

moderation of the default stance of antipathy with a guarded posture of empathy, which I believe has been rewarded with insights into thinking-as-relating—and perhaps even thinking-as-loving—which cannot be easily dismissed as idiosyncratic ephemera of Heideggerian thought. It is my hope that such insights might encourage the reader-viewers of Dora García's project on Arendt and Heidegger to weigh the pros and cons of compassionate thinking and proceed—with all due caution—towards the possibility of reconciliation.

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The Limits of the Reconcilable: Arendt, Eichmann, and Heidegger

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To reconcile is not to forgive; it is rather to come to terms with, to make due. Not to let bygones be bygones, but to somehow overcome. Reconciliation might be a sort of forgiveness without affect, an agreeable, mutual understanding of an event rather than an emotional embrace. Yet, to forgive implies that there is someone to whom the act of forgiveness is directed, and in turn, that someone bears responsibility. In Jewish religious thought one can differentiate between two types of forgiveness: *mehila* and *selhila*. The former is a pardon that can be achieved, a release from debt and further punishments. What is crucial, however, is that the offender explicitly asks for forgiveness. The latter, *selhila*, is beyond reach, as it is repentance and a purification by a spiritual return to a divine presence.¹ What a state such as Germany after the Holocaust could offer, and to a certain extent also did offer, was such a release of *mehila*—through reparations and restitution.

In Hannah Arendt's rendering, reconciliation might be reserved for that which cannot be forgiven. It is, for her, a third way between forgiveness and revenge, since it enables a political judgment. The other two notions are too inherently bound to Judeo-Christian religious thought, founded on the existence of an omnipotent God. Reconciliation is thus a worldly matter and a political charge. It is based on *amor mundi*, the love of the world, and the will of co-existence, which Arendt elaborates in her opus magnum *The Human Condition*. For the sake of the love of the world, one must accept the world as it is, even though it might be filled with ungraspable evil—this is the challenge of reconciliation. In her *Denktagebuch*, Arendt returns to the concept of reconciliation at several points and, in relation to *amor mundi*, she asks why it is so difficult to love the world? Roger Berkowitz writes: "[T]he answer is clear enough: anti-Semitism, racism, totalitarianism, poverty, corruption, and a feeling of

¹ Jean Axelrad Cahan, "Reconciliation or Reconstruction? Further Thoughts on Political Forgiveness," *Polity* 45, no. 2 (April 2013): 174–97.

utter powerlessness to make change. What reconciliation and understanding require is a commitment to politics and plurality that can come about only through a dedication to the world as it is.”² The concept appeared in her thinking in the aftermath of the Second World War, in what seems to be a direct response to the Holocaust. The question of how to live in a world where such a horror could take place illuminates the limits of reconciliation. Can the world be shared, can the common be found, after such a rift? Can the people who carried out and supported the Holocaust, or the event as such, be reconciled with? Returning, once more, to the words of Berkowitz: “[I]f they would admit their error, she could make the effort to live with them in a common world,” since “reconciliation names the power to face up to the wrongs of the world and still commit oneself to living with them in a political community.”³ The Nazi crime thus shakes the very foundation of what can be perceived as the common world, and not only make relevant the question of commemoration, but also that of responsibility. By the admission of a wrong, the common might be reinstated. Yet, if considered in a broader sense, one must ask what such an admission would entail? What kind of excuse is really sufficient? The answer must be: none. Yet, just by trying, one step towards reconciliation might be taken.

Arendt’s concept of reconciliation has recently received substantial attention with respect to how, after 1950, she related to her former lover and philosophical colleague Martin Heidegger. She who spent a great part of her life thinking and working through totalitarian systems, whose life was formed by her exile in the U.S., and he who not only remained in Germany but also both benefited from and to some extent supported Nazi rule. Was Arendt able to reconcile Heidegger’s appalling position and thus able to sustain their friendship until her death in 1975? And if so, *how*? In the genealogy of Arendt’s terms, however, the ethics of reconciliation cannot be understood without considering the broader context of the trial of Adolf Eichmann. One might even argue that what she writes about Eichmann can be transposed to her silence regarding Heidegger’s ties to Nazi ideology, and the subsequent absence of a public renunciation from him.

2 Roger Berkowitz, “Reconciling Oneself to the Impossibility of Reconciliation: Arendt’s Judgement of Adolf Eichmann,” *Journal for Political Thinking* 6, no. 1/2 (November 2017): 30.

3 Ibid.

Thus, a reading of the Eichmann trial might offer an entry point into Arendt’s philosophical views on reconciliation, and thus serve as a means through which to better understand her choice not to confront Heidegger’s involvement with the Nazis.

Arendt was present during Eichmann’s trial in 1961, commissioned to write about it for *The New Yorker*. While witnessing the trial, it was through Eichmann’s unwillingness to admit any sort of wrongdoing that she exhumes all possibilities for reconciliation. She saw the political charge of the trial as removing the question of punishment beyond the realm of the law. Yet, there is a possibility of denying reconciliation altogether, to say that there is no way to reconcile with a crime so vast, especially if no guilt is admitted. Or, in Arendt’s own words from her *Denktagebuch*: “Reconciliation has a merciless boundary [that] forgiveness and revenge don’t recognize—namely, at that about which one must say: This ought not to have happened.”⁴ As the Holocaust ought not to have happened at all, and as the world still must go on despite it having happened, reconciliation might have been the only way to continue to live in love of the world. Yet, since Eichmann claims he only acted within the given laws of the Nazi rule and therefore assumes no guilt, reconciliation is rendered impossible in this particular case. In consequence, this motivates his punishment. Berkowitz again: “Eichmann must die [...] because something happened in Germany to which we, as human beings, cannot be reconciled.”⁵ This line of thought comes from Arendt’s own conclusions (also quoted by Berkowitz) and is especially important considering that Arendt insisted her book on the trial was a report without “ideas,” only “facts with a few conclusions”—besides the epilogue, wherein she writes:

You admitted that the crime committed against the Jewish people during the war was the greatest crime in recorded history, and you admitted your role in it. [...] We are concerned here only with what you did, and not with the possible noncriminal nature of your inner life and

4 The quote comes from Arendt’s *Denktagebuch*, ed. Ursula Ludz and Ingeborg Nordmann (München: Piper Verlag), 2003; the English translation is taken from Berkowitz, “Reconciling Oneself to the Impossibility of Reconciliation,” 31.

5 Ibid.

of your motives. [...] Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that it was nothing more than misfortune that made you a willing instrument in the organization of mass murder; there still remains the fact that you have carried out, and therefore actively supported, a policy of mass murder. For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same. And 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.⁶

She reaches this conclusion after monitoring the trial for weeks, looking at, and thinking about Eichmann and his role in the genocide. Her verdict is without pardon, and should be read against the backdrop of *amor mundi*. That is, it is precisely because the world ought to be common, that it cannot be shared with his. Yet, to understand the depth of such a claim and unravel her view on reconciliation, which is bound to both *judgment* and *thoughtlessness*, one needs to return to her general account of the trial—which is what leads up to the concluding remark quoted above.

Arendt begins her book by describing the courtroom and the circumstances of the trial: who sits where, how the language issues are dealt with, and how the court is ordered to rise before the judges enter. She points out that the building *Beth Ha'am* [The House of the People], was remodeled for the trial by someone with “a theater in mind, complete with orchestra and gallery, with proscenium and stage, and with side doors for the actors’ entrances.”⁷ She argues that the Israeli Prime Minister, Ben Gurion, wanted a show trial and that this was evident even in the choice of space.⁸ He had a pronounced goal for the Eichmann trial, to educate the Israeli youth about the Holocaust. The choice to locate the trial in Israel was not only symbolic but crucial to both the defense and the prosecution.

6 Hannah Arendt, “Holes of Oblivion: The Eichmann Trial and Totalitarianism. From a Letter to Mary McCarthy,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 389.

7 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 4.

8 Ibid.

In his first statement, Eichmann’s defense attorney, Dr. Serfatius, objected that the court could not be unbiased, on the grounds of the judges’ identity as Jewish, since it was likely, he argued, that “one of the judges himself or a near relative of his was harmed by the acts brought forward in the charges.”⁹ Thus from the outset the issues of forgiveness, revenge, and reconciliation were already on the table.

The public interest and media coverage of the Eichmann trial were huge, and the trial was highly symbolic for the Israeli state, since it was the first time Israel tried a Nazi criminal. SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann was head of the Department for Jewish Affairs in the Gestapo from 1941 to 1945. He was in charge of organizing the practical aspects of the deportation of European Jews from their homes to extermination camps, attending to such details as scheduling the trains that delivered people to the camps. In May 1960, Adolf Eichmann, or Ricardo Klement, as he called himself in Argentina, was kidnapped by the Israeli secret services and brought to Israel to stand trial for war crimes committed during WWII. In April 1961, Eichmann was indicted on fifteen criminal charges, including crimes against humanity, crimes against the Jewish people, and war crimes. He pleaded “not guilty in the sense of the indictment” to each charge.¹⁰ Eichmann was sentenced to death and executed in May 1962 at Ramleh Prison. He took no responsibility for his actions (for what he was accused of) and thus did not belong in the shared world. As mentioned, his part in the Holocaust precluded the possibility of reconciliation, and meant that he had to be executed.

Arendt writes that the “case was built on what the Jews had suffered, not on what Eichmann had done.”¹¹ The trial not only convicted Eichmann, but it also provided a platform for witness accounts about the Holocaust and a framework to understand how and why such an event could take place. And it has become emblematic for various other reasons: it was the only time Israel convicted a high-ranking Nazi, it was the first time that survivors publicly testified, and the entire trial was videotaped and broadcast on both television and radio around

9 State of Israel, Ministry of Justice, *The Trial of Adolf Eichmann: Session 1: Reading of the Indictment, Preliminary Objections by Counsel for the Defense, Reply by Attorney General to the Preliminary Objections*.

10 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 21.

11 Ibid., 6.

the world.¹² As mentioned, the question of whether the deeds of Eichmann (implying the entire Nazi crime) could be reconciled with plays out in relation to the consequential question of legality. The defense claimed that Eichmann did not do anything unlawful within the framework of the Third Reich. And Arendt describes Eichmann as seeing himself as a law-abiding citizen: he not only obeyed orders but also the law, and thus he acted as if he was the legislator of the laws he obeyed.¹³ This portrayal of Eichmann conveys his obedience to Nazi law as absolute, as a fundamental issue on his part. Like a Kafkaesque figure, he stands before the law with no other choice than to obey—however, he seems to have lacked Josef K’s determination to take control over his own life.

Eichmann is not freed from responsibility by Arendt. Rather, her work suggests that the concept of responsibility needs to be redefined and removed from the realm of a physical act to include the direct ordering of an act or indirectly giving permission. In one sense, Eichmann was tried for the consequences of his actions, not for a bureaucratic act of signing documents or the concrete act of giving orders. A redefinition would then have to account for a responsibility not only in terms of lawfulness, but also in an Arendtian sense of a criminal who has taken “upon himself the responsibility of an act whose consequences now determine his fate.”¹⁴ In her account, Eichmann is ascribed a lack of judgment, in the sense of an inter-human responsibility, not only as it concerns the trespassing of legal boundaries.¹⁵ Thus, the lack of responsibility

12 The trial’s aftermath has also been marked by contention. Two years after the trial, Arendt published an account of it in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, and in so doing forever damaged her relationship with the international community of Jews in exile and established her image as the controversial thinker she would be remembered as.

13 She draws a parallel to the Kantian figure of a law as law without exception, and this can be understood as what she has accounted for in her writings on totalitarianism: the erasing of difference between law and ethics in the Nazi system. Arendt describes Nazi law as treating the whole world as under its jurisdiction and thus “a law which already supposedly existed before everyone.” See Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 137, as well as *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Inc, 1973), 394, 416.

14 Arendt, “The Perplexities of the Right of Man,” in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, 43.

15 After attending the Eichmann trial, Arendt became interested in the notion of thinking, and her understanding of Eichmann as thoughtless is crucial in her understanding of his inability to judge. She describes thinking, willing, and judging as the three basic mental activities, and even though they are different they cannot be separated from one another—since Eichmann neither can think nor assume responsibility for his actions. See Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1978), 6, 69.

on Eichmann’s part might make forgiveness impossible and also prevent reconciliation.

Now, even though Heidegger did not commit a crime, he falls under the same ethical conceptions in terms of judgment and responsibility. He did not enable the genocide, but nonetheless profited from the unraveling political situation in Germany at the time. This, however, has had one effect regarding the question of how to confront him then: his Nazi involvement was commonly downplayed and treated as if he only chose *not* to decline a promotion given by the Nazis when he assumed the position of rector of the University of Freiburg in 1933. Yet, since the release of the “Black Notebooks” in 2014 (in which he emphasizes classical anti-Semitic tropes, such as the labeling of a “world Jewry” or referring to the hustling skills of Jews in general), there can be no more assumption that Heidegger acted out of mere professional opportunism. Regarding Arendt’s own role in this constellation, she has often been depicted as the abused woman in a heterosexual relationship who could not speak up; that her silence could be explained through her own words as she craved “his protection for her soul.”¹⁶ These interpretations risk relegating Arendt’s thinking and attitude towards Heidegger’s anti-Semitism to an inability to defend against patriarchal structures, or a simple characterization that she was *blinded by love*.¹⁷ As we all know, it is not easy to negotiate matters of love and politics, ethical judgments, and personal actions. And maybe it is not essential or possible here to try to pin down what Arendt might have really thought or felt. Rather, I want to propose that what she writes about Eichmann can be extended to Heidegger because he also refused to bear responsibility for his ideology and actions. Ethically, this judgment could apply to anyone else who doesn’t assume responsibility for their own deeds. Thus, what is at the core is a question of ethics. Yet, regarding Eichmann and Heidegger it is also a matter of the shared historical situation, even if one was a committed enabler of the Holocaust and the other a mere bystander—albeit one who formulated a complex philosophy steeped in convictions of Aryan supremacy.

16 Daniel Maier-Katkin and Birgit Maier-Katkin, “Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger: Calumny and the Politics of Reconciliation,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (February 2006): 90.

17 Ibid.

He stood watching while not only her actual world fell apart but also that fundamental ethical stance which cannot be a *part* of her world (in the sense of the shared): *amor mundi*.

Eichmann was part of the machinery that made the genocide possible. The crime as such is a modern crime, and the Holocaust has become the *nomos* of the modern, in Agamben's words.¹⁸ This leads to possible distance between the bureaucrat giving an order and the act as such: the perpetrator can avoid being a witness to his own crime. He becomes a remote witness, dissociated from the very event he should testify to. While the trial posits Eichmann as a leading character, he is in this sense neither a witness to the event as such, nor does he have sufficient testimony to give about it—rather, what the remote witness testifies to is the machinery enabling the genocide in the first place. He does not, and cannot, account for what happened, but only for how it was carried out. In a sense, an understanding of the perpetrator is at stake, since the idea of a crime implies not only an illegal act, but having blood on one's hands in a literal sense.¹⁹ For Eichmann, the murderous act was committed at a distance; he did not even order anyone's murder, but solely organized the deportation of people to the camps. He is a typical figure of modern society, someone just doing his job; anyone could have replaced him. This seems to shed light upon an important aspect of the trial, recognized by Arendt: it is the Nazi policies as such that were really on trial. Here, another parallel to Heidegger emerges. In comparison to Eichmann, he might have been a bystander, but this does not at all mean that he did not contribute to the anti-Semitic policies instated by the Nazis—he was a cog in the wheel of the bureaucratic machinery that began to “cleanse” higher education of Jewish students and faculty. Furthermore, his anti-Semitic ideology lasted way beyond this short institutional episode in the early 1930s.

As discussed, neither could the crime committed by the Nazis be reconciled with, nor could Eichmann as an individual. That is, through its non-reconcilability does the crime appear as something that should not have happened. Eichmann's

18 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 25–6.

19 This is also true for the Holocaust in a more general sense, since the perpetrators systematically gave criminal orders that the victims had to carry out.

particular crime and Nazi rule in general are by definition irreconcilable with a civilized world—the very world that Arendt struggles to love. Berkowitz makes the important remark that it is not that the Holocaust should be forgotten, but rather that “the world in which Eichmann's crimes could and did happen must simply be said no to.” This leads to the conclusion that “Arendt condemns Eichmann to be banished from the earth.”²⁰ Hence, he, or someone like him, cannot be included in the common. Reconciliation thus demarcates the borders of the political: those who are irreconcilable are excluded from this realm. However, this is not a question of *bare life*, of an inclusive exclusion; it rather seems as an exclusion from the world as such. Or, in other words, if *amor mundi* designates the world we share, and reconciliation is held as its political judgment, that which cannot be included or judged within those default parameters is posed outside. “Therefore he must hang,” as Arendt writes, since there is no other possibility than death. For how could one, as a human, otherwise live in this world?

Yet, can this shared world in which an Eichmann cannot be accepted accommodate someone like Heidegger? How does one reply to such a question without returning to the easy escape of Arendt being *blinded by love*? As stated, this is not where I want to go. But maybe there is something in the question of being *able to see* versus *blindness*. Based on her writing on Eichmann, Arendt was criticized for doing the Zionist cause a disservice, but also praised for her *clarity of vision* in the same context. She *saw* the structures enabling the genocide, the role of the Jewish councils, the composition of Eichmann's argument of innocence. Why then does her gaze seem so obscured in relation to Heidegger? Despite her argument that it is impossible to reconcile with any Nazi, or any Nazi sympathizers, with Heidegger she seems to permit this as a possibility. For her, revenge, forgiveness, and reconciliation are bound to a transgression that needs to be responded to ethically, but reconciliation remains the one concept that is important in a political sense. She writes: “[L]ove, although it is one of the rarest occurrences in human lives [...] is unconcerned to the point of total unworldliness with what the loved person may

20 Berkowitz, “Reconciling Oneself to the Impossibility of Reconciliation,” 32.

be, with his qualities and shortcomings, [...] achievements, failings, and transgressions.”²¹ So could it be love that differentiates Heidegger from Eichmann, since love itself transgresses the sense of worldliness? The love she speaks of need not be the romantic kind, *the one that blinds*; it can also be the love in the love of the world, *amor mundi*. However, it also seems as though love—their personal intimacy—is what places her relation to Heidegger outside of the *amor mundi*, as the different types of love gesture in opposite directions—one pointing to the common, and the other, romantic love, clearly pointing to something that is *not* widely shared. Still it is decidedly not a question of *not seeing*, of being blinded—Arendt seems to *see* clearly—but rather a question of whom one reconciles with, and how. One might ask what this does to her ethical position: did this intimacy allow Arendt to look beyond Heidegger’s deeds and views? Importantly, Arendt did not know what was written in Heidegger’s notebooks, as they remained unpublished until after her death. Nevertheless, in the Eichmann trial, what is shared by the main actors, the prosecutor, the judges, the defense, the witnesses, and the perpetrator is their public standing. It is a matter of doing and acting within a shared society, of living in and with history—the trial itself was a public event. What the quote above may amount to is that Heidegger’s place, in relation to Arendt, lies outside of the public sphere. Regardless of his status as a public philosopher, their relation was a private, personal one. Here, a possible answer of why Arendt did not break with him emerges: reconciliation is, as I stated at the beginning of this text, what enables a *political* judgment, bound to the construction and maintenance of a shared humanity. Reconciliation is without affect, as it is placed in the sphere of politics, and thus fundamentally contradicts the basis of personal love and friendship. However, for Arendt, an intimate relation seems to defy any evaluation by those standards. Reconciliation might be reserved for that which cannot be forgiven politically, but in terms of friendships and love affairs, it is reconciliation that cannot be.

21 Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 242. This quote is often discussed in relation to this matter; see, for example, Maier-Katkin and Maier-Katkin, “Hannah Arendt and Martin Heidegger,” 117.

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