

Arendt on Adolf Eichmann

- A. Eichmann = ... operator/director of trains for the final solution... captured in Argentina in 1960, tried 1961... Arendt's book 1963
- B. Arendt caused scandal with this book, on at least two key points
 1. She characterized Eichmann as totally "normal," even overly normal, not "psychopathic." By extension she suggested that Nazis in general were not "crazy," but just "normal," following orders, following the heard. Arendt introduced the phrase "**the banality of evil**," meaning that evil ought not to be identified with a vicious will or a terrifying visage, but can have the form of **just doing your job / just doing your duty*.
 2. She drew attention to the participation of prominent Jews in the final solution. These "Jewish Councils" made lists, assembled people for deportation, often forcibly with their own police, took deportees money, put them on trains and sent them off.
- C. What's the takeaway? Same as above.
 1. The "evil" of the holocaust was augmented by the *participation in evil* of both the Germans and the Jews.
 2. "Evil" is not reducible to "bad guys" and scary armies. "Evil" is going along with what others are doing, **WITHOUT THOUGHT**. Eichmann finally felt okay about the final solution when he saw so many prominent men agree to it happily. "Who was he to judge?"

- **WHAT EVILS ARE WE PARTICIPATING IN?**
- What jobs do we have?
- What jobs are we going to get?
- For whom will we work and think?
- What business are they really involved in?
- Is what they are doing right?
- If not, could we find another job?
- **Should the ethics of businesses be a central concern in your search for good work?**

- **Are thoughtlessness and evil ultimately the same thing? That is, is the root of evil the wish not to have to think for yourself?**

- Is our government involved in evil?
- Should we withhold taxes?
- Should we rebel against it?

- **Is "peaceable" revolution possible?** (Thoreau *wonders*; so does Gandhi... neither, actually, is totally certain).

- Are *soldiers* deserving of the heavy criticism they receive in these texts?

- Are those who work at corporations involved in evil?
- (Is there such a thing as "evil"?)

- Could something like the final solution, or the rise of Nazism, occur in the United States? Why or why not?
- **Were the Nazis worse than us? Or are we the same?**
- Should German, Polish, Austrian Jews have resisted the Nazis? Is it possible to make judgments about so sensitive an issue?