On being spoiled: Arendt and the possibility of permanent non-thinking

Joshua A. Savage

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entitled

On Being Spoiled: Arendt and the Possibility of Permanent Non-thinking

by

Joshua A. Savage

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Art Degree in Philosophy

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May 2012
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An Abstract of

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My thesis explicates Arendt's Socratic notion of thinking, the adversarial dialogue one has with oneself that enables one to take moral account of past and future actions. Plato’s Socrates and Nazi officer Adolph Eichmann are utilized by Arendt as paradigmatic cases of thinking and non-thinking, respectively. My concern is how the thinking activity may become corrupt or even spoiled, whereby one is rendered genuinely incapable of thought, and hence, of moral action. I suspect such spoiling, if possible, could occur under one or both of the following conditions: (a) habituated refusal to engage in critical self-reflection; or (b) never developing the conceptual tools and language to adequately reflect on one’s moral self. I show that if we interpret Arendt’s claim that Eichmann was “never” capable of thinking to be absolute, in accordance with condition (b), then Arendt cannot justifiably levy moral and legal responsibility upon a man who helped send hundreds of thousands of Jews to their murderous death. However, if we interpret Eichmann’s failure to think as the product of condition (a), it suggests that at some point in his past Eichmann was capable of thought, and hence, moral action. Under such a reading, Arendt can have her cake and eat it too.
For my mother, who instilled a (somewhat effective) conscience in me.

For my father, who cultivated my curiosities about such things as consciences.

For my uncle, who convinced me to seriously address such curiosities.

For my wife, who supported me during two years of taking such curiosities seriously.

For an old man, who will remember this exercise in curiousness and be glad.
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Thanks to my fellow classmates for two years of illuminating, meaningful and hilarious research together. Friends remind us that thinking is an experience to be shared.
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Chapter 1

Understanding the Moral Significance of Thinking in Arendt

A thing which carries the label of “spoiled” is commonly thought to be stripped of its potential or ability to exist as a good thing. “Good” entities, anthropocentrically construed, may be good in a myriad of ways such as their instrumental use, exchange value, aesthetic value, or as ends in and of themselves. Spoiled eggs which have undergone irreversible chemical reactions, rendering them no good for man’s use, occupy this state permanently. Yet, it is unclear whether a human can be spoiled, permanently ruined, and beyond repair so that one is no longer capable of being good for oneself and ultimately towards others. Those who we commonly describe as spoiled are likely to gain that judgment after what is perceived to be inconsiderate and gratuitous behavior, especially when we take ourselves to be part of the subject-matter that has failed to be considered. While our affective experience of a so-called spoiled other indicates a certain wanting in us to be noticed, respected or at least considered as moral patients, perhaps what ought to be at issue in our frustration is whether the agent who frustrates us has affectively considered herself.

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1 I will not attempt to produce an exhaustive list of the ways in which things may be considered good, and hence, of things that can be spoiled. My aim is an analysis of the moral psychology and social conditions that generate the possibility of an agent who may be permanently incapable of thinking.
In order to grasp what it would mean for a person to be spoiled in a morally relevant way (as opposed to purely psychological, instrumental or aesthetic cases), I will attempt to contextualize the term within several writings of Hannah Arendt that collectively, but not necessarily cohesively, reveal a moral philosophy rooted in the human capacity to think. The primary texts I work through are *The Life of the Mind* (Vol. I), *Thinking and Moral Considerations*, and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Specifically, I will explore Arendt’s Socratic notion of the thinking activity, the adversarial dialogue one has with oneself that enables one to take moral account of past and future actions.

Thinking, the “ever-present faculty in everybody,” as Arendt suggests, is what provides the possibility for avoiding evil actions by producing an aporetic state in an agent. The Socratic dialogues of Plato are all aporetic, and Arendt views such thinking as having the power to unfreeze “frozen thoughts” or strongly held beliefs, making people literally stop and think in the midst of action, often ridding individuals of the apparent certainties that would have otherwise functioned as justifications for those actions. Working with Arendt's character analysis of Nazi officer Adolph Eichmann, we will find a paradigmatic case of spoiled thinking, an individual who appeared to have permanently lost the ability to think. Arendt claims that because of Eichmann's non-thinking, a condition which many of his contemporary countrymen shared, he was able to commit heinous crimes against humanity without the slightest affective experience (e.g. guilt, remorse, empathy, etc.).

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Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich suggest a helpful reminder for reading Arendt: “Those who persist in trying to find, or cleverly impose, consistency on this radically independent political thinker will neither get her right nor realize the exercise of their own free thinking to which she wished to invite us all.” We are encouraged to understand that “Arendt was not a systematic thinker,” and that “Arendt's philosophical refusal of system-building and her ‘anti-traditional’ stance are not failures to be corrected, but invitations to think with her, differently.”-- “Thinking with Hannah Arendt: An Introduction.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol.10 No. 2, (May 2002): 123–130.

One of my purposes is to bring to the surface an important undertone in Arendt's work, the tie between thinking and its often correlative affective feelings that steer us to make morally relevant valuations about the worth of the thinking activity itself. Mika Ojakangas champions what I think is central to the power of Arendt' concept of thought: “thinking, the intercourse between me and myself, is the condition of possibility of the fear of (bad) conscience, and it is this fear, not thinking as such, that impels man to abstain from doing wrong.”\textsuperscript{4} The phenomenon of thinking is not a strictly cognitive process of inference making and rationality, nor is it simply being conscious of sense data, or particular material things. Arendt distinguishes consciousness from thinking: “acts of consciousness have in common with sense experience the fact that they are 'intentional' and therefore cognitive acts, whereas the thinking ego does not think something but about something, and this act is dialectical: it proceeds in the form of a silent dialogue.”\textsuperscript{5} Arendt's description of the thinking contextualizes the activity as an experience one has with oneself, arguing that the man who exercises his faculty of thinking is always his own witness of his deeds: "I am my own witness when I am acting. I know the agent and am condemned to live together with him."\textsuperscript{6} Moreover, the potential to have bad and unpleasant experiences of ourselves when thinking, drives those who do it habitually to avoid actions that would make this felt experience worse.

In contrast to Eichmann, Arendt champions Socrates as the paradigmatic thinking human, one who was nearly always in a state of affective aporetic engagement with himself and others. In order to track the differences in the mental life of a non-thinking

\textsuperscript{4} Mika Ojakangas, “Arendt, Socrates, and the Ethics of Conscience,” \textit{Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences} Vol. 8 (University of Helsinki: 2010), 82.
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{LM}, 187.
\textsuperscript{6} \textit{LM}, 90.
human and a critically thinking human, Chapter 1 will explicate Arendt's Socratic notion of thought and will examine how the thinking activity may become spoiled under one or both of the following conditions: (a) habituated refusal to engage in critical self-reflection; or (b) never developing the conceptual tools and language to adequately reflect on one’s moral self. Chapter 2 will analyze Arendt's Eichmann within the context of conditions (a) & (b) to show how Eichmann exemplifies a spoiled thinker. The discussion of Socrates from Chapter 1 will serve as a measuring stick for the ways in which Eichmann's relationship with himself bears marks of corruption or spoiledness. Chapter 3 will provide a further look into what Arendt sees as the defining social force of late Modernity, namely totalitarianism, which illuminates the fertile cultural context that gave rise to and maintained pervasive non-thinking. Depending on the internal (self) and external (social) conditions which enable non-thinking, I will show that if the possibility for affective wonder still exists in apparently non-thinking agents, then the potential to think has not been permanently lost—that the kind of spoiled thinking which may characterize Eichmann, could only arise in individuals who were already non-thinking before destructive socio-political epochs, those Arendtian “dark times,” ensure the permanent moral ruin of non-thinkers. I conclude, that unless we are willing to offer a reading of Arendt's work that allows for Eichmann to be capable of thought (a status she regularly strips him of), then she cannot justifiably hold Eichmann legally and morally responsible for the evils he committed.
1.1 Introduction

“To put it crudely, they refused to murder, not so much because they still held fast to the command 'Thou shalt not kill,' but because they were unwilling to live together with a murderer—themselves.”

Hannah Arendt, Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship

To begin, Hannah Arendt's observations of Adolph Eichmann (which Chapter 2 will detail at length) encouraged her to further investigate the moral significance of the thinking activity, because her criminal of interest appeared to possess not a mere unwillingness to think, but “a curious, quite authentic inability to think.”7 In other words, Eichmann accepted rules and conventions without scrutinizing their justification, or more plainly, he was full of beliefs he took to be true without question. Such blind adherence to opinions or conventions effectively protected Eichmann against reality (i.e. that before and after the Nazi regime, and for those not under its totalitarian logic, murder was believed to be wrong). In her analysis of Eichmann's trial Eichmann in Jerusalem (1963/68), Arendt came to her famous conclusion: Eichmann's evilness is curiously banal, because it emanates not from his wickedness, but from his inability to think.

Considering this possibility, Arendt wondered if something of the opposite could be true as well, namely, that thinking as such could enable us to resist evil. In light of this, Arendt poses the following question to open up one of her later works, The Life of the Mind (1978): “[C]ould the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining and reflecting upon whatever happens to come to pass, regardless of specific content and quite independent of results, could this activity be of such a nature that it 'conditions' men

against evildoing?"\(^8\)

This is a pivotal question to Arendt's moral appraisal of those who enabled the atrocities of the Holocaust contra those who were able to resist participation in such evils. The former appeared to Arendt of having easily jettisoned one set of ethical rules and mores for a completely new and perverse set. In a post-Holocaust world, many of these individuals claimed to have been “swept up” by the totalitarian sociopolitical machine, choosing to comply with the carrying out the crimes required of them over the unthinkable alternative of “disappearing in silent anonymity.”\(^9\) Yet, the coercive effects of Nazi totalitarianism were not entirely pervasive. Some people did manage to resist, and Arendt suspects that since these resisters and their offending counterparts originally held the same set of moral rules, then there must be some other factor or faculty than judging by rules alone that allowed these few people to keep themselves from doing evil. Arendt finds her answer in an activity that she believes is most easily illustrated through the habits of Plato's Socrates—an activity she understands as the essence of the word “thinking.”

To better appreciate Arendt's guiding question from above, we must ask of her work the following two questions: “What is thinking?” and “What is evil?” We shall focus on the former question for the purposes of this chapter (and will indirectly reveal an Arendtian answer to the latter question, which is taken up in Chapters 2 and 3), which will examine why Arendt sees Socrates as the paradigmatic consciously thinking being, and second, to offer a slightly different reading of Socrates, which takes Arendt's analysis

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8 TMC, 160; LM, 5.
as its point of departure. The alternative reading will attempt to fill a gap in Arendt's analysis that fails to answer the question of how the Socratic intercourse between me and myself in effect (or affect) prevents evildoing. My contribution will show that it is not necessarily thinking outright that prevents Socrates' involvement in evildoing, but his appreciation of the fear of thinking—a side-effect of the activity. In order to bridge this gap, I will need an account of why Socrates thought wrongdoing damages the "soul" and will utilize the work of Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith for this purpose. Finally, I will show how it is that thinking can become spoiled, the cognitive conditions under which non-thinking can arise in “normally” functioning adults.

1.2 What is Thinking?

Arendt credits Immanuel Kant for the distinction between thinking and knowing, or between reason as the urge to think and to understand, and the intellect which desires and acquires verifiable knowledge. This distinction is a crucial one for Arendt (and Eichmann), because if the ability to tell right from wrong is at all related to the ability to think, then “we must be able to 'demand' its exercise in every sane person no matter how erudite or ignorant.” Arendt insists that the kind of thinking that grounds morality “is not technical and does not concern theoretical problems,” despite being “at the root of all philosophical thought.” She claims this because Socrates who, “thought about all subjects and talked with everybody, cannot have believed that only the few are capable of thought” nor that “only certain objects of thought, visible to the eyes of the well-trained

10 TMC, 163.
11 TMC, 164.
mind but ineffable in discourse” were what bestowed moral relevance to thinking.\textsuperscript{13} Rather, it must be “some property inherent in the activity of thinking itself,” regardless of its objects and those who consider them, that prevents men from doing evil.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, both thinking and the inability to think are possibilities for all humans, regardless of stupidity or intellect.

The “chief characteristic” of thinking is that it interrupts “all doing, all ordinary activities no matter what they happen to be.”\textsuperscript{15} The moment we begin to think on any issue or happening, we stop everything else, and likewise, the moment we begin doing anything else, the thinking process is interrupted, “as though we moved into a different world.”\textsuperscript{16} Arendt classifies the two “worlds” one moves between when thinking or acting as the world of \textit{invisibles} and the world of \textit{appearances}, respectively. This division is because thinking always deals with objects or others who are absent, or not in direct sense perception (i.e. invisible). “An object of thought is always a re-presentation, that is, something or somebody that is actually absent and present only to the mind which, by virtue of imagination, can make it present in the form of an image.”\textsuperscript{17} In other words, when one is thinking, one retreats from the material world of appearances, regardless of one's undeniable physical presence remaining in interaction with material objects. Even to think about another person who is in our immediate physical presence “implies removing ourselves surreptitiously from his company and acting as though he were no

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{LM}, 180.
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{TMC}, 164.
\textsuperscript{16} The allusion of moving between worlds is directed at Plato's two-world theory.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{TMC}, 165.
Moving back to the important distinction between thinking and knowing, the above description may indicate why thinking is not guided by practical purposes as it is a disengagement from the practical world of appearances. In our quest for knowledge, we are seeking verifiable information about the world that will stand the test of time. Similarly, with “common sense,” we are able to fit our five senses into a common world, enabling us to orient ourselves in it. Yet, there is something peculiar about thinking (contra “knowing” and “common sense”) that Arendt feels as “unnatural” and “contrary to the human condition.” Not only do the results of thinking remain uncertain and unverifiable, but the process is self-destructive. Kant nods at this feature of thought: “I do not share the opinion...that one should not doubt once one has convinced oneself of something...Our mind has a natural aversion against it.” If we are incline to think, the activity is always a negative process that “undoes every morning what it had finished the night before.” This effect of thinking, regardless of the deeply held beliefs of a given thinker, is what keeps one's beliefs in question and uncertain; and when one ceases to think, those beliefs solidify once more in order to be acted upon.

Arendt found it difficult that “few thinkers ever told us what made them think and even fewer have cared to describe and examine their thinking experience.” With this difficulty in mind and also her weariness of ascribing the faculty of thinking to a select few, Arendt sought a model who was unlike professional thinkers (i.e. academic

18 Ibid. We often see physical cues when one has traveled to the land of thought, such as staring into space or audibly talking to oneself.
19 TMC, 165.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid, 168.
intellectuals), but could be a representative for an “everybody.” In short, Arendt was looking for a model thinker who “never tried his hand at formulating a doctrine that could be taught and learned….who did think without becoming a philosopher, a citizen among citizens, doing nothing, claiming nothing that, in his view, every citizen should do and had a right to claim.”23 And so, ignoring the historical controversy over how this individual may have actually lived, Arendt turns to Plato's Socrates for her model thinker.

What first strikes Arendt about Plato's Socratic dialogues is that they are all aporetic, the arguments either lead nowhere or go around in circles. For example, if one attempts to know what something is, like justice or piety, one must first know what knowledge is, and to know knowing one must have a previous unexamined notion of knowledge. Thus, a man “cannot search for what he knows—since he knows it, there is no need to search—nor for what he does not know, for he does not know what to look for.”24 As we can quickly see, the line of reasoning in an argument or even a definition can never stay put and is set in motion by Socrates who asks questions to which he does not know the answers. Simple, but significant, adjectives we commonly use in describing the world as it appears to us (e.g. I see a beautiful mountain, a happy man, a courageous woman or a just decision), when turned into their root nouns take on the form of a concept that serves as a measure for our particular observations (e.g. beauty, happiness, courage, or justice). While such words are used to group together observable qualities and occurrences, they seem to nevertheless relate to something unseen, a concept, and despite

23 Ibid, 169.
being “part and parcel of our everyday speech...we can give no account of them.” 25 These apparently simple words become slippery upon our attempts to define them, something Socrates was well aware of and part of what motivated him to question those who claimed to have concrete definitions and knowledge of the apparent world. Hence, Arendt says, “we should ask ourselves what Socrates did,” when he discovered this tendency of men to claim what they do not know, and of words to appear understandable in usage, but whose meaning cannot be adequately accounted for in definition. 26

The answer to what Socrates did is perhaps best illustrated by the similes that were applied to him. First, Socrates was a gadfly, having the ability to arouse the citizens who would otherwise live their lives in an undisturbed sleep. 27 Those whom he stings, are aroused “to thinking, to examining matters, an activity without which life, according to him, was not worth living.” 28 The second of these titles was a “torpedo fish,” or electric ray, that paralyzes by contact. 29 The metaphor is appropriate, because the electric ray paralyzes others only through being paralyzed itself. Hence, it was not the case that through knowing the answers himself, Socrates could perplex, or paralyze, other people in thought. Instead, Socrates claimed he infected others with the perplexity he felt himself. While this effect seems to run counter to the arousal of the gadfly, Arendt says “what cannot but look like paralysis from the outside...is felt as the highest state of being

25 TMC, 171.
26 Plato, Apology, 20e-24e. After hearing that the Oracle of Delphi proclaimed Socrates the wisest among all men, Socrates thought about why that would be the case, realizing that it must be because he knows that he does not know. However, he set off to see if there were other men who were indeed wise and did know what they claimed to know.
27 Apology, 30e. Socrates refers to himself as a gadfly sent to stir the noble but sluggish horse that is Athens.
28 TMC, 174.
29 Meno, 80c-d. Socrates refers to himself as a “torpedo fish” and explains to Meno the metaphor.
alive.” Her appeal to the felt experience of thinking is important, because while it may be uncomfortable to challenge one's deeply held concepts and beliefs, it can also be a liberating experience if we do not recoil from the initial affect. Lastly, Socrates would “help” others share in his perplexity for the simple reason that he had nothing to teach; he was sterile (of knowledge) like the “midwives” in Greece who were beyond the age of childbearing. Yet, his sterility is what put him in a position to “deliver” the beliefs of others, allowing them to inspect those beliefs to see whether the “offspring” was fit to live and be kept, or if it was a mere “wind egg,” of which the bearer must be cleansed. Thus, his skill as a midwife allowed him to purge people of those unexamined prejudgments which prevent thinking by suggesting that we know what we actually do not know and cannot know.

The consequence of these three similes (gadfly, electric ray, and midwife) running their course is that “thinking inevitability has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short on those customs and values and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics.” Thus, the power of thinking is twofold: “it is inherent in the stop and think, the interruption of all other activities, and it may have a paralyzing effect when you come out of it,” as one may no longer be sure of what had seemed to be beyond a doubt while one was unthinkingly engaged in the activities of life. The real thrust for Arendt, is that thinking will usurp actions that are based on general rules of conduct, as such rules cannot withstand the

30 TMC, 175.
31 Plato, Theatetus, 149a-151d. Socrates explains his unique “craft” of midwifery to the young and hesitant Theatetus.
32 TMC, 176.
33 Ibid.
paralysis of thought. In “dark times” when rules of conduct condone murder, as they did under Nazi rule, it is thinking which undermines these violent rules (and not, as many would hold, other “better” rules), allowing those who think to disengage from following such rules and mores.  

Arendt is careful to point out that thinking can be dangerous, as “all critical examinations must go through a stage of at least hypothetically negating accepted opinions and 'values' by finding out their implications and tacit assumptions, and in this sense nihilism may be seen as an ever present danger of thinking.” The results from thinking can be dangerously applied in an unthinking way. For example, simply not being able to define justice does not mean that one has a license to do unjust things. Arendt ensures us that nihilism is not the end product of the thinking activity, it is “but the other side of conventionalism; its creed consists in negations of the current, so-called positive values to which it remains bound.” Regardless, such a danger does not arise from the Socratic conviction that an unexamined life is not worth living, but rather, on the contrary, “out of the desire to find results which would make further thinking unnecessary.” Arendt worries that any motivation for believing thinking to be unnecessary is dangerous. Yet, as we will see, such a desire has potential to manifest itself as a real cognitive state of non-thinking, a state that brought out the worst in humanity. The following section will examine the “two-in-one” mechanism that gives

34 Arendt is quick to note the threat of thinking to the well-being of a community. Under Socrates's tutelage, some had not been paralyzed by the electric ray, but had become aroused by the gadfly. Arendt writes, “What they had been aroused to was license and cynicism. They had not been content with being taught how to think without being taught a doctrine, and they changed the non-results of the Socratic thinking examination into negative results: if we cannot define what piety is, let us be impious—which is pretty much the opposite of what Socrates had hoped to achieve by talking about piety.”-- TMC, 177.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 TMC, 177.
thinking its moral import.

1.3 Understanding the “Two-in-One”

In order to lay out the preconditions for Socratic thinking, Arendt often refers to the following passage from the *Gorgias*: “I think it's better to have my lyre or a chorus that I might lead out of tune and dissonant, and have the vast majority of men disagree with me and contradict me, than to be out of harmony with myself, to contradict myself, though I'm only one person.”38 Within this passage, there are two distinct preconditions for thinking. The first is the “two-in-one” notion of “con-science,” or “to know with and by myself,” and it attracts Arendt because of its metaphorical power to capture the happenings of an otherwise hidden experience.39 The second is closely related to the first precondition, and holds that Socrates is a conscientious human due to his quest for consistency and harmony between the participants of this inner dialogue.

The idea of one-being-two and two-being-one is highly paradoxical, and something we will examine at length in the following section. Socrates spoke of being one, and hence, not being able to risk getting out of harmony with himself. However, says Arendt, “nothing that is identical with itself, truly and absolutely one like A is A, can be either in or out of harmony with itself; you always need at least two tones to produce a harmonious sound.”40 For example, when I appear to others, it is not as a simultaneous plurality of bodies, I am one, otherwise I would be unrecognizable. Yet, “this is not at all

38 Plato, *Gorgias*, 482b-c. Arendt refers explicitly to this passage in *TMC*, 181.
39 *TMC*, 160; *LM*, 5... By “hidden,”Arendt means that thinking is concerned with things that are invisible (e.g. concepts, ideas, imaginations, remembrances, etc) and that thinking itself is invisible in the world of appearances (i.e. the material world consisting of objects and other thinking beings).
40 *TMC*, 183.
the case if I in my identity (‘‘being one’’) relate to myself.”41 Whenever one says: ‘‘I am I,’’ one is conscious of oneself, and is only seen as identical with oneself to others for whom we appear one and the same. In short, thinking actualizes this difference that is given in consciousness.

Arendt reasons that the above two preconditions of thinking, an intercourse with oneself and the simultaneous quest for harmony, are matters of conscience because they have a direct stake in morality. However, she also warns us that ‘‘it would be a serious mistake...to understand these statements as the results of some cogitation about morality; they are insights, to be sure, but insights of experience, and as far as the thinking process itself is concerned they are at best incidental by-products.”42 According to Arendt, Socratic morality is based on the assumption that one has to be consistent with oneself, that ‘‘the two who carry on the dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be friends.’’43 As the opening quote to this chapter suggests, this explains why Socrates believes it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it. In other words, one cannot remain a friend of, or live with, another (or oneself) who has committed a severe wronging (e.g. murder); however, one could remain a friend to one who has suffered wrong.44

Still, in the Gorgias, the metaphor of the lyre seems to point beyond simply the

41 TMC, 184.
42 LM, 181.
43 LM, 187-188.
44 Even if the wrong that is suffered happens to be murder, Socrates is hedging the possibility of an afterlife where his soul would continue to live on in the company of itself. If this were the case, then this last act of choosing to remain friends with oneself could be the last chance for eternal harmony. See Gorgias, 474b & 483a-b, for a difference in view between Socrates, ‘‘It is better to be wronged than to do wrong,’’ and Callicles who claims that suffering wrong is ‘‘not the part of man at all.’’ Also, see Apology, 30c-e, for Socrates’ warning of his accusers that they will actually be suffering an evil far greater than he will (i.e. that unjustly condemning a man to death is worse than being the one unjustly killed).
“two-in-one,” given that there were more than two strings in the Greek lyre. This presents a problem for Arendt, for whom the idea of two is central to her work. Thus, she makes use of another Platonic metaphor of “a close relative” that is found in the (contested) dialogue *Hippias Major*, which I will quote at length in order to refer back to it throughout this chapter. After telling Hippias that he is a lucky man who is able to know what activities a man should practice and is able to practice them himself, Socrates goes on to explain his own “crazy” luck:

I wander around and I'm always getting stuck. If I make a display of how stuck I am to you wise men, I get mud-splattered by your speeches when I display it. You all say what you just said, that I am spending my time on things that are silly and small and worthless. But when I'm convinced by you and say what you say, that it's much the most excellent thing to be able to present a speech well and finely, and get things done in court or any other gathering, I hear every insult from that man (among others around here) who has always been refuting me. He happens to be a close relative of mine, and lives in the same house. So when I go home to my own place and he hears me saying those things, he asks if I'm not ashamed that I dare discuss fine activities when I've been so plainly refuted about the fine, and it's clear I don't even know at all what *that* is itself! “Look,” he'll say, “how will you know whose speech—or any other action—is finely presented or not, when you are ignorant of the fine? And when you're in a state like that, do you think it's any better for you to live than die?” That's what I get, as I said. Insults and blame from you, insults from him. But I suppose it is necessary to bear all that. It wouldn't be strange if it were good for me. I actually think, Hippias, that associating with both of you has done me good. The proverb says, “What's fine is hard”—I think I know *that*.46

Arendt provides the following interpretation of this passage:

When Hippias goes home, he remains one, for, though he lives alone, he does not seek to keep himself company. He certainly does not lose consciousness; he is simply not in the habit of actualizing it. Instead, when Socrates goes home, he is not alone, he is by himself. Clearly, with this fellow who awaits him, Socrates has to come to some kind of agreement, because they live under the same roof. Better to be at odds with the whole

45 Ojakangas, 69. Usually four or more strings were on a lyre.
46 *Hippias Major*, 304c-e.
world than be at odds with the only one you are forced to live together with when you have left company behind.\textsuperscript{47}

Continuing her interpretation of this section, Arendt effectively transforms the Aristotelian maxim “the friend is another self” to her own version of a Socratic maxim “the self, too, is a kind of friend.”\textsuperscript{48} Thus, Arendt wishes to employ the principle of non-contradiction, showing that one has passed this test of Socratic morality only if one is capable of maintaining a good relationship with the self (i.e. the friend or relative). One who succeeds in this way will have a harmonious soul, but one who fails (i.e. the wicked man) will have a soul resembling a lyre in discord. We should note that this resemblance of discord is only apparent to those who do think, whether it is oneself or someone else judging. There has to be someone both willing and able to listen for the discord and who also knows what counts as such.

Arendt claims that our contemporary notion of a conscience developed from being in good relation with and critically listening to the fellow who awaits Socrates; that fellow then became thought of as literally one's conscience. However, Arendt holds that it is the anticipation of after-thoughts roused by evil actions, bad thoughts, and unexamined opinions, and says: “Conscience is the anticipation of the fellow who awaits you if and when you come home.”\textsuperscript{49} Thus, as Ojakangas puts it, “conscience is either a bad conscience or the anticipation of bad conscience, nothing more.”\textsuperscript{50} The catch, which Arendt's own words hold her to, is that one can have a conscience only if one begins to critically examine one's deeds and thoughts: “No man can keep his conscience intact who

\textsuperscript{47} LM, 188.
\textsuperscript{48} LM, 189.
\textsuperscript{49} LM, 191.
\textsuperscript{50} Ojakangas, 70.
cannot actualize the dialogue with himself.”

Arendt also acknowledges that the Socratic propositions (e.g. it is better to suffer wrong than inflict it, and that doing wrong menaces one's inner harmony) are “self-evident truths for man insofar as he is a thinking being; to those who don't think, who don't have intercourse with themselves, they are not self-evident, nor can they be proved.” Thus, it seems that in order to become consistent and harmonious, one must be willing to ask critical questions of oneself that bring about affective discord between the two, or at least the fear of such discord. Under this paradox, it seems that Socrates is precisely the one whose soul is in constant and immediate discord with itself, while Hippias is the one who remains in harmony. The latter is happy according to Socrates, and remains one according to Arendt, because he fails to even begin the thinking activity. This suggests a fundamental property of thinking that runs entirely in the face of what we attempted to establish above (i.e. that only thinking beings are harmonious), so that now thinking is the original cause of the dissonant lyre, its condition of possibility. Further, Socrates must still be able to give an account of not just why it is better to be harmonious and consistent, but how such qualities differ from competing claims to harmony and consistency made on behalf of evil-doers and non-thinkers who feel no inner discord or contradiction.

Let us clarify the problem from above that will weigh most on our attempt to provide an account of spoiled thinking. First, Arendt admits that only good people (presumably ones who do think) are haunted by a bad conscience, regret and the anticipation of inner turmoil, whereas evil-doers (presumably ones who do not think) are

53 Ojakangas, 71.
not affected in such ways. If those who do not think remain the same (i.e. “one”), and
those who think are split in two (i.e. “two-in-one”), only the latter can be at variance with
themselves. Thus, how can Arendt simultaneously champion Socrates' claim that it is
characteristic of bad people to be at variance with themselves?54

We have sketched two apparently fundamental problems thus far based on what
Arendt champions as the two Socratic maxims (i.e. no one knowingly does wrong & only
bad men are at variance). The first problem is directed at those who do think, and it goes
as follows:

1. In order to have a conscience (i.e. the anticipation of self-criticism), one must
   already be a thinking subject.
2. If one is a thinking subject, then one is (or at least ought to be) aiming at
   preventing the two-in-one from being in discord, that is, to be consistent and
   harmonious.
3. If one accepts that consistency and harmony are ends worth pursuing through
   thought, then one will need to give a justification for why they are better
   conditions to be in than inconsistency and discord.

The second problem concerns those who do not think:

1. If there is a non-thinking subject, then that subject has no two-in-one dialogue.
2. If there is a subject who has no two-in-one dialogue, then there will be no
   scrutinizing levied by oneself against oneself.
3. If there is no self-scrutinizing, then one is already consistent and harmonious.

54 In TMC, 161: Arendt says, “A good conscience does not exist except as the absence of a bad one.”
In order to better understand how these problems intersect and how we might resolve them, it seems we will need a clearer notion of what Socrates meant about how wrongdoing corrupts the soul. In what follows, I will outline a view of Socratic moral psychology as championed by Brickhouse and Smith who argue that wrongdoing damages the soul by setting it on a slippery slope of increasingly non-thinking activity with regard to the wrongdoing one commits. Essentially, wrongdoers privilege the apparent benefit of satisfying temporally immediate appetites over temporally distant (and actual) benefits for the soul. The more one habitually privileges apparent benefits over actual benefits, the more one's soul is in discord with itself (although, this discord is felt less and less as the privileging becomes habit). Thus, we will arrive at a distinction between the felt discord that thinking generates and the non-felt discord (the damage Socrates fears) that is brought about by increased attempts to satisfy things that are merely apparent benefits to the soul. Wrongdoing damages the soul by decreasing its ability to do the thinking activity, and according to Arendt, a soul void of thinking “fails to develop its own essence—it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive.”\(^{55}\)

1.4 An Explanation of How Wrongdoing Damages the Soul

Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith contend that in Socratic ethics, “all goods and evils are not measured just on moral grounds, but also on practical grounds.”\(^{56}\) I agree with them that Socrates never distinguishes between the two in holding that what is good is beneficial (to the agent who commits good acts) and what is evil is detrimental

\(^{55}\) LM, 191.  
(to the agent who commits evil acts). *Prima facie*, it may seem easy for us to separate moral from practical values and to understand why a wrongdoer's moral risks are greater than those who do not commit wrongdoings, but it is a much more difficult task to understand why Socrates thinks wrongdoers actually face *more damaging* consequences. In the *Apology*, Socrates warns his accusers that they will actually be suffering an evil far greater than he will in being killed by them, because unjustly condemning a man to death is worse than being the one unjustly killed. 57 Brickhouse and Smith ask of this puzzling assertion, “Exactly what does Socrates think can be more damaging to a person than the risks he faces himself: death; exile, or the loss of his rights as a citizen?” 58

In various Socratic dialogues, we find it clear that Socrates believes the risks he faces in being killed are less dangerous because the threat of damage is only to his body, whereas the kind done by evil deeds is damage done to one's soul. The following exchange from the *Crito* evidences the dichotomy:

**Socrates:** Come then: If we ruin what becomes better by health and destroyed by disease when we're persuaded by the opinion of those who lack expertise, is our life worth living when this has been corrupted? This is, surely, the body, isn't it?

**Crito:** Yes

**Socrates:** Therefore, is our life worth living with a body in a bad condition and corrupted?

**Crito:** Certainly not.

**Socrates:** But is our life worth living with this thing being corrupted that injustice mutilates and justice improves? Or, do we believe that what justice and injustice concern—whatever it is of the things that make us up—is inferior to the body?

**Crito:** Certainly not.

**Socrates:** It is, rather, to be respected more?

**Crito:** Much more 59

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57 *Apology*, 30c-e.
58 B&S, 338.
59 B&S offer their own translation from the *Crito*, 47d-48a. Similar claims are made in *Gorgias* 478c-e, and *Republic* 353d-354a.
Socrates does suppose that there could be harsher punishments in an afterlife. In the *Gorgias*, he asserts the following as motivation to avoid wrong acts: “But those who have committed the greatest injustices and who have become incurable through these crimes will serve as examples, and they will no longer benefit in as much as they are incurable, but others will benefit by seeing them enduring throughout eternity the most fearful suffering [in Hades].” Nonetheless, it seems far too strong a claim that a potential and unverifiable inevitability is the main ground for holding that wrongdoing is more dangerous than suffering it. What seems more profound is the notion of those who have enacted the greatest injustices as having “incurable” souls, that they may arrive in the afterlife permanently damaged beyond the possibility of repair. Brickhouse and Smith point out that the practical import is this: “Injustice damages the soul, and the greatest injustice ruins the soul.” Still, it is unclear why the fear of a ruined soul is any different from the fear of a ruined body, especially if the consequence of a ruined soul is eternal torture, an experience that may feel corporeal even in the absence of a body. If the eternal torture is entirely psychological, I find it hard to imagine it not involving an embodied experience of pain or some sort of cognitive dissonance that creates affective emotions (e.g. guilt, remorse, regret, sorrow, etc.) for wrong deeds committed in the living world. It would seem in order for the latter to take effect/affect, a “two-in-one” would need to be engaged by the one being punished, and exactly how the conditions of Hades would

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61 In this passage, Socrates may be using the afterlife as more of a threat.
spark the “two-in-one” is unclear. Additionally, it is unclear how the quality and quantity of wrongdoings position one's soul closer to a state of ruin.

Brickhouse and Smith offer an account of Socrates' approval of disciplining the appetites and passions within one's soul that will shed light on the above concerns. In brief, they claim that the advantage of having disciplined appetites will interfere less with one's cognitive processes, “those processes by which we have and hold the beliefs we have and hold, and in virtue of which we act in the way we do.” In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates shows Meno that everyone, good or bad, desires only good things, and the difference is in what good and bad people believe. In other words, Socrates thinks no one voluntarily or knowingly commits evil. Socrates recognizes that some wrong actions are believed to be good because they will satisfy some appetite or passion in the soul. However, according to Brickhouse and Smith, Socrates reveals in the early dialogues (contra the latter books of the *Republic*) that “such passions are not identified as deriving from or residing in different parts of the soul, nor can their activity be understood in such a way as to make their effects independent of the universal human desire for the good (or what is truly beneficial to one), or of the general principle that human beings always do what they think is best for them.” Thus, we must investigate how the appetites and passions affect the soul.

Once more, Brickhouse and Smith contend that Socrates believes that when one acts for the sake of pleasure, one's appetites are strengthened and because of this, one's

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63 Further, if there is indeed a “two-in-one” experience in the afterlife, it is unclear how such a soul could be ruined. In fact, the “two-in-one” discord would seem to be an improvement towards the possibility of taking accountability for one's wrong actions.
64 B&S translate *Gorgias* 505a-b.
65 *Meno*, 77b-78b.
66 B&S, 350.
soul becomes increasingly habituated to believing that satisfying such appetites is good.\textsuperscript{67} Thus, one is disinclined to doubt whatever reasons one may have for taking the pleasure to which one's appetites are attracted as not as good as they may appear to be. In simply representing themselves to an agent as satisfying things, the appetites and passions appear to be “ways to satisfy our universal desire for what is good for us.”\textsuperscript{68} However, just because these things appear to be good for us necessitates nothing about them actually being good for us. It seems we have the age-old dilemma of short-sided demands blinding us from long-term consequences, but we still need a measuring stick, says Socrates in the \textit{Protagoras}, which would allow us to render misleading appearances powerless of fooling one into thinking that the apparent benefits are authentically good choices.\textsuperscript{69} Like a drug-addict whose addiction becomes stronger in attempt to satisfy the appetite, the more that addict loses his rational capacity to deliberate about whether seeking to satisfy the addiction is good for him.\textsuperscript{70} While this metaphor relies on hard physiological dependence, it shows that “the person with inflamed and undisciplined appetites continues always to act in ways that he thinks at the time are best for him.”\textsuperscript{71}

The argument is that if the addict were not to think that acting as he does is best for him, then he would not act in the way he does. Thus, his decisions and judgments will continue to be shaped by his desire for what is good for him; they will be informed by his beliefs about what material things, social interactions and mental content (e.g. stuff worth

\textsuperscript{67} B&S, 350.
\textsuperscript{68} B&S, 350.
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Protagoras}, 356d-357b.
\textsuperscript{70} While the act of ingesting a drug itself may not be a wrongdoing, often the means to satisfy the craving for a drug will lead one to acts that are less controversially wrong (e.g. stealing or lying). Regardless of whether it's the act itself or the means to make an act possible, it will be damaging insofar as it causes one to increasingly ignore considerations of those means or actions.
\textsuperscript{71} B&S, 350-351
imagining, believing, doubting, considering, etc.) will satisfy that desire. The catch is that “the increasingly habitual wrongdoer more and more acts on the basis of incorrect beliefs about what is really good for him,” and “finds less and less opportunity or interest in considering alternative goals and modes of living.” This slippery slope shows how damage to the soul is not strictly confined to the most heinous of wrongdoings, but that lesser unjust deeds will set one's soul down this same path. For example, in the Gorgias, Callicles concedes the metaphor of an unhealthy person needing to be kept away from activities that contribute to illness, and Socrates responds (505a-506a): “And about the soul, oh best one, isn't it the same thing? As long as it is bad, being foolish and out of control and unjust and impious, it ought to be kept from its appetites and not turn to anything other than what will be better for it.” Socrates suggests that if the ruining of one's soul (or body) is caught early on, before the deleterious habit barricades one against any consideration of the habit, it seems reasonable that a moral education (i.e. learning critical thinking skills for reconsidering or seeing contrary evidence of the perceived benefits of one's actions and habits) could help the wrongdoer avoid making the same moral errors in the future.

This section has shown that there are potentials within the self/soul that have aims other than what is truly beneficial, like appetites that seek only pleasure. Brickhouse and Smith have helped us to see that “these potentials function by representing their aims to the soul as benefits to be pursued and acquired, and if these potentials are not kept in

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72 B&S, 350.
73 B&S (352), contend that a moral education in the form of corporal punishment will give habitual wrongdoers “powerful reasons not to engage in wrongdoing.” In other words, they argue that punishment has a sobering effect on a habitual wrongdoer, and that the severity of the punishment must match the severity of the habitual wronging to be forceful enough to cause pause and reconsideration. As we shall see in Chapter 2, in certain kinds of non-thinking wrongdoers, like Eichmann, punishment makes no sense in this way.
check, they can begin to erode the cognitive functioning of the soul in ways that make correct evaluation of actual benefit increasingly difficult to perform."\(^\text{74}\) They warn that if the process is allowed to go on unchecked, then “the ultimate damage one can do to one's soul is to leave it in a condition where it cannot manage, rule, and deliberate,” but can only form judgments of what is best based upon the misleading and unreliable representations of appetites and passions.\(^\text{75}\) They claim that the “worst and most permanent” of such consequences are “ruinous,” but provide no examples or contexts that would allow us to understand what a ruined soul might look like, or whether such a being is even possible. In the following section, I will analyze the cognitive conditions that could cause a soul to be ruined, permanently non-thinking. Then, in Chapter 2, I will show how Arendt's Eichmann, as an antithesis to Arendt's Socrates, fills in the opposite end of the spectrum of thinking. As a case study, Eichmann will provide the contextual evidence of how it is that an individual may become permanently non-thinking, “stuck” at the bottom of Brickhouse and Smith's slippery slope.

### 1.5 The Conditions of Spoiled Thinking

As stated in the introduction, I suspect the potential for permanent non-thinking could develop from one or both of the following conditions: (a) habituated refusal to engage in critical self-reflection; or (b) never developing the conceptual tools and language to adequately reflect on one’s moral self. In consideration of (a) & (b), let us reexamine the case of Socrates and the fellow who awaited him every evening upon his return from the agora. Arendt reminds us that at the end of *Hippias Major*, as the speakers

\(^{74}\) B&S, 355.  
\(^{75}\) *Ibid.*
are parting ways, Socrates tells the thickheaded Hippias how “blissfully fortunate” he is in comparison with poor Socrates, who at home is awaited by a very obnoxious fellow who always cross-examines him. Yet, when Hippias goes home, he remains one, for he does not keep himself company as Socrates does with himself. Arendt asserts that it is common of “base people” to be “at variance with themselves” and of wicked men to avoid their own company; their soul is in rebellion against itself. If Hippias’ inability to engage in the kind of inner-dialogue that plagues Socrates was the product of condition (a), it could be that in the past, Hippias did engage in the activity but found it to be too disconcerting and unpleasant to continue. Such could be the case of an individual who has committed many heinous deeds and in order to avoid the inner strife of reflecting upon those actions, becomes accustomed to simply not thinking about them. To illustrate the uncomfortable silent dialogue characteristic of one's soul as “not in harmony but at war with itself,” Arendt points to Shakespeare's Richard III. In the stillness and privacy of night, Richard battles himself:

O! no: alas! I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.
Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter.

Yet, when morning comes and Richard has escaped his own company to that of his peers:

Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe...

Although Shakespeare uses the word “conscience,” he is not using it in the accustomed way of religious and legal matters, the lumen naturale that is supposed to tell

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77 LM, 189.
us what to do and when to repent. Unlike this notion of an ever-present conscience, the fellow Socrates refers to is one who we can “leave at home.” Thus, a fear of returning to this fellow is what motivates the murderers in Richard III to live without it, to never return to the troubling quiet of being with oneself – that they do not think, is an intentional matter of habit. In this case, we see Arendt’s view in alignment with Brickhouse and Smith, that such avoidance reveals a dark and slippery slope for man: “A person who does not know that silent intercourse (in which we examine what we say and what we do) will not mind contradicting himself, and this means he will never be either able or willing to account for what he says or does; nor will he mind committing any crime, since he can count on its being forgotten the next moment.”

An individual who experiences such hatred of conscience still must know what it is to listen to oneself, at least from time to time, otherwise (s)he would be unaware of anything to fear. Nonetheless, we can gather from the previous section that once a thinking person has committed a wrongdoing and must face the “relative,” that experience can be affective enough to discourage future introspection (especially before and after similar wrongdoings). But what causes someone, like King Richard, to hate and avoid the relative rather than fear and appreciate him like Socrates? It could be that such an individual of type (a) prefers to satisfy his appetites, those apparent goods which discourage further thinking, and has done so to the point of ruin, so that he no longer can live with himself because he is now literally incapable of thought. But what of those appetites, what contexts help them win out? While the habit of wrongdoing makes it increasingly difficult for one to question oneself, it seems that in the case of King

79 LM, 191.
Richard, only when he is alone is he capable of the two-in-one, but when in the company of others, he abandons the relative for the comfort of singular harmony (i.e. of satisfying his appetite to think well of himself, an attitude his peers promulgate).

Sometimes, being alone has the opposite effect that it had on King Richard, and instead, being in the company of others is enough to stimulate the two-in-one. For instance, Socrates would not only focus on engaging with his own relative, but attempted to reveal the relative in his fellow Athenians. This is indeed what Socrates the gadfly practices: “I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company.” In short, his mission was to make sure Athenians had the experience of “knowing with themselves,” and since so many seemed to lack this experience, Socrates took it upon himself to be a stand-in, a substitute for the relative that was not yet interiorized by the Athenians. For example, Alcibiades was only able to have such an experience when in the company of Socrates:

Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame—ah, you didn't think I had it in me, did you? Yes, he makes me feel ashamed, because I know perfectly well that I can't prove he's wrong he tells me what I should do; yet the moment I leave his side, I go back to my old ways: I cave in to my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become one constant effort to escape from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I'm doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should. Sometimes, believe me, I think I would be happier if he were dead.

The problem for Alcibiades is that he can escape this experience, because he has not developed the relative in himself, and only recognizes it when he visits Socrates. Mika Ojakangas argues that during the classical period of Greece, fear of the relative was not the predominate method for why people kept their actions in check. On the one hand, it

80 Apology, 30e.
81 Symposium, 216b.
was the fear of external punishments, and on the other (what Ojakangas thinks is most important), it was the fear of losing one's face and good reputation.\(^82\) It was the gaze of external others (contra the internal relative) and one's outward appearance that seemed to be the principle means of control and identity. But Socrates wanted citizens of the polis to interiorize the gaze of others in order to help them inspect themselves better and ultimately to develop a voice from that gaze. Hence, in the company of Socrates, Alcibiades' soul began to protest that his life is no better than the most miserable life of a slave, and as such, was not worth living. However, when outside the company of Socrates, Alcibiades felt great relief, because he was no longer split—the rest of Athens provided a cultural context where such comfort was possible and overwhelmingly popular (to the point that habitually upsetting this status quo meant being killed).

Chapters 2 & 3 will focus more on how cultural context and political life shapes what is possible for the two-in-one experience, but for now, we will focus on condition (b) of how one may become spoiled.

For condition (a), we considered the case of an originally thinking wrongdoer to develop a hatred of thinking about those wrongdoings to the point of habitually avoiding thought. If the habit of avoidance is prolonged, it eases the psychological burdens of wrongdoing and in effect, rids the agent of considerations to cease those actions. However, if a wrongdoer still occasionally battles himself like King Richard, we cannot label that individual as spoiled—the competing voice of criticism is still possible. Regardless, it is not a huge leap to suspect that such individuals whose lives have come to revolve around wrongdoing could reach a point of never thinking, not because they know

\(^{82}\) Ojakangas, 82.
thinking would be too painful, but because they no longer know how to engage themselves. It is at this point where we might consider why it is that an individual who is capable of thinking in the company of others (e.g. Alcibiades) cannot do it alone, and even extreme cases of individuals who cannot think in the company of themselves or others. In relation to condition (a), we might consider the following condition as an endpoint experience of habitually refusing to think, so that one's former skills (e.g. recognition of when to question oneself, of what to ask, of how to word it, of why it's important, etc) are beyond use and repair. Specifically, what follows is an attempt to understand cases that failed to cultivate their thinking capacities. Hence, if non-thinking is the product of (b), never developing the conceptual tools and language to adequately reflect on one’s moral self, we can consider this second condition in at least two ways: (b1) the vocabulary (i.e. critical and coherent questions) available for inner-dialogue is a constraint on the kind of experience we have when we do reflect so that our reflections fail to draw any correlations between our actions/beliefs and our Socratic “soul,” and thus fail to cultivate any changes in one’s actions/beliefs; (b2) the kind of language one learns to use in self-evaluation is rigged to protect one against the world of appearances in which we act so that we do not have to deal with the fallout of those actions.

In regards to the former case (b1), let us assume that there are individuals who have “correct” moral beliefs (i.e. beliefs that, if acted upon, would not damage the soul), but nevertheless, these individuals are unable to perform these permissible actions because they are incapable of bringing such beliefs to bear on any decision they are called upon to make. Brickhouse and Smith seem to think this condition is what Socrates has in mind for a ruined soul, saying, “even if it remained true that, in some sense, the
soul continued to have some beliefs that might be used to challenge the misleading appearance of some false judgment resulting from the intoxication of some appetite or passion, those beliefs will simply no longer be able to have any effect on the actions of the ruined wrongdoer."  

Unfortunately, Brickhouse and Smith do not clarify what the mental life is like for an individual who cannot act upon “correct” beliefs. How could this state of affairs even be possible? Certainly, there could be external constraints that would prevent beliefs from being acted upon (which will be discussed in Chapter 3), but an internal constraint could arise in the vocabulary available for inner-dialogue which would hinder the experience one has when one does reflect so that one's reflections fail to draw any correlations between one's actions and beliefs and one's soul.

The following metaphor may help illustrate such a linguistic constraint. Recall that Socrates is the quintessential thinker (as far as cross-examining oneself & one's beliefs) and is this way because through rigorous practice he has developed a mental tool-belt that allows him to at all times carry and readily access the kinds of robust or nuanced tools necessary for effective self-evaluation. Now, Socrates's ability to carry a tool-belt is the same as every human being's, and the holding capacity (possibly infinite) and structural quality of all tool-belts are the same. Yet, the kinds of tools Socrates has fashioned during his life, coupled with his well-practiced ability to quickly access said tools, makes him markedly more well-equipped than the average man to rigorously interact with himself. Evidence of his tools can be found in descriptions of him as an

83 B&S, 354.
84 Arendt sketches a portrait of thinking as an ability available to every human being. However, it seems in certain cases of the mentally handicapped, their cognitive structures may not afford them the ability/potential for what Arendt defines as thinking, and thus, these folks could not be said to be spoiled since the structural potential never existed in the first place.
electric ray, who paralyzes the certainty in us, leaving perplexity in its wake; and his prowess as a midwife, in delivering, examining and aborting the unfounded beliefs of others (and himself). What kinds of words and questions does one ask oneself in order to have the experience of a relative who is both an electric ray and a midwife? How does one's relative become enough of an adversary so that when one does reflect, the relative is capable of framing questions and criticisms that poignantly rouse the interlocutor? Unlike Socrates, the average man (or average ray) may only be equipped with “low wattage” or a marginal ability to inflict self-paralysis, resulting in sporadic lapses of thought that could have prevented or put an end to certain actions the average man now regrettably sees as immoral (or certain beliefs that lead to immoral actions). Or perhaps, the average man, as an unskilled midwife, has never endured an apprenticeship where one learns the craft of coaxing opinions out of those who bear them (including oneself), and by what standards those opinions must be judged.

What's more, an individual who fits the condition of (b1), may appear to himself (and others) as a thoroughly thinking being. Often times, when compelled to make a choice that we come to regret, we realize things we failed to consider, or questions we could have asked, that would have prevented those actions. For example, Eichmann took himself to have thoughtfully employed Kant's categorical imperative regarding his morally dubious career choices, but Arendt points out he completely mixed up Kant's words, so that it had the effect of not thinking those choices through at all. An individual such as Eichmann in this case, whose ability to do battle with himself, to frame and ask himself critical questions – to think – is futile (or at least misappropriated); he could not, even if he held “correct” beliefs (and it appeared he held many that ran counter to his
actions), bring his actions to align with those beliefs because his ability to think about them was more of an ability to appear to himself of having thought about them.\(^8^5\)

In the case of (b2), we could conceive of an individual whose thinking capacity diminished over time or of one who never developed the conceptual tools and language to adequately reflect on one’s moral self; either way, the language readily available for one to use in attempts to think is rigged by social forces which one may intentionally or unintentionally uptake for regular use. This too, seems to fit Eichmann if we agree with Arendt’s claim that he never learned to fashion the prized weapons of Socrates, nor learned to use them, and hence, was incapable of ever recognizing their value. Arendt criticized Eichmann for speaking only in clichés, and who may have only spoken to himself in clichés, euphemisms or fallacious reasoning that served to buffer his conscience from any accountability (as evidenced by a reported lack of emotion, remorse or guilt for his active role in facilitating the murders of hundreds of thousands of Jews). In fact, the Nazi “officialese” language was widely used among the regime members, allowing one to dissociate oneself from any emotional or moral connotations of otherwise heinous actions, barricading one's minds from any doubt that what was being done was anything other than routine business. It's possible that such a condition is the product of intentionally and habitually buffering oneself from reality (thus, bearing a resemblance closer to [a] than [b]). However, it may also arise unintentionally from being immersed in one's mainstream cultural lexicon. Pick any run-of-the-mill post-game press conference from a major American sports league and chances are the majority of athlete responses are ripe with clichés. It's not that these athletes are necessarily dumb and cannot think in

\(^8^5\) Chapter 2 attempts to elucidate the phenomenon of Eichmann merely appearing to himself as having thought about his beliefs.
other contexts, it's that the precedent in their world has been to speak that way (perhaps because the nature of their work is so very physical and requires one to be *in the immediate*, thus discouraging journeys to the land of thought).

Regardless, the phenomenological import in condition (b) is the difference between *never* developing the cognitive environment for thinking, for interiorizing the affective language of others, or simply failing to *effectively* interiorize the affective language so that one can still reflect but only in a comfortable simulation of the two-in-one. Further, the moral import lays in the difference between conditions (a) and (b). In the former, one is wickedly avoiding thinking (as a matter of choice) until one becomes entirely non-thinking; and in the latter, one may even believe that self-criticism is a virtue, but does not have the Socratic tools to enable an affective two-in-one. In Chapter 2, I will examine Arendt's Eichmann in order to gain a sense of how the above conditions apply to Eichmann as a habitual and perhaps permanent non-thinker. Chapter 3 will show that depending on how either or both conditions enabled Eichmann's wrongdoings, our justifications for holding Eichmann responsible may be threatened. At the least, we will find some troubling inconsistencies in Arendt's moral prescriptions as juxtaposed with her available moral descriptions.
Chapter 2

On the Evils of Eichmann

Hannah Arendt's account of thinking and its role in moral action gains its practical thrust from her observations during Adolf Eichmann's 1961 trial in Jerusalem. The man on trial stood accused of crimes committed against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity, and war crimes during the whole period of the Nazi regime, particularly those done during World War II. To these charges (fifteen counts in all), Eichmann pleaded, “Not guilty in the sense of the indictment.” Arendt was troubled by a question that went unanswered: “In what sense did he think he was guilty?” Eichmann's lawyer, Robert Servatius claimed that his client “feels guilty before God, not before the law,” an assertion that was never confirmed by Eichmann himself. The defense would argue that under the Nazi legal system, Eichmann had not done anything wrong and that it had been his state duty to obey orders, affairs over which no other state had retrospective jurisdiction. Additionally, Eichmann claimed he had nothing to do with the killing of Jewish people, “I never killed a Jew, or a non-Jew, for that matter—I never killed any human being. I never gave an order to kill either a Jew or a non-Jew.”

86 EJ, 21.  
87 Ibid.  
88 Ibid, 22.
It was the sheer mass of the crime committed, not just in the number of victims, but in the number of perpetrators, both passive and active, who aided the deportation, torture and extermination processes, that continues to trouble our judgment and understanding of the Nazi genocide. Prima facie, there appear to be two sets of pivotal questions, one that attempts understand how to levy moral responsibility on Eichmann and another that attempts to understand how we might hold an individual legally responsibility for massive crimes with no clear precedent. However, this chapter is primarily interested in a third and more fundamental set of questions, a set that Arendt points us toward, of how it is that Eichmann takes himself to be responsible, or “guilty.” The kind of questioning I have for Eichmann revolves around the inner dialogue he may have had with himself (or lacked in any recognizable way) throughout his years in the Nazi Party that would have allowed him to not simply participate in horrible crimes, but accelerate their efficiency with pride and “elation.”

An important component to my questioning, and to Arendt's theory of evil, is our concept of “normalcy.” Eichmann's inabilities to show remorse, to allow himself feelings of guilt, or to entertain thoughts of himself as more than a mere means to the Führer's “Final Solution” were not necessarily signs of someone who was abnormally evil at heart (or in motive), but merely a normal human who failed to invoke the normal human ability to think what we are doing. This normality of evil, something that can result from collapses in thinking in potentially any human, warrants a popular criticism of Arendt, that anyone (who is susceptible to non-thinking) could have committed the wrongdoings of Eichmann if they were in his same contextual situation; and thus, he was simply a

89 EJ, 62.
victim of circumstance and cannot be held morally/legally responsible for acts that anyone may have potentially carried out. Chapter 3 will attempt to reconcile this concern through examining what Arendt offers as justifications for Eichmann’s execution and also the limits of totalitarian rule to see whether it was actually possible for Eichmann to prevent himself from committing the wrongdoings he stood trial for.

In what follows, I will lay out Arendt's depiction of Eichmann in order to better grasp the kind of moral psychology that is necessary for making sense of Eichmann and the many other individuals who shared a similar cognitive environment. Throughout, I will use conditions (a) and (b) as established in Chapter 1, in order to classify the possible ways in which Eichmann's thinking capacity became corrupted to the point of ruin. We will find that although his actions were “monstrous,” Arendt provides a wealth of evidence that Eichmann's capacity for such wrongdoing was primarily the banal product of spoiled condition (b). That is, he never developed the conceptual tools and language to adequately reflect on his moral self, resulting in a failure to withdraw from his immediate engagement with Nazi political machinery and ideology. The pivotal reason why Eichmann's attempts at thinking failed, is because they were merely apparent engagements with himself about what he was doing and were unable to induce the fully aporetic movement that characterizes Arendt's model thinker, Socrates.

Let us look briefly at what Eichmann's duties were and how he himself denied or confirmed adherence to those duties. Eichmann's primary role within the Nazi regime was to accelerate the judenrein, or the cleansing of Jews from Europe. At first, the Führer’s orders were for this process to be one of deportation, something many Zionist

90 We can conceive “immediate engagement” to mean both his daily actions (job duties) and his membership in the Nazi regime at large.
Jews, European anti-Semites, and even self-proclaimed “allies” of the Jews, believed to be a mutually beneficial arrangement. Eichmann saw himself as belonging to this latter category, an aid to Jews, and went to considerable lengths to prove his point. Working with many Jewish leaders across Europe, Eichmann was able to efficiently coordinate a massive (forced) relocation of the central European Jewish population to camps and ghettos across Eastern Europe. His coordinating efforts were centered on rail transportation and readying important depots and terminals in the rail network. He claimed to have no ill-feelings toward Jews, that he had Jewish friends growing up, that he had Jewish relatives, and even a Jewish mistress. Thus, Eichmann was proud to “help” the Jews relocate and establish a centralized nation for themselves (he was a large proponent of an early Nazi goal to establish Madagascar as the dumping ground for Europe's Jews).

However, after several years of coordinating the “successful” deportation of Jews to concentration camps, Hitler gave the explicit order to begin the physical extermination of the Jewish population (and other undesirables). Eichmann claimed the news saddened him and described his reaction to this strikingly violent solution: “I now lost everything, all joy in my work, all initiative, all interest; I was, so to speak, blown out.” He claimed his unfortunate lack of enthusiasm stemmed from several visits to the newly built death camps, complete with state of the art gas chambers, mobile gas vans, and massive execution trenches for those who were spared the pleasantries of death by gas for death by bullet. His depression was furthered from working so diligently for years toward one end (deportation), only to have this goal undermined by a new end (killing). This

91 EJ, 30.
92 EJ, 31.
supplemental murder business was just such an inconvenience, and Eichmann was worried that the extra demand would overload his office's capacity to function well, ruining his reputation as a reliable officer.\footnote{Eichmann's highest rank was \textit{Obersturmbannführer} (lieutenant-colonel), standing 5\textsuperscript{th} in a chain of command extending from Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, and Muller.} Even if we grant that he was telling the truth, Eichmann pushed through these emotional barriers (it seems quite easily), because after all, it was his revered Führer who had mandated this policy of extermination.

Nonetheless, Eichmann still felt emotionally affected by this new role that was assigned to him. He clearly understood that in order for the new technologies of death to be utilized efficiently, the process depended on him to diligently allocate living bodies to be disposed at these sites. So how could someone who felt so much discord in watching a group of Jews loaded into a gas van, to the point of becoming physically ill and begging to be spared further observation, continue to perform his duties without ever considering to act otherwise? It seems such an affective moment would be enough to cause anyone to second guess their involvement, and that memories of such events would hauntingly evoke guilt (or Socrates' relative) whenever another train was directed toward a death camp. Yet, Arendt explains that Eichmann saw himself as an “idealist,” in the sense that he was a man who \textit{lived} for his idea (i.e. making a better Germany through the Führer's dictates), who was prepared to “sacrifice for his idea everything and, especially, everybody.”\footnote{\textit{EJ}, 42.} In a police examination, when Eichmann said that “he would have sent his own father to his death if that had been required, he did not mean merely to stress the extent to which he was under orders, and ready to obey them; he also meant to show what}
an 'idealist' he had always been." In the demand for universal sacrifice, such consuming ideology also demanded that Eichmann sacrifice himself, that he could not pause to consider the damage his actions may be having on his "soul." Thus, Eichmann "had of course his personal feelings and emotions," but unlike the affect that paralyzed Socrates, "he would never permit them to interfere with his actions if they came into conflict with his 'idea.'"  

2.1 Eichmann and Spoiled Condition (b1)

At first blush, Eichmann's privileging of ideology over everything and everyone else seems to fit the mold of spoiled condition (a), in that he must have habitually had the experience of refusing to consider alternatives to carrying out the Führer's ideology. However, there is little cohesive evidence that Eichmann's negative feelings about extermination were at all related to the inner-battle that characterized Shakespeare's King Richard, a man who experienced the discord because he thought about his actions, ultimately choosing to ignore his self-critical voice. In order for Eichmann to be convinced that to be a good Nazi officer required him to avoid thinking about his involvement with the horrors he witnessed, presupposes that Eichmann: first, was previously capable of thinking about his actions; second, was previously capable of seeing how thinking could derail his actions; third, was able to recognize thinking as a threat to his ideological ends. To concede these presuppositions would be granting too much, distorting the illustration that Arendt gives us of Eichmann as someone who was not a thinkingly wicked villain. Eichmann could not make the connections between his

95 EJ, 42.
96 Ibid.
actions (e.g. coordinating trains to death camps), his pre-ideological beliefs (e.g. murder is wrong), and his negative emotions (e.g. murder is unbearable to witness). As a result, Eichmann was unable to see any contradictions in himself that would bring about a challenge to his commitment to ideology; he never had reason to fear that what he was doing could be wrong. Hence, we should understand the failure of Eichmann's affective state to invoke change in his action not in the context of spoiled condition (a), but rather in the context of conditions (b1) and (b2). The latter two conditions offer us a further look into how Eichmann's mind was barricaded from reality and from the possibility of experiencing a Socratic two-in-one.

Throughout Eichmann's trial, the prosecution would repeatedly refer back to him: "there sits the monster responsible for all this." The characterization of Eichmann as a "monster" is right in that his actions were monstrous. He was responsible (along with many others) for the indiscriminate murder of innumerable Jewish people, and yet, what struck Arendt was "a manifest shallowness in the doer that made it impossible to trace the incontestable evil of his deeds to any deeper level of roots or motives." Eichmann did not join the Nazi party out of any conviction, and when asked to give his reasons, he "repeated the same embarrassed clichés about the Treaty of Versailles and unemployment." Eichmann pointed out during the trial, "it was like being swallowed up by the Party against all expectations and without previous decision. It happened so quickly and suddenly." Unaware of the Party's program and never having read Mein Kampf, it appeared that Eichmann lacked both the time and desire to be properly

97 EJ, 8.
98 LM, 4.
99 EJ, 33.
100 Ibid.
informed. At least initially, he did not understand (nor even cared about) the ideology to which he wholeheartedly committed his life. In the same carefree way one might respond to a friendly request to sample a new restaurant, Eichmann's initial response to an invitation to join the Nazi party was simply, “why not?” In other words, a young Eichmann was not the sensationalized psychopath, devious, hateful, overtly sadistic murdering monster that comes to mind when we ask ourselves who would be capable of such crimes. Eichmann's monstrosity was rather the product of “bad faith, lying self-deception, combined with outrageous stupidity.”

Therefore, we should not be searching for a “deep” explanation of how Eichmann's non-thinking enabled is evildoing, because any “deep” reason for Eichmann's evil would presuppose a process of ruin akin to condition (a), where he intentionally avoided thinking in order to continue wrongdoing.

There was strong evidence available to the court that Eichmann was more of an ordinary fellow than a uniquely evil one. A team of psychologists studied Eichmann and declared him to not only be “normal,” but that his outlook towards friends and family was “most desirable.” And a minister who paid regular visits to Eichmann in prison, seemed to think Eichmann was “a man with very positive ideas.” However, no one in the trial

101  EJ, 54. It's not so clear to me what Arendt means by “stupidity,” because she claims that failures to think are not the mark of the unintelligent and that non-thinking itself is no “dumb” behavior (rather, a possibility in all humans). Perhaps, it's that in the particular case of Eichmann, who did poorly in school and was averse to reading books, that Arendt felt compelled to describe him as “stupid,” but she does not make an explicit correlation his “dumbness” during the height of the Holocaust. Perhaps, “superficiality” is more apropos.

102  It may seem counter-intuitive to offer any reason at all for Eichmann's non-thinking if he was so entirely shallow, but that would lead to accepting his evil as something that cannot be explained because it has no real explanation; and this is quite the opposite of what Arendt was working toward in her attempt to awaken the post-Holocaust world who stood in confounded awe about how something apparently so inexplicably evil was possible. Arendt wanted to show the world how it was possible, that the evils of the Holocaust could in fact be understood, but we must first cast away our assumption that evil could only be perpetrated by non-normal people.
would acknowledge his apparent normalcy (or lack of demonic presence). Arendt saw that the combination of international pressure and local Israeli demand for identifiable figures to levy blame and responsibility upon for the deaths and sufferings of their kin, situated any captive Nazi official in a bespectacled status of deep-rooted evilness, because in order for such horrors to make any sense (so the belief goes), only the most outrageously perverted and deeply hateful humans could have been involved. Thus, the prosecution and judges were in no position to even entertain the possibility of admitting that an average or normal person, “neither feeble-minded nor indoctrinated, nor cynical, could be perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong.”103 Instead, the accusing party and judges found it more convenient to believe Eichmann was a liar, that the defendant must have been aware of the criminal and evil nature of his acts, and that such awareness was typical of those within the Nazi regime.104

In consideration that the command of the Führer was the absolute legal order during the Nazi regime, Eichmann did not want to be “one of those who now pretended that 'they had always been against it,' whereas in fact they had been very eager to do what they were told to do.”105 Eichmann's honesty about wholeheartedly endorsing the Führer's orders reinforced the prosecution's stigma of him as a criminal fully aware of the evils he was asked to perform. Yet, he was certain that his soul was not evil and that he in fact did have a functioning conscience; it just so happened that “he remembered perfectly well that he would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been

103 EJ, 26.
104 In this sense, the judges of Eichmann's trial are guilty of committing the same self-lie that he did, namely, it being more convenient to think of the beings we dispose of as warped/perverted/lesser versions of humans (Eichmann for the judges and Jews for Eichmann).
105 EJ, 24.
ordered,” that is, “to ship millions of men, women, and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care.” Further evidence that Eichmann did have a conscience, albeit misguided, was shown in his blushing remembrance of having peer-pressured his childhood friends into underage drinking: “contrary to my upbringing, I had tried, though I was the youngest, to invite my companions to a glass of wine.” While these two instances appear to show that Eichmann may have had a Socratic conscience, the two-in-one self-checking dialogue, they instead point to a pivotal feature of his failure to let the thinking activity run its aporetic course: Eichmann could only judge his actions against particular rules (e.g. those of the Führer, or in his youth, those laid out by his parents), remaining unable to take the next step in making his own judgments about the value and legitimacy of those rules.

For Eichmann, being able to use a “banister” for judging in relying on his political party's rules and goals for his ethical standards, Eichmann gave himself the impression that he was in fact thinking what he was doing. The most overt example of this occurred in Eichmann's pre-trial interrogation; he “had declared with great emphasis that he had lived his whole life according to Kant's moral precepts, and especially according to a Kantian definition of duty.” Those who are familiar with Kantian ethics (who know how closely tied it is to one's faculty of judgment, which rules out “blind obedience”), would immediately recognize Eichmann's claim to be entirely confused. However, when Judge Raveh pressed Eichmann on this in court, the accused “came up with an

106  _E.J._, 25 (emphasis added).
107  _E.J._, 32.
approximately correct definition of the categorical imperative." Eichmann then went on to confess that when Hitler's orders came for him to carry out the Final Solution, "he had ceased to live according to Kantian principles, that he had known it, and that he had consoled himself with the thought that he no longer 'was master of his own deeds,' that he was unable to change anything."

Thus, despite not living up to Kant's categorical imperative, Eichmann was able to afford himself the consolation of a good conscience. He had never understood that Kant stated that the self categorically has the duty to judge its own actions in the light of the transcendental law of reason, whose inner voice is the only ground on which the self can claim mastery over its own deeds. Instead, Eichmann had egregiously distorted the categorical imperative to allow for a good conscience while being loyal to another's command of his actions. As Arendt words it, he had followed the imperative of acting "as if the principle of your actions were the same as that of the legislator or of the law of the land—or, in Hans Frank's formulation...'Act in such a way that the Führer, if he knew your action, would approve it.'" Eichmann's rule-based judging gave him the

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109 EJ, 136. Majid Yar clarifies what's at stake here for Arent: "Arendt eschews 'determinate judgment,' which subsumes particulars under a universal or rule that already exists. Instead, she champions for Kant's account of 'reflective judgment,' the judgment of a particular for which no rule or precedent exists, but for which some judgment must nevertheless be arrived at. What Arendt finds so valuable in Kant's account is that reflective judgment proceeds from the particular with which it is confronted, yet nevertheless has a universalizing moment: it proceeds from the operation of a capacity that is shared by all beings possessing the faculties of reason and understanding. Kant requires us to judge from this common standpoint, on the basis of what we share with all others, by setting aside our own egocentric and private concerns or interests. The faculty of reflective judgment requires us to set aside considerations which are purely private (matters of personal liking and private interest) and instead judge from the perspective of what we share in common with others (i.e. must be disinterested). Arendt places great weight upon this notion of a faculty of judgment that "thinks from the standpoint of everyone else." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Hannah Arendt," <http://www.iep.utm.edu/arendt/#H7> . Last accessed: 3/20/12.

110 Ibid.


112 Ibid.
appearance of having accomplished something which he believed to be an important or necessary aspect of an ethical life. He took himself to be a morally conscious man, capable of introspection that even Kant would endorse. The obvious danger in a non-thinker's ability to appear to himself as having already thought through his actions, is that he presupposes a knowledge of what thinking actually is, and this may have the power of blinding him from recognizing, engaging in, and understanding the need for actual thinking.\(^{113}\) It is possible that a non-thinker both understands the ethical significance of needing to think about and judge one's actions, and at the same time incidentally fails to do the real thing without knowing it.

As such, we can classify this kind of non-thinking as (b1), because what was available for inner-dialogue (e.g. rule-based judging) was a constraint on the kind of experience Eichmann had when he “reflected” so that his reflections failed to draw any correlations between his actions and his Socratic “soul,” and thus failed to cultivate any changes in those actions. Eichmann's primary “tool” for thinking was essentially a measuring stick provided to all members of the Nazi party. His total reliance on the measuring stick precluded his questioning of it, and as a result, he was unable to paralyze himself vis-à-vis Socrates the “electric ray,” despite feeling the stinging bite of the “gadfly” in witnessing the atrocities being committed at the death camps he helped to populate. In essence, Eichmann failed to produce a Socratic “relative” within himself for critical dialogue, and instead, used rules (some of which he did not even understand) to measure himself and his actions against. Unfortunately, rules cannot ask questions.

\(^{113}\) Chapter 3 will explicate how apparent thinking, or simulated thinking, destroys an apparent thinker's ability to recognize actual thinking.
2.2 Eichmann and Spoiled Condition (b2)

In what immediately follows, I will show how Eichmann's use of clichés further enabled him to appear to himself as having a Socratic conscience. Arendt writes:

I mean that evil is not radical, going to the roots (radix), that it has no depth, and that for this very reason it is so terribly difficult to think about it, since thinking, by definition, wants to reach the roots. Evil is a surface phenomenon, and instead of being radical, it is merely extreme. We resist evil by not being swept away by the surface of things, by stopping ourselves and beginning to think, that is, by reaching another dimension than the horizon of everyday life. In other words, the more superficial someone is, the more likely will he be to yield to evil. An indication of such superficiality is the use of clichés, and Eichmann ... was a perfect example.\(^\text{114}\)

Perhaps the most telling sign of Eichmann's inability to think, “to ever look at anything from the other fellow's point of view,” was his use and misuse of euphemisms and clichés, or what Eichmann called “officialese.”\(^\text{115}\) Much of this language arose from the “objective” attitude that was typical of the S.S. mentality, which talked about concentration camps in terms of “administration,” about extermination camps in terms of “economy,” and even about the taking of life (e.g. murder by gas) as “medical matters.”\(^\text{116}\) This kind of “objective” terminology allowed the S.S. to dissociate itself from any emotional or moral connotations, barricading their minds from any doubt that what was being done was anything other than routine business. Arendt postulates that, “the net effect of this language system was not to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, “normal” knowledge of murder and lies,” and that “Eichmann's great susceptibility to catch words and stock

\(^{114}\) Hannah Arendt, “Correspondence between Grafton and Arendt,” (September 19, 1963) draft, Hannah Arendt's Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, 6.

\(^{115}\) EJ, 48.

\(^{116}\) EJ, 69.
phrases, combined with his incapacity for ordinary speech, made him, of course, an ideal subject for 'language rules.'

Eichmann followed suit with those who stood trial in Nuremburg, saying that he would like to “find peace with his former enemies.” Common expressions among post-War Germans were centered around “conciliation,” eager to distance themselves from those “barbaric” days of judenrein. According to Arendt, such talk falls short of anything remotely meaningful: “This outrageous cliché was no longer issued to them from above, it was a self-fabricated stock phrase, as devoid of reality as those clichés by which the people had lived for twelve years.” Arendt's point is that officialese became Eichmann's language because he was “genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché.” The judges in Jerusalem accused Eichmann of feigning “empty talk,” in order to conceal his actual thoughts that were not empty, but full of hideous motives. Arendt says, however, “this supposition seems refuted by the striking consistency with which Eichmann, despite his rather bad memory, repeated word for word the same stock phrases and self-invented clichés (when he did succeed in constructing a sentence of his own, he repeated it until it became a cliché) each time he referred to an incident or event of importance to him.”

When confronted with situations for which such routine procedures did not exist, he [Eichmann] was helpless, and his cliché-ridden language produced on the stand, as it had evidently done in his official life, a kind of macabre comedy. Clichés, stock phrases, adherence to conventional, standardized codes of expression and conduct have the socially recognized function of protecting us against reality, that is, against the claim on our thinking attention that all events and facts make by virtue of their

117 EJ, 86.
118 EJ, 53.
119 EJ, 48.
120 EJ, 49.
We can understand habitual use of clichés as having the same effect on thinking as rule-based judgment, that it offers one the appearance of having considered a state of affairs. On one hand, clichés are just another kind of rule to be followed, “standardized codes of expression.” In this sense, Eichmann's adherence to officialese is akin to his adherence to any other facet of Nazi ideology, inhibiting him from considering alternative means of expression and description. On the other hand, his heavy reliance on clichés prevented Eichmann from even being able to recognize his own flawed use of them. In other words, if it somehow struck Eichmann to wonder about what he was doing, or in this case, about how he was talking to others and himself, he would have only been able analyze the phenomenon with the tools that were available to him—with more clichés. For the same reason we do not clean dirt with dirt, clichés lack the power to “clean-up” one's beliefs and actions. In this regard, a habitual user of clichés cannot do the work of Socrates the “midwife,” because the language used in attempts at self-evaluation is rigged to protect one against the world of appearances in which we act so that we do not have to deal with the fallout of those actions—effectively satisfying our spoiled condition of (b2). Thus, declares Arendt, “no communication was possible with [Eichmann], not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such.”

As Karl Barth states with regard to slogans, catchwords, or clichés, “The slogan is not designed to teach, instruct, or convince the hearer or reader. It aims to exert a drum-

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121 LM, 4.
122 EI, 49.
roll influence on people by awakening associations, engendering ideas and the associated feelings, and issuing marching orders. It does not initiate or permit any reflection or discussion, but it hammers home an axiom that must precede and underlie any possible reflection and discussion.” 123 Hence, as he continues, “Slogans are simply vents with whose help ideologies surface and in the form of laud whistles call for general applause and acknowledgment.” 124 Clichés allow us to make a gesture that resembles thinking without all the Socratic work to produce the gesture, namely, the one-becoming-two. Their readily available nature allows us to substitute clichés in place of having to experience the affective tension of thought, the sting of the gadfly, the paralysis of the electric ray, and the often painful purging of the midwife. The catch, however, is that this apparent thinking is only a simulation of thinking and is entirely unconcerned with actually getting to the root of a state of affairs. Clichés are about convenience, and as such, are merely shallow attempts to convey meaning. If one is aware in advance of possibly having to reconcile or account for a wrongdoing, then clichés can be used to simply grease the track to where one was already headed without having to consider possibilities for thinking or acting otherwise.

While Arendt was initially taken back by Eichmann's declaration of having lived an ethical life, she knew that such claims were to be expected; she knew Eichmann was the current icon of the S.S., and that the S.S. itself was an icon for the delirium of blind loyalty. When Arendt calls Eichmann the banality of evil, she is referring to the

124 Ibid.
thoughtlessness that characterized his life before and after, but particularly during his time as an S.S. officer. This substitution of duty to another, for thinking of and for oneself, was banal because it was commonplace (though not necessarily commonly occurring). Elizabeth Young-Bruehl points out that Arendt did not mean that either evil was banal or that the Final Solution was just one more of the banal evils that afflicts human-kind; she meant rather that Eichmann, like every human being, possessed the commonplace ability to see himself by thinking about the meaning of who he is. However, he was also uncommon in that by not thinking about who he was, he had crossed from the kind of world in which humans usually live to participate in another kind of world that was organized around an axis of duty that entailed genocide. Arendt seemed to think that if this latter kind of world could occur because of the failure of the commonplace capacity of humans to think, then once was enough to question whether thinking can lead us beyond the comfort and moral evasions of blind loyalty into a world that would take failures to think as a telling state of affairs (and a dangerous slippery slope).

Regarding Eichmann's use and misuse of clichés, his misunderstanding of the categorical imperative, and his eagerness to follow orders unconditionally, we are left with a picture of a man who is not necessarily stupid, but who simply and tragically failed to think. According to Arendt, moral and ethical standards based on habit and custom have shown themselves capable of being easily changed by a new set of rules of behavior dictated by the current society. In “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,”

Arendt emphasizes: "It was as though morality, at the very moment of its collapse within an old and highly civilized nation, stood revealed in its original meaning of the word, as a set of mores, of customs and manners, which could be exchanged for another set with no more trouble than it would take to change the table manners of a whole people." 126 Arendt posits the question of why so few people resisted this switch of mores, and she answers: “The nonparticipants, called irresponsible by the majority, were the only ones who dared judge by themselves,” not because they held onto a superior notion of right and wrong, but because they asked themselves to what an extent they would still be able to live in peace with themselves after having committed certain deeds. 127 Arendt argues that the presupposition of such judgment is “merely the habit of living together explicitly with oneself, that is, of being engaged in that silent dialogue between me and myself which since Socrates and Plato we usually call thinking.” 128

Unfortunately, in Eichmann's mind “there was no contradiction between 'I will jump into my grave laughing,' appropriate for the end of the war, and 'I shall gladly hang myself in public as a warning example for all anti-Semites on this earth,' which now under different circumstances, fulfilled exactly the same function of giving him a lift.” 129 It is easy to find such a grotesque contradiction unsettling, and taking Arendt at her word that it results from merely a “failure to think” does not necessarily help us to think further about how one becomes habituated to non-thinking so that it inhibits one's actions so extensively. For Eichmann at least, his history of non-thinking manifests itself in and is perhaps manifested by: his loyalty and obedience to ideology; his career obsession with

127 Ibid, 44.
128 Ibid, 40-41.
129 EJ, 53.
maintaining efficiency; and his entire submersion into a superficial language game. These three factors appear to work together in a way that inhibited Eichmann from encroaching the kind of doubt, wonder and self-criticism that enables the possibility of stymieing one's cog-like participation in an evil machine.

Let us ask once more a question from Chapter 1, why does Arendt maintain that if one engages in actual thinking, then (s)he will necessarily upset or cause affect between the two-in-one if (s)he commits evils? Arendt champions this in part because she understands the soul's dialogue with itself as an interiorization of the individual's dialogue with others, and those others would normally “call us out” when we have done or are about to do something wrong. While Arendt does not give a detailed account of how one actually interiorizes “otherness,” if we grant her that this does indeed happen, then how are we to make sense of one who interiorizes an otherness which supports and reinforces evildoing rather than opposing it? This seems to be what Eichmann has experienced working in the Nazi regime. Recall that Eichmann “would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he was ordered to do,” (i.e. help ship millions to their murderous deaths). Additionally, Arendt claimed that Eichmann's conscience “spoke with a 'respectable voice,' with the voice of respectable society around him.”

130 Is actual thinking only possible when we interiorize Socratic-like voices, and is merely apparent thinking what results if we happen to interiorize anything else? Joseph Beatty argues that in light of this, Arendt must hold that either “thinking is occasioned when a certain kind of range of otherness or societal super-ego is interiorized or that we have a conscience which reveals right and wrong independently of thinking conceived as the soundless

130 EJ, 126.
dialogue with oneself.” On the latter account conscience is not necessarily mediated or awakened by dialogue with the self, but is intuitive and innate, showing us when it might be worth engaging the two-in-one. Arendt does seem to leave the door open for this possibility saying, “even though we have lost yardsticks by which to measure, and rules under which to subsume the particular, a being whose essence is a beginning may have enough of origin within himself to understand without preconceived categories and to judge without the set of customary rules which is morality.” It now seems unclear whether thinking leads to moral considerations or that our moral sense which primes us for thought arises from elsewhere. Attempting to resolve this dilemma in Arendt's work is beyond the scope of this project; however, Chapter 3 will attempt to address the former account from above that “thinking is occasioned when a certain kind of range of otherness or societal super-ego is interiorized.” This account still requires us to examine whether our relationship to societal movements and mores are necessarily decisive and overriding, either steering us toward or away from the thinking activity. Thus, Chapter 3 will examine the cultural context of totalitarianism which could generate such extremely non-thinking individuals like Eichmann. My findings will show it may be best to read Arendt's work as allowing for Eichmann to be capable of thinking, or at least making conscious valuations of and decisions about engaging in the thinking activity. Under such a reading, Arendt is not caught in a contradiction in her justification of Eichmann's moral responsibility and execution.

Chapter 3

Responsibility and Non-thinking

If we read Arendt's claim that Eichmann was incapable of thinking to mean something beyond merely being too lazy or unwilling, but genuinely an “inability to speak [outside of ‘Officialise’]… closely connected with an inability to think, namely from the standpoint of someone else,” then we run into a crucial problem for her ascription of moral responsibility upon Eichmann. For Arendt, the thinking activity is what makes moral judgment possible, and if Eichmann genuinely was incapable of thinking, it seems he would also be genuinely unable to judge the morality of his actions. On such a reading, Eichmann is portrayed as morally incompetent and those labeled as such are often thought “not to merit the ascription of responsibility.”133 Those who we deem incapable of appropriate moral responses to others are often considered psychopathic or sociopathic, and if dangerous enough, are removed from society and institutionalized for psychiatric rehabilitation—this is widely considered the just response to such individuals. Eichmann, however, was executed.

Even though Arendt describes Eichmann as the paradigm of a new kind of criminal, she still thinks this new criminal “commits his crimes under circumstances that

make it well-night impossible to know or feel that he is doing wrong.”134 She consistently claims Eichmann “never realized what he was doing.”135 Yet, Arendt also recognizes that the concern of law is with what Eichmann did do, since “guilt and innocence before the law are of an objective nature.”136 Joseph Beatty notes that while Arendt “allows that we have become accustomed to invoking determinisms of various sorts to excuse individuals from responsibility, she argues that justice and judicial procedure would not be possible if we are determined.”137 Arendt holds the common position that if human actions are determined in advance, then it would make no sense to judge and punish, but we do think it is crucial to render legal judgment and so we must assume that determinism as a theory of action is invalid. How is it that Arendt, in recognizing both Eichmann's cognitive incapability and the demands of judicial procedure, could assert that justice was done to Eichmann, that he was “qua individual morally and legally responsible?”138

3.1 Problems in Levying Responsibility

Arendt says Eichmann's trial “had to take place in the interests of justice and nothing else.”139 So what does she mean by “justice?” In analyzing Arendt's condemnation of Eichmann, Joseph Beatty observes three separate appeals for justice: retributive, utilitarian, and an account approximate to natural law. In the Epilogue to Eichmann in Jerusalem, Arendt offers what she would have said if serving as a judge on Eichmann's trial. Here is what she thinks to be defensible grounds for execution: “And

134 EJ, 276.
135 EJ, 287.
136 EJ, 278.
137 Beatty, 275. Arendt argues this in EJ, 278.
138 Beatty, 275.
139 EJ, 286.
just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations...we find that no one, that is no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang.”¹⁴⁰ Her appeal to retribution, *lex talionis* (an eye for an eye), cannot stick if Eichmann genuinely failed to realize what he was doing, especially with a sociopolitical environment that so heavily reinforced his non-thinking. To be sure, Beatty rightly points out, “if a sleepwalker murdered masses of people on his nightly rounds we would not invoke *lex talionis* and execute him.”¹⁴¹ The parallel of Eichmann to a sleepwalker is not a distant one, as he joined the Nazi party with apparently no motive at all, and proceeded to carry out his orders under a dogmatic torpidity, lacking any conventionally evil motives (unless we count desires for efficiency and career success as inherently evil). Thus, Arendt's offering of retribution as justification for Eichmann's execution seems unacceptable.

Arendt offers a second and separate defense for condemning Eichmann to death; this time invoking a utilitarian logic. In the Postscript to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, she endorses the words of one of the presiding judges: “punishment is necessary 'to defend the honor or the authority of him who was hurt by the offense so that the failure to punish may not cause his degradation.”¹⁴² Because the crime Eichmann stood trial for was claimed to have been committed against all of humanity (not just the Jews), her rationale is that the community of humans which was violated by the crime needs to reaffirm the value of the human lest it be damaged. This was a wholesale crime on humanity because

¹⁴⁰ EJ, 279.
¹⁴¹ Beatty, 276.
¹⁴² EJ, 287.
“the general public order... has been thrown out of gear and must be restored.”\textsuperscript{143} Thus, the reason Eichmann should be put to death is utilitarian because his death is likely to have a beneficial impact on the community at large. An objection to this utilitarian justification is that such ethics countenances the death of an innocent for the sake of the greater good of those who survive.\textsuperscript{144} In order for such an objection to hold, Eichmann must be innocent on some level, and although he participated in a mechanism of mass murder, he did so without any thought or guilty feeling. Again, if we are to accept Arendt's dominate characterization of Eichmann that would legally warrant his behavior as psychopathic or sociopathic, it would seem she would also have to agree that the less controversial resolution would be institutionalized psychiatric treatment rather than death.

Arendt's third attempt at justifying Eichmann's execution is an invocation of a “natural law” defense. Although Arendt explicitly rejects some forms of natural law (e.g. a natural moral order violated by evil), she appears to affirm an instantiation of it, holding that “…human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgment, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them.”\textsuperscript{145} Arendt praises the few who were still able to tell right from wrong during the Holocaust, believing that they were able to judge those evils despite the nonexistence of any rules with which to deal with such novel wrongdoings. However, Arendt gives us no coherent explanation as to why some individuals were able to keep thinking in “dark times” while

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\textsuperscript{143} EJ, 261.
\textsuperscript{145} EJ, 294-295; see 277 for a renunciation of natural law.
others were unable. My concern is with how strong we take being “able” to mean, because depending on how literal the interpretation is, we may be able to show that Arendt's moral descriptions and ascriptions are not mutually exclusive.

In recalling the conditions for spoiled thinking as established in Chapter 1 and later molded to Eichmann in Chapter 2, we can infer that a “weak” version of being “able” to think satisfies spoiled condition (a), where Eichmann's non-thinking could have become “permanent” after willful and habitual avoidance of opportunities to engage the two-in-one.146 A weak version also satisfies Eichmann's non-thinking as a result of condition (b2), which suggests he was at some point willfully choosing to describe his actions to others and himself through clichés (well aware of alternate descriptions), making his role in genocide much easier to digest for himself. However, a “strong” version would only satisfy condition (b1), where Eichmann genuinely could never do the things Socrates was capable of (e.g. engaging himself as the gadfly, electric ray and midwife), effectively negating Arendt's claim that all humans are capable of the thinking activity. Non-thinkers of this last sort (b1), would be excused from any responsibility, for they unwittingly became cogs in a murderous political machine. The other participants in evil, of conditions (a) and (b2), could be held responsible even if they could no longer think once the machine of evil gained steam, because at least momentarily on one occasion or more, these individuals chose to mitigate their affective state by choosing to quiet any harbinger or whisper of the Socratic relative. Their choices have made them increasingly less likely to think, or as Brickhouse and Smith pointed out, to consider alternatives to their actions. Given the reinforced sociopolitical milieu, the net effect of

146 We may not even need of conditions (a) & (b2) as having to entail a permanent non-thinking, but that they at least set us well on our way toward such an end.
those choices and the resultant slippery slope is an arrival at the same status as cases of (b1): entirely incapable of thinking. In short, these individuals ignored the affective feeling that only one who is already capable of thought knows to be a calling for further investigation, and thus Arendt can hold an Eichmann of this version legally and morally responsible.

Moreover, Arendt appears to want two competing truths. The first is that all humans possess the ability to avoid wrong judgment because all humans are inherently capable of thinking and only become non-thinking through purposeful habituated avoidance of it [conditions (a) & (b2)]. In dark times like the Holocaust, this ability is fleeting, and once gone can earn an individual the status of spoiled thinker. The second is that some individuals, however hard to detect amongst us, never had a chance to think. They are born into a world where the words and techniques available for interiorization enable merely an apparent thinking, falling short of what Arendt might call the actual Socratic exercise.\(^{147}\) In order for Arendt to levy responsibility upon Eichmann and justify his execution, she would need to only affirm the former without giving heed to excuses of obeying orders or the coercive sociopolitical mechanisms in play. Contradictorily, if we are to accept what I have painted as primary to Arendt's thesis, that Eichmann bore a real inability to think, that he was genuinely spoiled, then her attempts to justify his execution are undermined.

My thesis is concerned less about arguing for a particular way one ought to read Arendt, or which version (strong or weak) of being able to think we ought to hold her to, but rather, this project seeks to explain further the conditions which enable and maintain

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\(^{147}\) Or perhaps some individuals are physiologically impaired to the point of being unable to enact a two-in-one.
spoiled thinking given the evidence Arendt avails. Hence, in order to think more about thinking through Arendt, we will consider an interpretation that may allow her written inconsistencies some productive wiggle room. Thus far, we have primarily examined the internal conditions, or moral psychology, that scaffolds habitual and perhaps permanent non-thinking. Yet, a phenomenon that remains to be addressed is how those praiseworthy few, who were still able to think during the Holocaust, could have done so in a time when thinking was so dangerous and uncommon. Did they simply choose to think, while others chose not to? The following section first highlights why some thinkers continued to think even when others failed. I will then consider the external conditions that many accused non-thinkers claimed to have sealed their actions as having no alternatives. This analysis will help us afford Arendt some argumentative space so that she can both justifiably hold Eichmann responsible for his wrongdoings and still claim that he was, for the most part, non-thinking.

At the beginning of this thesis, I offered Arendt's query of whether the habit of thinking could condition men against evildoing. Characteristic of her style (and that of Plato's Socrates), she does not provide a black and white answer to this question, despite providing an abundance of evidence that thinking has some sort of vital role in our ability to judge rightly (though, it can make no positive moral affirmations). Mika Ojakangas champions what I think is central to the power of Arendt' concept of thought: “thinking, the intercourse between me and myself, is the condition of possibility of the fear of (bad) conscience, and it is this fear, not thinking as such, that impels man to abstain from doing wrong.”148 The phenomenon of thinking is not a strictly cognitive process of inference

148 Ojakangas, 82.
making and rationality, nor is it simply the beholding of sense data, or particular material things: “the criterion of the mental dialogue is no longer truth, which would compel answers to the questions I raise with myself, either in the mode of Intuition, which compels with the force of sense evidence, or as necessary conclusions of reckoning with consequences in mathematical or logical reasoning...” It is an embodied, felt experience, and Arendt relays this sentiment in a metaphor for thought as wind from Socrates: “The winds themselves are invisible, yet what they do is manifest to us and we somehow feel their approach.” Feeling the approach of thought is precisely what allows us to have a fear of it. This is why I share Ojakangas' view that Socratic morality is convincing not because it is based, as Arendt claims, on the assumption that one merely has to be consistent with oneself, but rather on the fear of being inconsistent. Recall that in order to experience oneself, there must be a split in the self, and for the self to strive towards moral consistency would be to strive for a state that it only knows as an ideal concept, not as a feeling. That is, such consistency or harmony happens only when our actions align with what is best for the soul in the long term, rather than the short term demands of one's felt appetites, so how could we ever be convinced or recognize ourselves as having reached such a point? It seems much more likely and practical that the reason thinking compels us to judge and avoid certain actions, is not because those who do it have in mind something they wish to attain (a positive goal such as achieving consistency in effect functions like a rule for thinking and Arendt has already thrown out such activity as unreliable), but because we are fearful of the impending scrutiny of the relative. In essence, thinking makes it possible for us to fear further or future thinking

149  _LM_, 185-186.
150  _TMC_, 175. Arendt cites Xenophon's _Memorabilia_, 4.3.14.
that would be even more unbearable if we decide to enact the currently considered wrongdoings.

We can conclude then, that “when everybody is swept away unthinkingly by what everybody else does and believes in, those who think are drawn out of hiding,” because they choose to remain in the company of themselves over the desire for anything else.\(^{151}\) Their fear of the Socratic relative is one of reverence, like how one may respect an oft-chastising family member who always has one's best interest at heart (e.g. a mothering “worry wart”). On the other end of the spectrum are those who sacrificed their relationship with themselves in favor of something else (e.g. Party belonging, fear of death and corporeal suffering, resignation to inevitability, etc.), and in their newly found non-thinking, will not have to worry about answering to the relative. The fact that such individuals were once thinking, means that they knew the feeling of guilt (something to be feared), but found it more convenient in the short term to jump on board with the Nazi regime. Such is the case of Eichmann if we accept a weak notion of claim that he was incapable of thinking. The following is how I think she can still be right.

There are what I see as two explicitly telling moments in Eichmann's life that reveal opportunities where he had a chance to think, and hence, to judge his actions: when he received orders to transition from deportation to extermination and in realizing the war would be lost, that he would face a life without orders. As described in Chapter 2, when Hitler changed state policy from merely deporting Jews to concentration camps to explicitly murdering them, Eichmann felt emotionally “blown out” and was further sickened by what he witnessed visiting a newly built death camp. If Eichmann is at all

\(^{151}\) LM, 192.
telling the truth about his depression at the time, then I suspect that affect was caused by his ability to have an experience of witnessing something wrong, bad, or at the very least unpleasant. This moment of affect, of feeling that wind of thought begin to creep in, is what a Socratic thinker embraces and investigates to see why something seems awry about the situation. Eichmann chose not to embrace or question, despite feeling pressed to. I suspect at some point during his depression he had to consciously avoid the voice of “the relative” who encouraged him to find a solution to his depression. Heeding this advice in a more convenient way than investigating alternatives to accelerating the rate of exterminations, Eichmann found an alternative to dealing with the relative instead of his own actions. His chosen alternative was to recommit himself to his work, believing that life outside the Nazi party was much less preferable.

Eichmann's desire to stay within the Nazi movement at all costs points to the second moment in his life where I suspect he was capable of thinking about and judging his current and past actions. As Germany began to lose the war, he recalls: “I sensed I would have to live a leaderless and difficult individual life, I would receive no directives from anybody, no orders and commands would any longer be issued to me, no pertinent ordinances would be there to consult—in brief, a life never known before lay before me.” At this moment, Eichmann wondered in discomfort about how he will go on living without orders and rules to follow; it was as if he knew that he would have to think for himself again. His life before joining the Party convinced him that thinking for oneself leads to disappointment and failure. Arendt considers reasons beyond Eichmann's “why not” acceptance to join the S.S.:

152 EJ, 32.
...he had been an ambitious young man who was fed up with his job as a traveling salesman...From a humdrum life without significance and consequence the wind had blown him into History, as he understood it, namely, into a Movement that always kept moving and in which somebody like him—already a failure in the eyes of his social class, of his family, and hence in his own eyes as well—could start from scratch and make a career. And if he did not always like what he had to do (for example, dispatching people to their death by the trainload instead of forcing them to emigrate), if he guessed, rather early, that the whole business would come to a bad end, with Germany losing the war, if all his most cherished plans came to nothing...if he never advanced beyond the grade of S.S. Obersturmbannführer.... he never forgot what the alternative would have been.153

Holding Eichmann in this light, we can clearly see that accepting a “weak” version of his ability to think is not distorting Arendt's painting too severely.

3.2 A Totalitarian World

The banality of evil which appeared through Eichmann made evident how superficial the phenomenon of evil could show its face. In recognizing the possibility of a weak account, we find him reprehensible for his own moral weakness, his shallow quickly made decisions to not think and continue wrongdoing. This kind of evil could spread out as fungus under the surface, by a mass of citizens that did not reflect on events, did not ask for significance, nor made a dialogue with themselves about their own deeds. Arendt says: “The greatest evildoers are those who don't remember because they have never given the matter a thought; nothing can keep them back because without remembrance they are without roots.”154 Let us finally consider whether the compelling and murderous sociopolitical forces surrounding those in regions under Nazi reign were

153  EJ, 33-34.
totalizing in a way that would have prevented those who slipped into non-thinking to remain there. In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt writes, “[T]he compulsion of total terror on one side...and the self-coercive force of logical deduction on the other...has succeeded when people have lost contact with their fellow men as well as the reality around them; for together with these contacts, men lost the capacity of both experience and thought.”155 Arendt describes the totalizing conditions of Nazi rule to be a pervasive force that inculcates every facet of life, for both its perpetrators and its victims, effectively removing “all possibility of...the solitude required for all forms of thinking.”156 Totalitarianism's terror and self-coercive logic compels its subjects to “rely completely on a distorted reality seen through the lens of ideology.”157 Paul Formosa reminds us of George Orwell's Winston from 1984, who comes to lose the very foundations from which thinking is even possible (i.e. to remove himself from party logic, and be alone with himself in the kind of solitude Socrates' fellow lived), “if the party says 2 + 2 = 5, then 2 + 2 = 5.”158 Thus, in one aspect totalitarianism destroys the worldliness of thinking (i.e. anything that would inspire wonder of alternatives to the way things currently are). In another aspect, it brings about ultimate isolation as a solidified state of being in that one is unable to even be alone with oneself (let alone with others). Both these aspects of totalitarianism run counter to how Arendt sees “the simple fact that life itself, limited by birth and death, is a boundary affair in that my worldly existence always forces me to take account of a past when I was not yet and a future when I shall

156 Ibid.
157 Formosa, 503.
be no more.”¹⁵⁹ We gain larger scope of what is morally at stake in our acting in the world when we engage thinking and “transcend the limits of [our] own life span and begin to reflect on this past, judging it, and this future, forming projects of the will.”¹⁶⁰ 

Arendt shows us that, “under the conditions of the Third Reich only 'exceptions' could be expected to react 'normally.'”¹⁶¹ In other words, our accustomed moral landscape had been completely flipped under Nazi rule. Richard Bernstein highlights this "normal and ordinary behavior" of the bureaucratic mass in not thinking about the real meaning of the rules themselves, in the sense that they would behave in the same manner in the manufacturing of either food or corpses. "We may find it almost impossible to imagine how someone could 'think' (or rather, not think) in this manner, whereby manufacturing food, bombs, or corpses are 'in essence the same' and where this can become 'normal', 'ordinary' behavior. This is the mentality that Arendt believed she was facing in Eichmann.”¹⁶² Further, In “Understanding Evil,” Robert Fine notes that the common German perpetrators typically saw themselves like Eichmann, as “cogs in the mass murder machine” who did the job of killing “only in a professional capacity, without passion or ill will,” and no longer recognized any contradiction between “being a good father, husband, and dog-owner at home and killing Jews if that was his public duty and legal obligation.”¹⁶³ Fine takes this type of “modern” man to be one of the masses, who does his duty even at the expense of his own inclinations and cannot think otherwise,

¹⁵⁹  LM, 192.
¹⁶⁰  LM, 192.
¹⁶¹  EJ, 26.
void of any notion of personal responsibility in the private sense (or to the relative).

One of the bizarre and tragic features of Nazi totalitarianism was that “The triumph of the S.S. demands that the tortured victim allow himself to be led to the noose without protesting, that he renounce and abandon himself to the point of ceasing to affirm his identity.”

Arendt writes, there is “nothing more terrible than these processions of human beings going like dummies to their deaths.”

Could it be that (at least) one of the conditions which allowed Nazis, particularly those working at death camps, to mentally distance themselves from their work of murder—to dehumanize themselves—is what enabled (or forced) their victims into a similar non-thinking dehumanized state?

Certainly the arresting fear of immediate violence was always in play for victims, and that seems to have at least initially prevented sustained periods of reflection. However, the pain of remembrances, the shame in not fighting, the guilt of being coerced into terrible deeds against fellow prisoners, would be very difficult to dwell on and so much easier to dissociate from altogether. Thus, there is a certain discord that destroys the human victim, a renouncing of the self that Arendt saw manifest in their willingness to die. The breakdown of a victim's humanity is doubly significant, because, and it has been widely acknowledge by Holocaust survivors that many times the victims were also perpetrators.

While the above provides a very strong depiction of the totalizing effects many experienced under Nazi rule (and many more would have felt if Hitler had “won” the war), Arendt claims that Nazi totalitarianism never fully realized this essence of total

164 EJ, 12.
165 Ibid.
166 Ironically, Arendt holds that it is indeed a very human capacity to dehumanize oneself and others.
domination outside of the death camps themselves.\textsuperscript{167} Thus, if the possibility for thinking remained throughout Nazi Europe (that is, where Eichmann conducted his affairs, outside of the death camps), then even though Eichmann was in a situation that made thinking very difficult and dangerous, he was still not in an exempting situation that would have absolutely and permanently precluded the possibility for thinking. If this is so, and I hope very much that it is, then Arendt is justified in levying legal and moral responsibility upon Eichmann. It does not matter that “under the conditions of terror most people will comply but \textit{some people will not}, just as the lesson of the countries to which the Final Solution was proposed is that ’it could happen’ in most places but \textit{it did not happen everywhere}.”\textsuperscript{168} Arendt says because “one man will always be left alive to tell the story,” no matter how totalizing “dark times” may appear, we can point to those who chose not to participate (dead or alive) and hold those who did participate accountable.\textsuperscript{169}

As convenient as it was for evildoers to excuse themselves as merely cogs in a killing machine, Arendt argues that “all the cogs in the machinery, no matter how insignificant, are \textit{in court} forthwith transformed back into perpetrators, that is to say, into human beings.”\textsuperscript{170} This seems right for juridical purposes, which need to judge persons, not machines and their constituent parts. However, what about Eichmann, who offered no convincing sign fifteen even years after his cog-duties expired of whether he was still capable of thinking of himself as something other than a successful part of the Nazi regime? Arendt offers us two sides of Eichmann: the man who is incapable of thinking, like a child who does not take his own motives into account and has no curiosity of why

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\textsuperscript{167} Hannah Arendt, \textit{The Origins of Totalitarianism}, 467.
\textsuperscript{168} E.J., 233.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid, 289 (emphasis added).
\end{flushleft}
he believes and acts as he does; and the man who was consciously driven by an appetite
for social significance and recognition. The first possibility arises from what seems to be
the bulk of evidence from Arendt, that Eichmann was and would have been genuinely
unable to think in *any situation*, totalitarian or otherwise—that he was in fact, spoiled
under condition (b1). The second would suggest that Eichmann was swept into a situation
that made it *difficult, but not impossible* for him to think within the unfolding of
totalitarianism—that he was corrupt under conditions (a) and/or (b2), but was not spoiled.
I have attempted to show that considering all three accounts respectively, and also how
they might function together, is fruitful for understanding the question guiding Arendt
throughout several of her defining works: whether thinking conditions human beings
against doing evil.

3.3 Conclusion

This thesis has explored the ethical meaning of thinking and non-thinking across
several works of Hannah Arendt. I have shown several possible ways in which thinking
individuals could become habitually non-thinking or spoiled under conditions (a) and
(b2). I have also shown that under a strong reading of Arendt, individuals who were never
able to think, as in condition (b1), could not justifiably be held accountable. The
respective paradigms of a habitual thinker and a habitual non-thinker that we find in
Socrates and Eichmann represent the polar opposites of a spectrum in which we all fall—
a spectrum in which we routinely move in and out of being in thought, fearing thought
and appreciating thought. In Chapter 1, I showed how it is that thinking, the engagement
of one’s inner dialogue, has the power to throw into uncertainty the beliefs and concepts
that motivate our actions. Chapters 2 and 3 show that when this faculty ceases to function, individuals imbedded within a socio-political structure relying on ideology that rationalizes murder, enables non-thinkers to commit some of the most efficiently heinous crimes in human history. Thus, the value of thinking, in its ability to stop our actions and rid us of unquestioned rule following, only becomes explicit during what Arendt call “dark times.”

Apropos for a thesis which is itself an exercise in thinking, we are left with some pivotal uncertainties regarding the role of thinking in times that are not “dark.” We must recall that Arendt chooses Socrates for her model thinker, because he considers all things, not just particular norms and rules. Thinking does not only call into question suspicious and dubious norms and rules (as I have given attention to), it may call any norm or rule into question, because one can endeavor to call anything one is aware of into question (rule or otherwise). In recognizing that this activity destabilizes standards for action regardless of time and place, we are left wondering how a thinking community should come to uphold standards to live by, whether in custom or law, and how such a community would maintain the standards without usurping them again and again. When we take into account the process of internalizing the voices of others from the community in which we are embedded, the doubts and questions raised by the Socratic relative may represent a vast array of competing influences. Some influences may warrant more time in consideration than others, and how we are supposed to decide what is worth thinking about is not something thinking can guarantee in concreteness.

In my attempt to stress the importance of affective feelings arising from and sometimes direct towards the thinking activity, I have assumed, like Socrates and Arendt,
that all humans are motivated to act in ways which one perceives to be good for oneself. Whether we run from thinking or embrace it may depend upon whether our surrounding community appreciates the activity as integral to the wellbeing of the community at large. The positive power of thinking is that it enables one to investigate radical methods and goals as alternatives to ones that are already established. In other words, thinking opens us up to new pathways for perceiving the moral worth of our actions, and offers communities (e.g. nations, towns, clubs, families, etc.) opportunities to keep asking questions about what should be questioned. Recall that one’s ability to think can become spoiled or fail to effectively develop through the internalization of superficial language that enables one to undergo apparent thinking in the place of actual thinking. Engaging in a thinking dialogue with others in the world we share invites opportunity to empathize and to interiorize new vocabulary and questions that we can then use to further investigate our actions in the world. Thinking is an end in itself, “the need to think can be satisfied only through thinking, and the thoughts which I had yesterday will satisfy this need today only to the extent that I can think them anew.”

\[171\] \textit{TMC}, 163.
References


