bourgeois. Indeed, her description of Eich-
537 mann is of someone who is at once crass, ludicrous, and pathetic.²⁷ In her own
538 words, Eichmann represented that most isolated of the bourgeois type, the philis-
539 tine. While there has been recent literature to demonstrate that Eichmann was
540 both a powerful force in his own right in the Nazi hierarchy and a raging criminal
541 who had a profound anti-Semitic psychosis, Arendt was nonetheless right to
542 insist on these unprecedented features in Eichmann's role that derived from the
543 workings of the totalitarian state.²⁸ The suggestion, quite common at the time of
544 the controversy, that Arendt was trivializing the evil of the Holocaust by speaking
545 about Eichmann's banality, could quite rightly be deemed a severe misapprehension
546 if not borderline slander.²⁹ The many protests of the alleged "downgrading" of Eich-
547 mann's significance, as referenced by Anthony Grafton among others, fail to see
548 how this perspective has actually expanded the boundaries of guilt and responsibil-
549 ity and significantly accounted for the entirety of the genocidal coalition. Eichmann
550 here is presented as a non-person, thoroughly disconnected from the consequences
551 of his actions and capable of speaking and thinking only in clichés. Like a travel
552 agent oblivious to the fact that the planes on which he is booking people are set
553 to crash every time, this analytical premise has actually done more to spread the
554 guilt and accountability than a framework that ascribed responsibility to only a
555 few demons at the top. Indeed, the Arendt controversy in West Germany actually
556 led in some part to a new spate of war crimes trials concerning lower functionaries.

557 The prejudices and social biases reflected in Arendt's account of the Eich-
558 mann trial may be seen as "blind spots," as part of the symptomatic after-effects
559 of the German Jewish Enlightenment. On one level they may themselves be per-
560 ceived to be "banal," as something one could hear from any dentist in Haifa (or
561 accountant on Bennett Avenue), rather than emanations worthy of a great intel-
562 lect.³⁰ Yet the fact that Arendt was clearly capable of generating profound intellec-
563 tual work grounded in such cultural criticism is itself worthy of examination as a
564 possible new genre of scholarly writing. The Arendt-Scholem exchange may now
565 be seen in a new light. Their shared experience as young rebels in a minority
566 movement of generational upheaval, stigmatized probably as much if not more
567 by Communism than by their parents points to one formative context in which

568 27. Peter Beahr, "Banality and Cleverness: *Eichmann in Jerusalem* Revisited," in *Thinking*
569 *Dark Times: Hannah Arendt on Ethics and Politics*, eds. Roger Berkowitz, et al. (New York:
570 Fordham University Press, 2010), 139.

571 28. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 338.

572 29. Richard J. Bernstein, "Is Evil Banal?: A Misleading Question" in *Thinking Dark Times*, 131.

30.

573 they lived and matured intellectually. A second context is alluded to in Scholem's
574 accusation that Arendt lacked of *Ahavat Yisrael*. It suggests that she reverted back
575 to "old ways," failing to extend the requisite measure of solidarity to the *Ostju-*
576 *den*.³¹ After all, the leading political figures in Israel, as well as most of the pro-
577 secutors and witnesses against Eichmann, were east European Jews. Additionally,
578 almost all of her Jewish interlocutors in the New York circle of public intellectuals
579 were the children of East European immigrants. Some of them, most prominently
580 Lucy Davidowicz, actually imported and adopted East European diaspora nation-
581 alism into the American context. Arendt's denial of something like an ethnic col-
582 lectivity defined by solidarity among Jews was perhaps the element that could be
583 least forgiven in her discourse. In fact, one could argue that Davidowicz's *War*
584 *Against the Jews*, with all its focus on intentionalism and specific German antisem-
585 itism, may be seen as the east European diasporic nationalist rejoinder to
586 Arendt's German Jewish *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.³² The crux of the contention
587 is that Arendt's operation of the category of "Jewish" did not exceed the bound-
588 aries of the contingent in a circumstance of political resistance.

589 Underneath these political disagreements were cultural tensions that cannot
590 be entirely discounted. The sacral discourse about the Holocaust was largely an
591 east European phenomenon that represented the experience of most of the
592 victims and survivors. Arendt's placement of the *Judenräte* (Jewish Councils or
593 the Jewish municipal administrations formed by Nazi authorities to implement
594 their policies), on trial, has consistently been cited as the most charged element
595 in the controversy, and was seen by many, in particular Scholem, as symptomatic
596 of Arendt's own prejudice or lack of "solidarity" with Jews in a situation that could
597 simply not be conceived by those not there. Arendt did not claim, first of all, that
598 the Jewish elite was specifically corrupt, but rather that notions of privilege with
599 hierarchies of distinctions among Jews were a structural reality in post-
600 emancipation Europe. Secondly, although elite Jews were not necessarily unfaith-
601 ful to traditional values of responsibility, it was precisely their lack of skepticism
602 and doubt (and by implication, their unwillingness to share decisions with the
603 skeptics and doubters) that greatly worsened the lot of the Jews as a whole.³³
604 By implication, Jewish identity itself in politically contingent circumstances did
605 not form bonds of solidarity that could override differences of class and politics.
606 These social fractures were arguably more consistent and historically grounded
607 than a discourse of identity that had imposed an erasure of such difference.

607 Yet critics have often overlooked that Arendt was just as harsh on German-
608 Jewish Reform leaders such as Leo Baeck, to whom she once referred as the
609 "Jewish führer."³⁴ In fact, there was a specific German-Jewish counterattack to
610

611 31. see again the previously cited letter.

612 32. I would like to thank the invaluable help of Professor Nancy Sinkoff in generating these
613 insights.

614 33. Jose Brunner, "Eichmann, Freud and Arendt in Jerusalem: On the Evils of Narcissism and
615 the Pleasures of Thoughtlessness" *History and Memory* 8 no. 2 (1996): 18.

616 34. Arendt applied this term only in the version of her account published in *The New Yorker*. It
did not appear in book form. See Cohen, "A Generation's Response," 261.

617 Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as best represented by *In the Wake of the Eich-*
 618 *mann Trial*, published in 1963. It featured some of the most eminent German Zio-
 619 nists such as Siegfried Moses, Martin Buber, and Ernst Simon. Furthermore, the
 620 *Judenräte* that has been most frequently pointed to in rebuke of Arendt is that
 621 of the West European community of Amsterdam that perished in such great pro-
 622 portions due to the *Judenräte's* meticulous records and apparently rather naïve
 623 cooperation with the Nazis.³⁵ Additionally, in her discussion of Croatia Arendt,
 624 with great analytical invention, made the startling claim that assimilation in
 625 Eastern Europe, when it was possible, provided a more secure guarantee for pro-
 626 tection than it did in Western Europe.³⁶ Finally, Arendt was also one of the first
 627 few who insisted upon the absence of any German resistance to the Nazis and
 628 the widespread acceptance the regime enjoyed.³⁷ In fact, far from being hostile
 629 to the Israeli national agenda in the trial, Arendt made a striking case for the jur-
 630 idical capacity of Israel to serve as prosecutor of Nazis in the name of all Jews.³⁸
 631 An irony of the entire controversy surrounding Arendt's work on Eichmann is that
 632 the portrayal of Arendt's critique (i.e. meek Diaspora Jews without the political
 633 steel of statecraft) fit the profile of a facile parody of traditional Zionist attitudes
 634 towards the Diaspora that had been reproached for weakness and the futility of
 635 Jewish leadership.

636 Yet the perception on the part of Arendt's critics seems to have triumphed
 637 over trifling details. The appearance of an assault on the memory of the victims
 638 alienated Arendt from the organizations of the mainstream Jewish establishment,
 639 as well as from members of New York intellectual circles still sentimentally
 640 attached to an old world vision of east European Jewish life. As Anthony
 641 Grafton points out, the New York intellectuals were infused with a residue of
 642 Yiddish sentimentalism. They were by and large not at all students of Jewish
 643 history and generally disdained its study.³⁹ Yet, they remained thoroughly
 644 imbued with the folk pieties of American ethnic pride, not at all incompatible
 645 with strident assimilationism. Fully aware of this, Arendt was said to have
 646 remarked that their ignorance became their chief qualification in their denuncia-
 647 tions of her work.⁴⁰ Arendt's advocacy of the contingency of Jewish identity

649 35. See Council of Jews from Germany, eds., *Nach dem Eichmann-Prozeß – Zu einere Kontro-*
 650 *verse über die Haltung der Juden* (New York: Council of Jews from Germany, 1963).

651 36. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 183.

652 37. The Eichmann text itself contains numerous references to the popularity of the regime in
 653 Germany and abroad and the lack of even a single instance where genocidal non-complicity was pun-
 654 ished. See Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 37, 103, 137 where she ironically remarks that "...no secret in
 655 the secret-ridden atmosphere of the Hitler regime was better kept than such 'inward opposition'."
 656 Elsewhere, Arendt draws a parallelism between Jews and the SS, that both had the possibility for non-
 participation, in particular that the SS members did not have to fear punishment. See Letter 133, *Der*
Briefwechsel.

657 38. Seyla Benhabib, "Identity, Perspective and Narrative in Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jer-*
 658 *usalem*," *History and Memory* 8, no. 2, (1996): 51.

659 39. Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West*
 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 279.

660 40. See Cohen, "A Generation's Response."

emerged out of decades of intensive historical study of the Jewish past, which provided her with stores of knowledge that her detractors could not claim. Furthermore, a consistently understated element in this confrontation is the degree to which Arendt's critics may have been operating out of guilt feelings for their own inaction during the Holocaust. Not only were most of Arendt's critics among the New York Jewish intellectuals the children of east European immigrants, some, such as Philp Rahv, were born there.

The controversy surrounding Arendt's Eichmann book as most often expounded in the voices of Jewish critics became dominated by overstatement and misrepresentation. Symptomatic overstatement of criticism can perhaps be seen in Lionel Abel's claim, for instance, that Eichmann comes off as more aesthetically pleasing than the victims and that Arendt sets a higher standard for the victims rather than for the perpetrators.⁴¹ Oft-repeated accusations that Arendt downplayed Eichmann's role and instead heightened the culpability of Jewish leaders amounted to a picture that framed Arendt as spear-heading a vindictive campaign against the Jews.⁴²

Recent critical essays have contended that the Israeli prosecution exaggerated Eichmann's role in a manner inconsistent with the historical record.⁴³ Arendt apparently herself claimed that before she had seen the evidence she was under the impression that Eichmann was much more important than he actually was. These overstatements and misrepresentations were not so much grounded in what Anthony Grafton singled out as Arendt's apparent "poor grasp of her intellectual texture and style,"⁴⁴ but rather Arendt's audience's poor grasp of her culturally-grounded criticism, with Central European vectors eluding even her most careful readers.

Arendt's premise of analysis was ultimately lost in the transatlantic and the ensuing controversy became symptomatic of her difficulty integrating into the dominant discourses of American and New York Jewish intellectual society. For instance, it was held against her that she stood her ground and defended her views. She was accused of "smugness," and "insensitivity," comments that could be related to some not very well-disguised misogyny, and arguably differing gender politics between German and Eastern European Jews.⁴⁵ Arendt's troubled process of integration in her new home, naturally raises the question of whether or not something like an intact transfer of a German-Jewish cultural collective would have been possible through emigration, a prospect Arendt would have most likely

41. Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds*, 279.

42. See Yaacov Lozowick. "Malicious Clerks: the Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil" in *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem*, 214; and Kohn, ed. *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writings*, 482.

43. Please see Ruth Bettina Birn: "Fifty Years After a Critical Look at the Eichmann Trial," [http://law.case.edu/journals/JIL/Documents/\(21\)%20Birn_Darby.pdf](http://law.case.edu/journals/JIL/Documents/(21)%20Birn_Darby.pdf), also Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 108.

44. Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds*, 280; See also Bernstein, "Is Evil Banal?" 131.

45. On this point one may consult Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: the East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982) or Daniel Boyarin *Unheroic Conduct: the Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

not supported, these difficulties represent a transatlantic transfer of discourses originally at home in dichotomies between Central German and Yiddish-dominated Eastern Europe. On the one hand, the Eichmann controversy was a result of the inability of certain cultural styles to translate, and on the other, it was the result of the fact that the cultural conflicts and tensions behind such styles translated all too well in the New World setting.

The secondary cultural divide in the transatlantic Eichmann controversy engaged Arendt's new-found proximity with an American subject-position and a greater distancing from the apparent trajectory of the Jewish state. Her inheritance of north German-Jewish norms may have predisposed her for some particular disdain for the largely Polish-Israeli leadership and trial prosecutors. As Leon Botstein has noted, Arendt went to Jerusalem to report on the judicial proceedings after a close and affectionate reading of America's political origins and their modern consequences.⁴⁶ While it may be somewhat of an overstatement to present Arendt as a thinker who castigated the Jews for failing to imitate America with its federal system designed to guarantee political equality to all its citizens, Arendt's critique of Israel inspired by her American experience does nevertheless present another factor in the analysis of the Eichmann controversy as a transatlantic text. Arendt implicitly interpreted the force of the Zionist logic and narrative that presented the Eichmann trial as contrasting with her American experience, which validated the possibility of a secular political order, and which also provided for the flourishing of a secular Jewish nation in a democratic Christian Diaspora.⁴⁷ A subtext here is that Arendt's marked discomfort with Israel may have been related to a parallel growing comfort with America. This may be ironic, considering that enmity expressed against her views came from a circle of Jewish intellectuals in post-war America who had staked their careers and outlooks on a full validation of the American political context.

This apparent Israel-America tension felt among Jewish intellectuals is found most clearly in instances in which Arendt took issue with Ben-Gurion's instrumentalization of the trial for pedagogic purposes, the charge that would have likely not have been denied by Ben-Gurion himself, given his theatricalization of the trial.⁴⁸ The pedagogic framing of the Eichmann trial as a "teachable moment" for the younger generation did nevertheless carry a certain political logic and narrative. The multiple presentations on long-standing suffering and anti-Semitism, and the inability of European polities to protect their Jewish citizens, expounded that the logic of history and the collective experience of the Jews led directly to Zionism and nationalism in Israel. But Ben-Gurion's efforts succeeded only in imparting misleading "Hegelian" lessons that implied Eichmann was only an instrument of some foreordained destiny.⁴⁹ Arendt, by contrast, tried to insist on the fact that the crimes of the Nazis could simply not be

46. Leon Botstein, "Liberating the Pariah: Politics, Jews and Hannah Arendt," in *Thinking Dark Times*, 171.

47. Botstein, "Liberating the Pariah," 94.

48. See Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*.

49. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 18.

749 assimilated into either “atrocities of the past,” or “current Jewish self-
750 understanding, which ultimately reinforced each other.”⁵⁰

751 While Arendt did regret the evolution of Israel along traditionally European
752 nationalist lines, her embrace of the U.S. as a beacon of freedom of speech in the
753 public sphere was also greatly tempered with developments in the late 1960s and
754 early 1970s.⁵¹ She may have seen the American political system as a way to
755 prevent the totalitarian breakdown that transforms bureaucrats into mass murder-
756 ers. Nevertheless, for all her demands that the Jews enter the “world,” and
757 become political, her disdain for Israel indicated that she could not fully divorce
758 herself from the cultural norms of ethical superiority that has been the hallmark
759 of the outlook of the “successful Diasporic” Jewish intellectual.

760 The final fissure in the transatlantic divide of the Eichmann controversy was
761 accessibility of university intellectuals and scholarly discourses to the public sphere.
762 In the 1960s, as is still the case until this very day in Europe, humanities professors
763 were regularly called upon to comment on television and in mainstream newspaper
764 editorials. While there may be a lack of transition vehicles for scholarly ideas that
765 appeal to the elite, such as *The New Yorker*, or *The New York Review of Books*, intel-
766 lectual arguments tend not to be embedded with much greater security in periodicals
767 designed for a much wider readership. In his essay, Anthony Grafton, somewhat senti-
768 mentally, argued that the Arendt controversy occurred during an apex of the “golden
769 age of magazines,” which was also a “glamorous age for American intellectuals,”
770 when there existed “something like an intelligentsia.”⁵² As Grafton has suggested,
771 the structure of the Eichmann controversy became the template for future media hand-
772 ling (or lack thereof) of new scholarly arguments. He outlined a three-step process, an
773 initial book is selected, its argument is then dramatized, and finally deployed within the
774 news media. This process strongly mirrors Arendt’s own account of the devolution of
775 media in the fabrication of public opinion.⁵³ The Eichmann controversy could plausi-
776 bly mark the beginning of the retreat of scholarly arguments from the broader public
777 sphere except in sensationalized form, while also triggering a reaction on the part of
778 scholars themselves to retreat even further from the public sphere. The Eichmann con-
779 troversy was an unintended consequence of the failure of translation between its Euro-
780 pean, Israeli, and American vectors. Thus, today American intellectual discourse, as
781 far as it can be said to exist in the public sphere as attended to by a wide reading
782 public, is structured along a sequential series of controversies, of which the Eichmann
783 controversy may be argued to be the first.

784 The fabricated truth and misrepresentation that shaped the public understand-
785 ing of Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* may in the end mirror Arendt’s own aporia
786 about the role of ideology. Nowhere in her Eichmann book did Arendt put forward a
787 clear position on the question of whether the ideology of antisemitism was a func-
788 tion of indoctrination from above or whether Nazism *qua* totalitarian movement

790 50. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 267.

791 51. See Botstein, “Liberating the Pariah,” 174–5.

792 52. Grafton, *Worlds Made by Worlds*, 286.

53. See Hannah Arendt, *Crises of the Republic* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971).

793 produced ideology through the fabrication of reality itself.⁵⁴ Similar ambiguity
 794 would reemerge during the Eichmann controversy, which resulted in a concerted
 795 assault on, and misrepresentation of, her work. Arendt carefully noticed that
 796 throughout the controversy, most of those attacking her book were actually
 797 dealing with a fabricated image of it and not with what she really wrote.⁵⁵

798 The controversy over Hanna Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* changed the
 799 way intellectual discourse is represented in the media and the way a mass reading
 800 public is informed of such debate. As Arendt herself noted, the public began to
 801 think that the arguments and statements *attributed* to her began to be confused
 802 with her *actual* statements and even with historical truth itself.⁵⁶ Ultimately the con-
 803 troversy has replaced the original book, as the master text of this subject, to which,
 804 as Arendt wrote, "there can be no good reply as it deals with a book no one wrote."⁵⁷

805 Such misrepresentation of the book is inextricably bound up with the book's
 806 status as a destabilizing post-war transatlantic document. Arendt deliberately
 807 accentuated the universalist aspects of the Holocaust as part of the general collapse
 808 of values under totalitarianism, which one would presume would enhance its
 809 ability to travel as a text. The results are well-known and cannot be underesti-
 810 mated. A concerted campaign to discredit her book was undertaken in the
 811 United States with counter-books, lectures, and proclamations issued by a wide
 812 variety of organizations. There is even evidence that a "campaign" did in fact
 813 exist and that it was "concerted."⁵⁸ In Israel, the book was simply not available
 814 in the Hebrew language; it had not been published in a translated form.

815 Arendt's bold and direct analysis of the Holocaust forced a painful reconsi-
 816 deration of the momentary truce of solidarity provoked by the revelation of
 817 wartime atrocities. It was her own status as a transatlantic refugee that enabled
 818 her to write unbound from the specificity of any one subject-position, though
 819 one nevertheless highly informed by her German-Jewish conditioning. Her
 820 opponents reveled in a discreditation that fed the desired myths, providing pre-
 821 cious little evidence to refute her.⁵⁹ In fact, it may be argued that the gradual
 822 decoupling of Holocaust studies and Judaic studies may have been influenced
 823 by the controversy. This separation arguably alleviates the pressure to account
 824 for the question of Jewish action and involvement during the Holocaust.⁶⁰

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829 54. Richard King and Dan Stone, eds., *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism,*
 830 *Nation, Race and Genocide* (New York: Berghan Books, 2007), 161.

831 55. Hannah Arendt and Mary McCarthy, et al. *Im Vertrauen: Briefwechsel 1949–1975* (Munich:
 832 Piper, 1995), 233–4, 238–9.

833 56. Kohn, ed. *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writings*, 511.

834 57. Kohn, ed. *Hannah Arendt: the Jewish Writings*, 487.

835 58. Cohen. "A Generation's Response," 259.

836 59. Cohen. "A Generation's Response," 277.

60. David Engel, *Historians of the Jews and the Holocaust* (Stanford: Stanford University
 Press, 2010), 166.