A Taxonomy of Evils: Expanding On Hannah Arendt's Conceptions

of Evil to Identify Four Variations

by

SHEALYN MILLAY

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Philosophy
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 2024

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Shealyn Millay for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of Philosophy to be taken June 2024

Title: A Taxonomy of Evils: Expanding on Hannah Arendt's Conceptions of Evil
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Approved: _____*Steven Brence, Ph.D.*_____
Primary Thesis Advisor

Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* examines the rise of Nazism and Stalinism and explores the mechanics of totalitarian movements. She believed that evil in the conventional sense could not describe certain horrors. Conventional evil can be understood in human terms, as it often involves a human desire and uses people for some end (without regard for morality). However, the evils of the Holocaust, for example, were marked by a lack of humanity and impossible to understand in human terms. She applies the term "radical evil," a Kantian term that she uses to describe the deliberate—yet purposeless—rendering of humans as superfluous.

In a later work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,* she changes her definition of evil, introducing what she calls "the banality of evil." Unlike radical evil, banal evil is hyper-rational, yet thoughtlessly intertwined within bureaucratic systems. It occurs when a system is working toward an evil end, and the people within the system don't see themselves as responsible for evil because they are only doing their job. While she may describe Hitler with radical evil, many of the administrators and officials under Hitler may not have harbored antisemitic hatred, but participated in genocide out of dull, bureaucratic duty. While Arendt

spoke as if there could only be one definition of evil, changing her conception from radical to banal, this paper will argue that they each describe different phenomena and can exist simultaneously.

Additionally, this paper will argue that there is another, previously undefined form of evil, which will be called frenzied evil. While radical evil is thoughtful yet irrational, and while banal evil is rational but thoughtless, frenzied evil is irrational and thoughtless. During his rise to power, Hitler used his speaking skills to drive people into a furious frenzy. Events like the Kristallnacht contained an impulsive and impassioned hatred that was likely, for some participants, devoid of critical thinking. In total, this paper will argue for four categories of evil: conventional, radical, banal, and frenzied.

Acknowledgements

First off, I want to thank my Primary Thesis Advisor, Dr. Steven Brence. I took my first class with him during my first year of college, in which he introduced me to Hannah Arendt's work. Since then, I've taken at least one philosophy class with him each year, and he is largely responsible for expanding my interest in philosophy.

I would also like to thank the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Barbara Muraca and Dr. Lisa Wolverton. Professor Muraca introduced me to 19th Century philosophy in her PHIL312 class, and then greatly helped me out by joining my thesis committee as a secondary reader late in the thesis process. Professor Wolverton has also acted as my CHC advisor and has always been kind and helpful as I've struggled to navigate the school's systems.

Lastly, I'd like to thank my mom and sister for patiently reading and re-reading my 40+ pages of philosophy writing as I finalized my thesis. Both are busy women, yet never complained when I asked them for help. They have been instrumental both in the development of my thesis, and in the development of myself in general.

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"But the women had further scores to settle. They prowled round him, nostrils flaring, sizing him up like she-wolves. Each of them was trying to think of some terrible deed, some savage act of vengeance, which might relieve their pent-up fury."
(Zola 370).

"His mother was the first to attack him, initiating as priestess the bloody rite. He threw the headband from his hair, so that the wretched Agaue might recognize him and stay her murderous hands. Touching her cheek, he spoke these words: 'Mother, it is I, your son, Pentheus, whom you bore in the house of Echion! O Mother, pity me, and do not kill your son because of my offences!' But Agaue, foaming at the mouth and rolling distorted eyes, her senses gone, was in the grip of Bacchus and deaf to his entreaties."
(Euripides 157).

Introduction

Hannah Arendt was particularly qualified to write on the subject of evil. She studied under Martin Heidegger, obtained her PhD under Karl Jaspers, and became an established contributor to discussions of philosophy and Jewish relations. However, her experience was not just academic, but also firsthand. She lived through both World Wars, she was a German Jew who fled from the Nazis, and then she witnessed the totalitarianism of Communist Russia and lived well into the Cold War.

She drew from her experiences to craft her philosophical work, writing extensively about different conceptions of evil. The conventional understanding of evil involves a sense of harmful selfishness; taking advantage of others or exploiting them. Examples of behaviors that fall under this category include those prohibited by the Ten Commandments, which include theft, adultery, and murder. However, Arendt didn't think this conception of evil could describe the horrors of the Holocaust. In 1951 she wrote *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* in which she analyzed Nazi Germany and Communist Russia to shed light on the nature of totalitarianism. A key aspect of this book is Arendt's exploration of the Kantian term "Radical Evil." She uses this term to describe the depths of depravity and the unprecedented cruelty that was witnessed during these totalitarian regimes. While both conventional evil and radical evil are deliberate, they differ in that radical evil doesn't have a purpose or use people toward any end. It annihilates people for no reason, treating them as if they were useless, or superfluous.

However, Arendt later expanded upon her understanding of evil in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* Adolf Eichmann was a Nazi official who had fled after the war, only to be caught in Argentina by an Israeli intelligence team. He was brought back to Israel to stand trial for participating in the Nazi government and extermination of Jews.

Arendt attended this trial as a journalist, and her report on it sparked significant controversy. Arendt was shocked at how unintelligent, boring, and unoriginal Eichmann was. She described him as a "joiner," who just wanted to be a part of something and have a purpose afforded to him. He ended up joining the Nazi party, not out of passion for the Nazi cause, but almost by accident as he was looking for something to do. He spoke in cliches, seemed unable to formulate original thoughts, and a psychologist claimed that he was perfectly "normal." Eichmann contributed to the Nazi movement and the extermination of Jews, but he was apparently not evil in the same way a serial killer or Hitler was; he even claimed to harbor no ill feelings toward Jews. This phenomenon led Arendt to change her definition of evil from being radical to banal. Banal evil describes people who are caught up in a system and don't feel responsible for the atrocities that the system as a whole perpetrates. They feel that they are just doing their job, or doing what they are told, and are totally estranged from the evil they are participating in. They may be rational, performing their job with efficiency and precision, but they are also thoughtless regarding the morality and the greater effects of their actions.

Arendt largely replaced her earlier conception of radical evil with her conception of banal evil, but I think this was a mistake. I think that the two conceptions are not mutually exclusive, but rather coexisted during the Nazi era. Furthermore, I think that there were examples of clearly horrific and evil things in Nazi Germany that don't fit into the categories of conventional, radical, or banal evil, but belong to a fourth category which has been previously undefined. Hitler was renowned for his public speaking skills and ability to drive crowds into a frenzy. Germans who felt humiliated by the Treaty of Versailles were passionate and eager to participate in Hitler's vision, and they supported him with almost religious zeal. As Hitler blamed "the Jews" for many of Germany's problems, millions became furiously enraged, despite the

ridiculousness of the notion that Jews were a unified collective that had conspired against the German people. Hitler was able to bring people into an impassioned frenzy, in which he could direct the emotions of the crowd as he willed. As they became increasingly stirred up, they participated in violent attacks against Jews, with the Kristallnacht being a particularly famous example. While these attacks are clearly evil, no singular notion of "evil" can accurately or fully represent the complexity of motives and behaviors that went into them. They were the product of a variety of individuals participating in a variety of different ways. For example, Nazi officials who spread propaganda and misinformation regarding Jews were deliberately conspiring to enact genocide against them. However, there were many Nazis who participated in the violent outbursts who would likely be considered psychologically normal and who were not strategically organizing the pogroms. They may have become wrapped up in Nazi propaganda, becoming increasingly frustrated and angry until there was an explosion of violence.

While some, like Hitler, deliberately acted upon their irrational hatred for Jews, and others, like Eichmann, participated in the Holocaust without thinking themselves responsible for the tragedy, a third group seems to have been carried away by an impassioned, excited movement in which they were both thoughtless regarding the morality of their actions and irrational regarding their end goal. Driven by economic and political frustration, as well as the enmeshed self-affirmation of their group, many Germans directly attacked Jews without an understanding of why or what they hoped to achieve. There are other examples, in literature and in history, that contain similar phenomena. By finding instances of frenzied violence within these examples, and by comparing them to the conventional, radical, and banal conceptions of evil, it becomes clear that they best fit under a fourth category.

This paper will begin by describing radical and banal evil from Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* While conventional evil will be acknowledged for context, it is older and more commonly understood, so most of the analysis will be on Arendt's two conceptions. Besides Arendt's books themselves, I will use a variety of sources that provide examples of her conceptions of evil in the real world or in literature. I will then argue for the simultaneous existence of conventional, radical, and banal evil, and then explore instances of evil that do not fit into any of the aforementioned categories. Following these examples, I will attempt to clarify and summarize the argument, as well as address potential counter-arguments. Lastly, I will discuss potential future applications of this expansion upon Arendt's conceptions of evil, and I will discuss areas that can be researched further. In total, this project will show that through analyzing the Nazi movement, Hannah Arendt identified two forms of evil that are distinct from the conventional understanding, one of which she calls radical evil, which involves the deliberate rendering of humans as superfluous, and another which she calls banal evil, marked by thoughtlessness and a sense of bureaucratic duty. However, there is a fourth form of evil which is present in literature and throughout history and is defined by frenzied, thoughtless, and passionate violence.

Radical Evil and Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

In Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* she often refers to radical evil. This term may sound familiar, as Immanuel Kant coined it in 1793 in his *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason Alone.* In the conventional sense, evil is taken to represent a type of selfishness; an individual puts their own desires above those of others and is willing to do harm against others to satisfy themselves. This is the conception of evil prohibited by the Ten Commandments of *The Bible.* Evil actions like murder, theft, adultery, etc. each express negative consequences that come from someone fulfilling their desires at the expense of others. However, there are examples of evil that aren't defined by selfishness. Sometimes, evil actions are committed for seemingly no good reason, and they are hard to understand. Kant identified this problem and labeled nonsensical evil as radical evil. For Kant, radical evil was an innate inclination toward evil that is inherent in human beings. He wrote

> "The depravity of human nature, then, is not so much to be called badness, if this word is taken in its strict sense, namely, as a disposition (subjective principle of maxims) to adopt the bad, as bad, into one's maxims as a spring (for that is devilish); but rather perversity of heart, which, on account of the result, is also called a bad heart." (Kant 30-31).

He is claiming that the definition of "badness" as a disposition to adopt evil into one's guiding principles does not account for the depths of moral corruption. Essentially, badness is not just the inclusion of evil into one's maxims, but the perversion and corruption of morality itself.

Hannah Arendt applies radical evil to the Nazis, because the horrors they committed cannot be explained through the conventional understanding of evil. Amos Elon writes in his introduction to Penguin Classics' edition of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that "in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* [Arendt] still held on to a Kantian notion of radical evil, the evil that, under the

Nazis, corrupted the basis of moral law, exploded legal categories, and defied human judgment" (Elon xiii). The Nazis were not acting according to selfish desire; the evil actions of the Nazis were coming from a motive that is impossible to describe with reason. For example, it seems impossible to understand or find any rational substance in Hitler's ramblings against Jews in *Mein Kampf.* Films like *Schindler's List* and *The Pianist,* which try to display the cruelty done against Jews in concentration camps, are in part so shocking because the violence is senseless and purposeless. There are many war films with equal violence and gore, but they are not as psychologically troubling as the concentration camp movies because there is a reason, or objective behind the violence. Like war, the aforementioned crimes described in the Ten Commandments can be understood in that there was a reason for them – regardless of how questionable that reason is. This is what distinguishes conventional evil from the radical evil of the Holocaust.

Arendt used the term "radical evil," and effectively applied it to the Nazi phenomenon, however Arendt did not actually mean to use the term in the exact sense that Kant used it. Although Kant's definition largely fits Arendt's usage, and understanding Kant's definition of radical evil provides context for Arendt's work, Arendt makes a crucial distinction. In his *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question,* Richard Bernstein examines what exactly Arendt meant by "radical evil." He writes that:

> "Arendt indicates that her understanding of radical evil is quite different from Kant's.
> Consider … what she says in her all too brief reference to Kant. 'Kant, the only
> philosopher who, in the word he coined for it, at least may have suspected the existence
> of this evil *even though he immediately rationalized it in the concept of a perverted ill
> will that could be explained by comprehensible motives'* … it is clear that Arendt does not

think that Kant grasped what *she* intends by radical evil. Kant's analysis is based on the presupposition that there are comprehensible motives that can explain radical evil. But this is precisely what Arendt is calling into question" (Bernstein 143).

Essentially, Arendt believes Kant's conception of radical evil is too charitable and too mild. Kant still thinks radical evil can be understood in human terms, as he tries to describe it as a "perversity of heart." The "heart" is something that we can understand, and Kant attempts to build off our understanding of the heart by defining radical evil as an alteration of it. Additionally, this description of radical evil treats it as if it is a human quality; although it may be a perverted human quality, it is still a human quality. This is made especially clear when Kant describes this evil as "the depravity of human nature." Arendt will continue to describe radical evil as an absence, or reduction of human nature rather than a depravity of human nature.

Shortly after she claims that Kant's conception of radical evil falls short, Arendt delves into her own definition. She writes that "radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous … the Nazis and the Bolsheviks can be sure that their factories of annihilation which demonstrate the swiftest solution to the problem of overpopulation, of economically superfluous and socially rootless human masses, are … a warning" (Arendt, Origins 459). Radical evil can not be explained as an aspect of humanity because its end is to diminish and erase humanity; to treat humans as if they have no value. Ironically, the totalitarian regimes that produced radical evil were founded upon the principle that "everything is possible." They embraced an aura of forward momentum; of pushing humanity to become more than what it was. The Nazis, for example, sought the propagation and expansion of an Aryan master race, superior to all others. However as they claimed to be pushing humanity to become more than it was, in reality they made it less than it was. Arendt writes that

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"What totalitarian ideologies therefore aim at is not the transformation of the outside

world or the transmutation of society, but the transformation of human nature itself. The

concentration camps are the laboratories where changes in human nature are tested …

Human nature as such is at stake, and even though it seems that these experiments

succeed not in changing man but only in destroying him" (Arendt, Origins 458-459).

The organized, mechanical destruction of life within the concentration camps left no room for

any aspect of humanity. The purposelessness of the entire situation was particularly

dehumanizing; people were treated as if they were useless, or superfluous. In her December 17,

1946 letter to her friend and mentor Karl Jaspers, Arendt provides an example of how humans

were treated as superfluous. "There is a difference between a man who sets out to murder his old

aunt and people who, without considering the economic usefulness of their actions at all (the

deportations were very damaging to the war effort), built factories to produce corpses"

(Bernstein 148-149). Essentially, the mass murder did not serve any purpose; while murdering

someone for a particular end is bad enough, the murder of Jews *served no end.* The Nazis

enacted this genocide for *no good reason* and it resulted in no benefit, perhaps even doing harm

to the German economy if Arendt is correct in her assertion that the deportations were damaging

to the war effort. In this way, although radical evil is deliberate, it is also totally irrational.

In his exploration of the exact nature of Hannah Arendt's conception of radical evil,

Bernstein speaks about the irony of how the slogan "everything is possible" became identified

with a movement that reduced humanity rather than expanded it.

"Arendt's own thinking was deeply affected by the traumatic experience of witnessing

what had seemed to be impossible - that an unprecedented totalitarian movement could

arise whose ideology was based on the principle that 'everything is possible,' including

the transformation of the human species into something less than human … the specter

that haunted Arendt, the specter of totalitarianism, was one in which human beings would

become superfluous, and even the concept of humanity itself would be obliterated"

(Bernstein 147).

To relate this back to Kant, it is clear that Arendt's conception of radical evil bears a

fundamental distinction from Kant's conception. Kant tried to rationalize radical evil by

explaining it in human terms and by relating it to aspects of humanity that are understandable.

But for Arendt, this form of evil is impossible to rationalize and impossible to connect to any

form of humanity. Arendt understood radical evil to be *against* humanity; to "transform the

human species into something less than human;" to treat people as "superfluous" and enact the

"obliteration" of humanity. Radical evil is purposeless, as it does not seek to use human lives for

any purpose, but rather destroys them for no real reason at all. By treating people as if they are

purposeless, useless, and superfluous, radical evil dehumanizes them.

As will be discussed in the next section, Arendt built upon her understanding of

purposelessness as a key component of evil to define the banality of evil, which is an entirely

new form of evil that is distinct from radical evil. When Arendt formed this new conception of

evil she seemingly abandoned radical evil. Upon finishing *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* Arendt

sparked controversy and backlash, which I will explore in more detail later. Gershom Scholem, a

Jewish scholar, wrote a scathing letter to Arendt in which he criticized her description of the

banality of evil as trivializing the Holocaust. In response, Arendt wrote a letter that affirmed her

stance on the banality of evil while forsaking radical evil. She replied:

"You are quite right: I changed my mind and no longer speak of 'radical evil' … it is

indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it

possesses neither depth nor demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole

world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is 'thought-defying,' as

I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it

concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its 'banality.'"

(Bernstein 138).

Arendt seems to have changed her mind and her understanding of evil seems to have evolved.

She built upon the connection between evil and purposelessness and redescribed it as a lack of

depth. Rather than focusing on irrationality, as she did with radical evil, she focused on

thoughtlessness. In this way she appears to have left radical evil in the past, claiming that she no

longer speaks of it. Bernstein affirmed this in his analysis, arguing that "Arendt not only rejects

Nazis as 'insane' monsters … she emphatically states that 'one cannot extract any diabolical or

demonic profundity from Eichmann.'" (Bernstein 142-143). Eichmann was an apparently

regular, boring bureaucrat, and many Nazis were likely psychologically normal people who

harbored no demonic, ideologically-grounded hatred toward Jews. While he was a rational

creature in that he could organize and manage things, he gave no thought to the ultimate ends of

his actions. Arendt inferred from this that evil is as shallow and thoughtless as Eichmann was,

and that evil is not dependent on any satanic or demonic traits.

While Arendt's description of the banality of evil accurately explains many aspects of the

Nazi movement and world history in general, I don't think the legitimacy of banal evil replaces

that of radical evil; I think that the radical evil explained in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and

the banal evil in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* coexisted in the Nazi movement. Arendt claims that

"evil is never radical," but I don't think she provides any justification for this. Her description of

Eichmann is certainly not radical evil, and so I agree that there is a category for the form of evil

espoused by Eichmann and the bureaucratic aspects of Nazi Germany. However, Arendt offers

no evidence that radical evil doesn't exist, and I think there are many real examples of it.

Eichmann may have never personally killed a Jew, and he was not personally leading them into

killing machines, but there were many Nazis who were. SS troops who tortured and antagonized

Jews like in the depictions from *The Pianist* and *Schindler's list* certainly existed. Hitler's

deliberate hatred of Jews was not banal. I would thus argue that banal evil *does not replace*

radical evil, but is rather a separate category of evil that coexists with radical evil.

The Banality of Evil and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*

The first known description of evil as "banal" comes from an early exchange between Arendt and her mentor, Jaspers. Arendt had sent him a copy of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and he had been concerned that her discussion of radical evil mythologized it, thus providing it with a sense of greatness. He wrote:

> "You say that what the Nazis did cannot be comprehended as "Crime" - I'm not altogether comfortable with your view, because a guilt that goes beyond all criminal guilt inevitably takes on a streak of "greatness" - of satanic greatness - which is, for me, as inappropriate for the Nazis as all the talk about the "demonic" element in Hitler and so forth. It seems to me that we have to see those things in their total **banality**, in their prosaic triviality, because that's what truly characterizes them. Bacteria can cause epidemics that wipe out nations, but they remain merely bacteria." (Bernstein 148).

Despite the clear connection, Arendt didn't adopt the term "banality of evil" until over a decade later. Her exploration of the banality of evil started with the capture of Adolf Eichmann.

Eichmann was a Nazi bureaucrat who had fled after World War Two to hide in Argentina. In 1960, he was captured by the Israeli secret service and abducted to Israel to stand trial for his participation in the Holocaust. Arendt was working for *The New Yorker* at the time and requested to travel to Jerusalem and report on it. "She felt she simply had to attend the trial, she owed it to herself as a social critic, displaced person, witness, and survivor. She had never seen a Nazi butcher like Eichmann, she wrote to the Rockefeller Foundation, and this was probably her only chance" (Elon xi-xii). Interestingly, her expectation of what the "Nazi butcher" would be like may not have fit her early expectations.

Witnessing Eichmann's trial caused Arendt to fundamentally change her understanding of evil. Before, she had been at risk, Jaspers feared, of "glorifying" and thus empowering it. Afterward, she treated evil with much less awe and respect. "Evil, as she saw it, need not be committed only by demonic monsters but – with disastrous effect – by morons and imbeciles as well" (Elon xi). Adolf Eichmann was responsible for this fundamental shift in Arendt's philosophy because he participated in the Holocaust, yet he was also thoughtless and unremarkable. Far from being a maniacal serial killer, he was deemed to be completely psychologically normal. "Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him 'normal' – 'more normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him,' one was said to have exclaimed, while another had found his whole psychological outlook … was 'not only normal but most desirable'" (Arendt, Eichmann 25-26). While he was thought to be normal from a psychological standpoint, listening to his life story showed him to be below average, even pathetic, from an intellectual standpoint. He had done poorly in school, and was said to have "not exactly been the most hard-working pupil–or, one may add, the most gifted" (Arendt, Eichmann 28). He also seemed to be constantly caught making little lies, embellishing details about his accomplishments to make himself seem more interesting or remarkable than he was (such as falsely claiming that he spoke Hebrew and Yiddish) (Arendt, Eichmann 28-29). He had worked a variety of run-of-the-mill jobs, such as a position as a salesman for the Vacuum Oil Company, from which he was later fired (Arendt, Eichmann 29). He bounced from occupation to occupation to the point that Arendt labeled him a 'joiner;' he was easily swept into a movement, regardless of what the movement stood for. When he eventually joined the S.S, it was not because of any conviction or belief, but rather a sense of boredom. "Kaltenbrunner had said to him: 'Why not join the S.S?' and he had replied, 'Why not?' That was how it happened, and that was about all there was to it" (Arendt,

Eichmann 33). He sought the prescriptive purpose afforded by a group, and struggled to find purpose that wasn't given to him. His greatest regret upon learning of Germany's defeat was: "I sensed I would have to live a leaderless and difficult individual life, I would receive no directives from anybody, no orders or commands would any longer be issued to me, no pertinent ordinances would be there to consult -- in brief, a life never known lay before me" (Arendt, Eichmann 32).

Arendt did not expect a "Nazi butcher" like Eichmann to lead such a boring and purposeless life. She may have been further surprised to learn that, by all immediate accounts, Eichmann had never killed anyone or maintained any kind of maniacal hatred toward Jews. In the beginning of the trial he claimed that "With the killing of Jews I had nothing to do. 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; I just did not do it." (Arendt, Eichmann 22). The prosecution tried to connect him to murder or to directly ordering the extermination of Jews, and they came close, presenting a piece of paper that had "Eichmann proposes shooting" scribbled on it, but Arendt saw many reasons to doubt the authenticity and/or significance of this evidence, and Eichmann's involvement was never proven (Arendt, Eichmann 22-23). For the most part, Eichmann's role in the Nazi bureaucracy was a logistical one. He seemed to view this as some kind of moral shield such that he was part of something bigger than him, in which he was following orders and only responsible for his immediate contribution rather than the system's end goals. Absolving himself of responsibility this way was extremely effective in that he was able to participate in horrendous crimes without flinching. This was even the case when his personal relationships were concerned. When some of Eichmann's Jewish friends were targeted by his party, he was *somehow* unable to help. Upon hearing that one of his acquaintances had

been sent to a concentration camp, Eichmann went to meet him. After listening to his friend's

woes, he responded "Look, I really cannot help you, because according to the orders from the

Reichsführer nobody can get you out" (Arendt, Eichmann 51). Being removed from the physical

killing enabled Eichmann to feel like he had no responsibility for any of it, to the point that he

was so enmeshed with the genocidal bureaucracy that he could not muster any autonomy even

when the lives of his friends were at stake.

In total, banal evil is a systematized evil in which the individual participant feels

exonerated because they only feel responsible for their immediate contribution, rather than the

system's end goals. The Holocaust was the product of Eichmann, his superiors, his inferiors,

soldiers, train drivers, engineers – it was broken up into so many components that each person

felt they could deny responsibility. If Eichmann had reflected on the greater implications of his

actions, he may have realized that his actions were wrong. But thoughtlessness is a crucial aspect

of banal evil. On an individual level, evil requires malintent; active, bad thoughts. At an

institutional level, however, evil requires no thoughts; thoughtlessness. This was reflected in the

way Eichmann spoke. Arendt realized that he was unable to offer any critiques or original ideas,

so he instead spoke in a jargon of clichés he didn't understand. "Officialese became his language

because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché" (Arendt,

Eichmann 48). Even when speaking about horrific war crimes, Eichmann's words were

somehow shrouded in insignificance and banality. In fact, the Nazis had a policy of subjecting

sensitive topics to "language rules," which were ways of watering down unpleasant words. "All

correspondence referring to the matter was subject to rigid 'language rules,' and, except in the

reports from the Einsatzgruppen, it is rare to find documents in which such bald words as

'extermination,' 'liquidation,' or 'killing' occur" (Arendt, Eichmann 85). Eichmann's habit of

speaking in cliches, saying words yet somehow saying nothing at all, or using cliches that he didn't really understand the true meaning of, must have been helpful here. Arendt continues, providing examples of the "language rules" in practice. "The prescribed code names for killing were 'final solution,' 'evacuation,' and 'special treatment;' deportation …received the names of 'resettlement' and 'labor in the East'" (Arendt, Eichmann 85). It seems that not only was Eichmann shielded from physical killing by his place in the system, likely in an office far away from the killing chambers, but he was also shielded from any allusion to or acknowledgement of the crimes he was committing. Furthermore, Eichmann was not only shielded from allusion to murder and genocide, but his use of cliches and his adoption of the language rules protected others from the discomfort of having to face the product of their actions. It seems like the entire evil system was designed to keep people focused on the work immediately in front of them, and not on the greater ramifications of their work. Eichmann's inability to think and speak even appear to have protected him from the discomfort of his own death. After he was sentenced to hang based on his obedience, and by extension support, of the genocidal system, he did not lose his composure, and spoke of his own death in "officialise." He may not have even understood what was happening, as he once again began speaking in cliches and contradicting himself.

"He was in complete command of himself, nay, he was more: he was completely himself. Nothing could have demonstrated this more convincingly than the grotesque silliness of his last words. He began by stating emphatically that he was a Gottgläubiger, to express in common Nazi fashion that he was no Christian and did not believe in life after death. He then proceeded: 'After a short while, gentleman, *we shall meet again*. Such is the fate of all men. Long live Germany, long live Argentina, long live Austria. *I shall not forget them*.' In the face of death, he had found the cliche used in funeral oratory … It was as

though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil.*" (Arendt, Eichmann 252).

As it turns out, Eichmann may have been more anti-semitic and conscious of his crimes than Arendt believed. Tape recordings of Eichmann, which were not available during his trial, showed a very different story than that of *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* The New York Times described the tapes and their implications, writing that:

"Eichmann went to the gallows insisting that he was a mere functionary following orders, denying responsibility for the crimes of which he had been found guilty. Describing himself as a small cog in the state apparatus who was in charge of train schedules, his professed mediocrity gave rise to the philosopher Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil … [but the tapes expose] Eichmann's visceral, ideological antisemitism, his zeal for hunting down Jews and his role in the mechanics of mass murder" (Kershner).

It's possible that Eichmann was trying to sell himself as pathetic and thoughtless in an attempt to garner sympathy, and that his performance (along with the absence of these tapes) convinced Arendt of his mediocrity.

One might wonder if Arendt's misdiagnosis of Eichmann's character would result in a misdiagnosis of evil as banal. I don't, however, think that this new evidence changes anything regarding the core of Arendt's argument. Even if Eichmann does not perfectly fit the definition of banal evil, there are many who do; the concept of the banality of evil is not undone by the possibility of Eichmann being a bad example. There were many others besides Eichmann who participated in the Nazi bureaucratic machine, and there were very few who openly resisted. Germans were not genetically predisposed to be more cruel than people of other nations (there

were, of course, those who engaged in gratuitous cruelty and who would fall under the umbrella of radical evil), and yet most were in some way complicit in constructing death factories. Arendt's diagnosis was an accurate representation of the many normal people who thoughtlessly and guiltlessly contributed to the Holocaust.

Frenzied Evil

So far, this paper has argued for the existence of both the radical evil Arendt developed in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as well as the banal evil she later committed to with *Eichmann in Jerusalem.* It has been argued that despite the fact that Arendt replaced her conception of radical evil with that of banal evil, radical evil was still prevalent in Nazi Germany, and it has also been argued that despite Eichmann being more anti-semitic than was initially believed, banal evil is still a prevalent form of evil. However, there are examples of an evil both in Nazi Germany and throughout the world that does not fit into either the conventional, radical, or banal categories. This indicates that there is a fourth form of evil.

Although Arendt never identified another form of evil, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* does describe some scenarios that don't seem to fit the overarching theme of the book. For example, she writes about an interesting situation in Romania in which some Romanians killed Jews with such ferocious zeal that even the Nazis were opposed to it. The Nazi bureaucracy, in typical banal evil fashion, preferred an orderly and systematized approach to eliminating Jews. They witnessed riots and pogroms in Romania that were too wild and passionate to them. "In Rumania even the S.S were taken aback, and occasionally frightened, by the horrors of old-fashioned, spontaneous pogroms on a gigantic scale; they often intervened to save Jews from sheer butchery, so that the killing could be done in what, according to them, was a civilized way" (Arendt, Eichmann 190). The cruelty done by these Romanians was, even in the eyes of Nazis, totally insane. On its face, it may seem like the radical evil described in Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* as it was certainly more radical than the banal evil of Nazi Germany.

"Deportation Rumanian style consisted in herding five thousand people into freight cars and letting them die there of suffocation while the train traveled through the countryside

without plan or aim for days on end … Also, the horrors of the Rumanian concentration

camps, which were established and run by the Rumanians themselves … were more

elaborate and more atrocious than anything we know of in Germany … The Germans

were horrified, and everybody intervened" (Arendt, Eichmann 191-192).

The unparalleled cruelty of these Romanians was clearly at odds with the bureaucratic,

systematized destruction of life championed by the Nazi bureaucracy. This level of cruelty,

coupled with the excitement and zeal of riots and pogroms, do not bear the markings of banal

evil; it appears to be something different.

It *prima facie* seems like these Romanians had a deeper hatred toward Jews than the

Nazis did. Indeed, Arendt writes that there was a long history of antisemitism in Romania

(Arendt, Eichmann 190). However, after shocking the Germans with their horrific violence,

some Romanians completely changed their attitude and embraced emigration as a solution to the

"Jewish problem," rather than liquidation. This was a result of economic incentive:

"The Rumanians suddenly did an about-face … What the Germans had not taken into

account was that … side by side with the massacres, there had sprung up a flourishing

business in exemption sales, in which … it had discovered that one could sell Jews

abroad for hard currency, so the Rumanians became the most fervent adherents of Jewish

emigration" (Arendt, Eichmann 193).

Their reasons for embracing emigration and opposing murder were not noble; this was clearly

still evil. However, it is clearly distinct from radical evil. *These Romanians were using the Jews*

toward a specific end. Radical evil requires that human life is destroyed for no reason; that

human beings are rendered superfluous. Many Nazis, as discussed earlier, murdered Jews even

when doing so was detrimental to the economy/war effort. This was a key aspect of radical evil.

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These Romanians, however, completely halted the genocide as soon as they realized it was not ideal from an economic perspective. They used Jews toward a particular end, which means the Jews were not rendered superfluous and thus not victims of radical evil. It would seem that the hatred of Jews in Romania was more superficial than the hatred of Jews in Nazi Germany; the Nazi's hatred withstood economic inconvenience, while the Romanian's did not. This begs the question: why were these Romanians so much more violent if their hatred was not as organized or resilient as that of the Nazi's?

The situation in Romania overlaps with some of the previously discussed forms of evil, but it also has distinctions. The marketization of Jewish emigration could be explained as the classical, conventional evil. As was discussed earlier, the evil that is prohibited by the Ten Commandments involves using others toward some end while harming them or violating some principle. In Romania, the Jews were being used as a source of money. Emigration may seem like a better alternative to mass murder, but it was exploitative and selfish, and thus fits the description of conventional evil. The riots and pogroms might also be connected to conventional evil, as the rioters may have used the Jews as an outlet for their frustration. The situation in Romania also bears some similarities to banal evil, as those involved in chaotic and frenzied killing may be acting thoughtlessly, just as Eichmann was thoughtless. However, it was clearly incompatible with banal evil because some Nazis viewed the pogroms as too wild and impassioned, which is not consistent with banality. Some Romanians also did not appear to be deeply committed to the killings; as soon as there was an economic opportunity, they abandoned massacre and adopted Emigration. This means there is also a distinction between the situation in Romania and radical evil, as radical evil perseveres even in the face of economic disadvantage (as was the case with the Nazi concentration camps). The violence of these Romanians was

noncommittal, but extreme. It was not grounded in substantive hatred because it was short-lived and quickly abandoned. It was not an entrenched, goal-oriented process of making humans superfluous, but something wild, impulsive, and frenzied.

It may be the case that the Romanians who became fervent supporters of emigration were different from the Romanians who were involved in the pogroms (for example Romanian officials may have pursued exemption sales while other citizens were attacking their Jewish neighbors). This would complicate the matter, although Arendt refers to both those involved in the pogroms and those involved in exemption sales as "Rumanians," which would imply that they were the same. Even if it was just certain officials who were in support of emigration, they still appear to have changed their mind from initially endorsing the pogroms, and they were largely able to stop the pogroms from happening. Regardless, this situation opens questions regarding where frenzied violence would fit into the previously described categories of evil.

Further examples can provide a more accurate account of this phenomenon. For example, although the Nazi's organized effort to murder Jews was incompatible with the hectic style seen in Romania, Germany had previously experienced similar frenzied behavior. During Hitler's rise to power Nazi rallies were known to be massive and exciting. Strong feelings brought about from the historical context, such as national pride, anger over the Treaty of Versailles, hatred toward Jews etc., combined to leave the German population extremely emotional (The Popularity of the Nazis). Hitler's public speaking skills drove crowds into a frenzy, so that they were obsessively and dogmatically in support of his vision. News articles from the time were particularly alarmed by the energy level of these rallies, such as a New York Times article from 1938 titled:

> "NAZI FRENZY GRIPS HUGE LINZ CROWD; Three Hours of Cheering Keep Throng
>
> Agitated Until Hitler Arrives PLANES DROP LEAFLETS Upper Austrian Leaders Join

Broadcasts– Pledge Their Loyalty to 'One Reich' Crowds Shout Themselves Hoarse

NAZI BANNER AND HITLER'S NEW CABINET MEMBERS IN VIENNA" ("Nazi

Frenzy Grips Huge Linz Crowd").

This excitement does not appear consistent with the dull, thoughtless obedience of those under the banality of evil. While banal evil requires a lack of substantive feelings, the feelings of these crowds were overflowing. However, even though the Nazi frenzy is different from the banality of evil, it was still evil. Unlike the impassioned crowds of, say, a music festival (or at least most music festivals), the impassioned Nazi crowds were a catalyst for injustice and violence.

The Nazis' overflowing emotions resulted in more than frenzied rallies; they also contributed to frenzied riots. The same year as the previously referenced rally took place, the Nazi's energy boiled over, resulting in Kristallnacht. Ernst Vom Rath, a German noble and Nazi member, was assassinated by a Jewish teenager whose family had been deported by Hitler's government. Nazis, already hateful due to rampant antisemitism and Nazi propaganda, snapped and began attacking Jews, their shops, and their synagogues. Another New York Times article from 1938 described the event:

"The News of the Death of Ernst Vom Rath in Paris was the signal for a reign of terror

for the Jewish community in Munich, which began with the wrecking of shops during the

night and continued with incendiarism during the morning and wholesale arrests and

notices of expulsion during the day" ("Jews are Ordered to Leave Munich").

This type of violence is distinct from the banal violence often seen in concentration camps. A riot is, by definition, short-lived. It is an outburst of extreme agitation and violence that goes away as soon as the riot calms down. Although there are many examples of spontaneous, ruthless violence in concentration camps, much of the violence in that context was consistent and

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methodical. While the Nazis' hatred toward Jews was prevalent throughout Hitler's reign, its form seems to have largely shifted from pogrom to concentration camp; frenzied to banal. The antisemitism seen in Romania also seems to have shifted, going from a frenzied sort of evil to the conventional, exploitative form. There is an understanding of the radical evil and banality of evil, as Arendt wrote books on them. Conventional evil has been understood for much longer, since as was mentioned earlier, it is central to the Bible. Although the frenzied violence seen in pogroms is clearly distinct from the conventional, radical, and banal forms, it lacks the same acknowledgement and discussion that they have had.

This paper has shown examples of frenzied violence from Nazi Germany, but discovering its exact nature and the conditions that lead to it requires looking elsewhere. Namely, this paper will examine Euripides' play "The Bacchae," as well as other historical examples from before the Nazi era. "The Bacchae," despite being a fictional play, displays a disturbing aspect of humanity that may be reflective of the real world. Dionysus, the Greek God of such things as wine, festivals, religious ecstasy, and insanity, plans to appear before the city of Thebes as a God and establish a cult of followers. He drives the women of the city mad and leads them into the mountains. Reports from the mountain begin to reach the city of the women behaving strangely, doing things like braiding snakes into their hair and suckling animals. Some herdsmen attempt to capture one of the women, but the women enter a frenzy and attack the men's cattle, ripping them apart with their bare hands. Still in their furious frenzy, they plunder villages and steal resources and children. Pentheus, a man from the city whose mother was among the maddened women, is convinced by Dionysus to go spy on them. Pentheus hides in a tree, but Dionysus then exposes his location to the crazed women, and in their furious frenzy they rip him apart. Pentheus' mother, Agave, then triumphantly brings her son's head back to the city and proudly

presents it to her husband, Pentheus' father. He is horrified, and then Agave's madness begins to wane and she becomes aware of what she has done. She becomes emotionally devastated and regretful of her actions. The play ends on this note, emphasizing the tragedy of the situation (Euripides 161).

The parallels between this story and the pogroms of World War Two are striking. Dionysus drove the women into a frenzy so he could easily steer their destructive power for his own purposes. One could say this is similar to Nazi Germany, with Hitler bringing some Germans into a frenzy so that he could use them to enact his antisemitic, imperialist ends. In both situations the maddened people were full of violent rage, but they were not thinking clearly or measuring their actions carefully (of course, there were Nazis who *were* thinking clearly and who would fall under the umbrella of one of the previously discussed forms of evil, but the analogy to "The Bacchae" applies to those who may have been wrapped up in the Nazi movement under frenzied conditions). In both cases there was a thoughtlessness reminiscent of Arendt's banality of evil, yet in this case the lack of critical thoughts is replaced with furious, chaotic passion and energy.

There are many examples in literature and throughout history of a group of angry, fearful people getting riled up and laying blame upon an innocent population. People in this state seem capable of doing terrible things, even when they would not act so violently under normal conditions. Emile Zola's *Germinal* comes to mind, in which impoverished women from a coal-mining town are so angry over the injustice they suffer that they seize the local shopkeeper (a bourgeoisie), cut off his body parts, and display them on a stick (Zola 370-371). A more in-depth historical example comes from the early persecution of Christians in Pagan Europe. Similarly to the Jews who suffered under Nazis, these Christians were a religious group who were accused of

things that they weren't responsible for. While Christians were also persecuted by Jews,

Muslims, and other Christians at various points in history, such conflicts were the result of

political or ideological differences, and were often deliberate and planned-out. The persecution

of Christians by Pagans, however, was much less organized and much more spontaneous.

Attacks were often sporadic and local, with Christians being "always subject to oppression and at

risk of open persecution" (Bernard 120). Pagans were upset that calamities or natural disasters

would occur at the same time as Christians moved in. They became resentful and hateful and

blamed the Christians for their suffering. Examples include the Great Fire of Rome and the

Antonine Plague. The Great Fire of Rome took place in year 64, and resulted in the majority of

the city burning. The Christians had recently entered the city, and were blamed for the

catastrophe, which resulted in one of the first persecutions against them (Lynch 83). Later,

during the late 100s, the Antonine plague devastated the entire Roman empire. Once again,

Christians were blamed for the pandemic and persecuted for it. There was of course no causal

link, but there was speculation that the Christians were angering the Pagan Gods through their

refusal to make sacrifices to them, thus resulting in punishments brought against the entire

population of Europeans. "At the time, there was a general opinion that, because of the

Christians' disregard for the Roman gods, all kinds of misfortunes and cataclysms occurred …

the plague could be explained by the wrath of the gods upon the Romans due to Christians"

(Lukashenko 49). The persecutions that came after these natural disasters were often quite bad,

with Christians being forced to sacrifice to the gods in order to appease them, or be killed (Lynch

79).

Relating this back to the Holocaust, the situations are strikingly similar. These early

Christians made up a marginalized religious group that was blamed for disasters and hardship

that they weren't responsible for. The Jews of the Nazi era were also a marginalized religious group that was blamed for problems they weren't (and could not have been) responsible for, such as the economic hardship Germany was experiencing. In both cases, this frustration built up until a problem (like the burning of Rome, or the assassination of Ernst Vom Rath) pushed people over the edge and resulted in an explosion of violence. Instigators, like Roman emperors or Nazi officials were more deliberately involved, propagating misinformation and encouraging violence against the persecuted groups. The efforts of these instigators may have resulted in some of the perpetrators becoming furious and impassioned so that they were not thinking clearly or fairly. These conditions eventually could have led them to lose control of themselves, so that rather than thinking critically about the situation, they let their hatred explode.

While not identical, the story told in Euripides' "The Bacchae" and the persecution of early Christians by Pagans bear similarities. Comparing these accounts of frenzied violence to the pogroms of Nazi Germany and Romania reveal a source of violence, or form of evil, that was not previously identified by Arendt. While she acknowledged evil in the conventional sense of the word, and developed a concept of radical evil and later of banal evil, she did not describe a category that accounts for rash, thoughtless, chaotic violence. This paper will define such a category as frenzied evil, identifying several preconditions, characteristics, and potential consequences of it.

To start, frenzied evil occurs mostly in large groups. It may be possible for a mentally "healthy" individual to be driven into a blind rage where they commit thoughtless violence, but it seems like the most frequent, intense occurrences are in large groups. This is similar to the banality of evil, in that a characteristic of banal evil is the excuse that one is just following orders; that they are enmeshed in a larger system they feel exonerates their personal

responsibility by providing a buffer between them and the system's evil ends. Unlike banal evil, however, frenzied evil is impassioned; while banal evil depends on a system to reduce feelings of empathy or responsibility so that its members can do evil without feeling moral repercussions, a group engaging in frenzied evil feeds upon itself, creating a short-circuit of hateful passion. The group forms a gestalt, in which the hatred and energy of the group is greater than the sum of individual hatred and energy. The individual takes in the urgency and fury around them, which emboldens them and leads them to express more urgency and fury. This creates a feedback loop, in which everyone gets increasingly riled up and out of control. Additionally, there is a sense of security, or safety in numbers, which makes the group feel invincible. The actions of the individual are affirmed by the actions of the group; that individuals don't feel like they are doing anything wrong because they have the approval and endorsement of everyone around them. All of these factors can contribute to riots, pogroms, massacres, etc. exploding in severity over disproportionately small triggers. The Jews in Munich had nothing to do with the assassination of Ernst Vom Rath – such a diverse and widespread group cannot act with a united individual agency. Similarly, the early Christians were not responsible for the plague or the fires. However, each group was treated as if they shared a collective agency, which happened in part because the feedback loop of the mob's emotions created a short circuit, or meltdown, in which their hatred and frustration overwhelmed their capacity for thought and reason so that they lost their grip on reality.

Frenzied evil often results from triggers (like the fires or the Ernst Vom Rath assassination), but there may also be a precondition that sets the conditions for an eventual explosion of violence. In the previous examples, this precondition took the form of an underlying social frustration that is often propagated by a demagogue. Most Germans had suffered greatly as

a result of economic hardship, and they may have wanted someone to blame. Similarly, the Roman Pagans had always been skeptical of the Christians and frequently blamed problems like crop failures, sickness, or other forms of misfortune on them. "The Bacchae" is a rare example in which there was no apparent underlying frustration, as the women were driven mad by frenzy-inducing Dionysus, but most real world examples do not depend on the act of a God and are the result of fear, resentment, suffering, or other real-world problems. There can, however, be an instigator that takes advantage of the frustration and contributes to the build up of resentment or the trigger that causes it to boil over. These would be Hitler and the Nazi propagandists for Germany, and Roman emperors who often publicly accused Christians for natural disasters (Nero for the fires, Aurelius for the plague). Even "The Bacchae" had an instigator (Dionysus), although he relied on supernatural powers rather than underlying social frustration. With that exception in mind, these instigators build upon a feeling of injustice, and direct people's resentment toward another group. In feeling injustice, people feel like they have been wronged and thus may even feel they are acting defensively when they lash out, when in reality they are the perpetrators; they imagine they are bringing justice, but in reality they are causing injustice by attacking innocent people.

Of course, if those engaging in frenzied violence thought objectively and clearly about what they were doing, they would quickly realize there was no basis for it. While an instigator (such as Dionysus or Hitler) may seek to fulfill some purpose by encouraging frenzied violence, those who are swept into the frenzy do so without a clear understanding of how or what they will achieve. They may have some vague notion of purpose – Nazis supposedly believed the Jews were an autonomous collective seeking to exploit them – but such reasons are baseless and ridiculous. However, these Nazis were still able to act according to such ridiculous reasons

because another aspect of frenzied evil is a lack of critical thinking. This is yet another similarity to banal evil, which requires thoughtlessness so the perpetrator isn't consciously opposed to the evil at hand. In a frenzied evil situation, the groupthink of the crowd and the overwhelming passions override thought so that people aren't thinking clearly. Rather than rigorously examining the purpose of their actions and what they hope to achieve, they lose their capacity to think and reason, or they suppress such a capacity and allow their rage to direct their actions. This is a distinction from radical evil, which involves a perpetrator who is more thoughtful in their actions. Hitler, for example, published a manifesto (Mein Kampf) largely filled with hatred toward Jews, and then actively engaged in spreading misinformation and propaganda about the Jews to foster widespread antisemitism. Hitler's actions were deliberate, but the majority of Germans were not publishing manifestos or actively trying to cultivate hatred and violence, and yet they were susceptible to the propaganda and anger around them. As their frustration and feelings of victimhood continued to build up, they likely thought less and less critically about the situation, until a trigger enabled their rage to take control of them.

This loss of critical thinking isn't permanent, and as perpetrators of frenzied evil regain control of their senses they might feel regret. Sometimes the remorse is instantly felt, like in "The Bacchae." After the mother rips her son apart and presents his head to her husband, the madness wanes and she regains control of herself. She begins to understand the magnitude of the tragedy and is horrified at what she had done. In the case of Nazi Germany, however, the persecution of Jews under Nazis continued for years after Kristallnacht. There may have been Germans who felt immediate regret after seeing the destruction caused by Kristallnacht, but the fact that Jews were persecuted for many years afterward shows that there was not a wide-spread condemnation of violent bigotry. There was also no documented guilt following the persecution

of Christians in Pagan Rome, but the fact that the entire region converted to Christianity shortly thereafter indicates that there was a widespread change in sentiment. In any case, the violence that comes from frenzied evil is short lived, so be it from fatigue, remorse, or some other factor, it dies down as the furious passions begin to subside. The fact that the violence can die out so quickly suggests that it was not grounded in any kind of reasonable cause, and that those involved may not have been deeply committed to it. In this way, subsequent remorse could be an indicator of frenzied evil having taken place, although it certainly is not a necessary condition. For someone that stays consistent in their hatred, this does not apply; they may very well be deeply committed to their cause, and they may be thoughtfully entrenched in their position. But, once again, I would argue that these individuals do not belong in the category of frenzied evil (or at least this specific behavior does not).

Lastly, an important characteristic of frenzied evil is that something terrible has to occur. People can be driven into a frenzy over myriad things. People may be driven indo a Dionysian frenzy at some festival or other event in which individuals become enmeshed with the passions around them. But if these passions are not those of rage, hate, or frustration, and they do not drive people to commit atrocities, then these scenarios are not evil; the evil comes from violence done against those who have done nothing wrong. Frenzied evil is unjust because a group thoughtlessly and hatefully attacks others for no good reason. Nazis who were otherwise normal yet got caught up in an antisemitic movement and committed atrocities were doing evil because the Jews (as a collective group) were not responsible for whatever assassinations or economic hardship was creating frustration. The distinction between a frenzied mob that has no negative consequences and a frenzied mob that persecutes an innocent group is akin to a generic bureaucracy that does nothing particularly bad versus the banal system of death that Eichmann

worked in. A bureaucracy is banal, but it is not evil until it does evil things. In this way, frenzied and banal evil are distinct from radical and conventional evil. Frenzied and banal evil involve thoughtlessness, which implies that they aren't acknowledging the moral implications of their actions. This makes it easier to ground the "evil" aspect in the result; there are certainly those who thoughtlessly participate in a bureaucracy, yet are not contributing to any horrific ends. Radical and conventional evil, however, suggest an awareness of immorality. As such, it is easier to tie the "evil" aspect to the motive, rather than to the outcome. This is not to say that those involved in banal or frenzied evil are not responsible for their actions, while those involved in the conventional or radical evils are responsible. It is also not to say that some forms of evil are better or worse than others. Discussions involving the degrees of responsibility or badness are complicated and escape the scope of this project, but could provide an intriguing continuation.

In total, frenzied evil occurs under conditions in which there is a group that creates a passionate gestalt, the group has been subject to underlying social frustrations (which is often propagated by a demagogue), their frustration takes ahold of them and they don't think critically, and the consequences of their actions are something terrible and unjust. There also may be instances of regret being felt after violence has occurred. While examples of frenzied evil may differ from each other, they often fall between these parameters. While frenzied evil can overlap with other forms, there are enough differences for it to have its own category. While frenzied and banal evil both depend on thoughtlessness, for example, frenzied evil is wild, chaotic, and passionate, and as was the case in Romania, this made it incompatible with the structured, organized killing system of banal evil. Frenzied evil is also distinct from radical evil, since it is often spontaneous and thoughtless, and does not involve consistent, deliberate rendering of humans as superfluous. Those who engage in frenzied evil may feel like they are acting out of

self defense against those that have been bringing them hardship. They may be taking out their anger on an innocent group, but if they are using an innocent people to blow off steam, or if they believe that their attacks will eliminate their problems, then they are *using the persecuted group to some end*; whether it be to solve a problem or quell their rage, they are not engaged in radical evil because they are not trying to render people as superfluous. This may seem more similar to conventional evil, although the conventional evil also implies an awareness of immorality, while frenzied evil does not. Also, even if frenzied evil is based upon a frustration or suspicion that people are causing them problems, when it is in action it is thoughtless and wild. It is not in the same category as things like adultery and theft, which are more deliberate and do not require group energy. Those involved in frenzied evil use others for a particular end, but simultaneously, they are not deliberate or thoughtful. Frenzied evil occurs under certain conditions, some of which overlap with other forms of evil, but many of which do not.

Conventional Evil	Radical Evil	Banal Evil	Frenzied Evil
- Deliberate - Rational - Uses people for some end	- Deliberate - Irrational - Renders humans superfluous	- Thoughtless - Rational - Unimpassioned - Renders humans superfluous	- Thoughtless - Irrational - Impassioned - Uses people for some end

In many cases, these categories overlap in the same event, or even in the same individual. For example, someone espousing banal evil can rationally pursue some insane end that has been assigned by someone espousing radical evil. Radical evil is the elimination of people for no reason, and perseveres even when it is irrational (the continuation of concentration camps even though they were economically damaging). Eichmann, however, was rational in that he was doing logistical calculations to enable the concentration camps. In this way, rational people can

serve and enact an irrational end. The previously provided examples of frenzied evil all also

involved other forms. Kristallnacht, for example, was in many ways planned and organized by

Nazi officials. While those running through the streets may have been acting according to

frenzied evil, this in part occurred as a result of the propaganda and misinformation provided by

Hitler (radical evil) and the plotting of Eichmann-like figures (banal evil). On an individual level,

someone like Eichmann could get wrapped up in a bureaucracy in which they contribute to evil

ends, and then also get wrapped up in a riot or some similar outburst of violence in which they

lose sense of themselves. Eichmann certainly seemed weak-willed and thoughtless enough to

participate in both scenarios.

Complications and Potential Objections

One critique of this discussion could take the form of questioning the very concept of evil. One may find the concept of evil to lack substance and distract from the root causes of issues by blanketing them with a vague and absolute term. For example, John Dewey, a pragmatist, preferred to analyze the world not in terms of good or evil, but in terms of what works and doesn't work.

> "I have indeed attempted analysis, rather than either a condemnation of evils of present society or a recommendation of fixed ends and ideals for their cure. For I think that serious minds are pretty well agreed as to both evils and ideals – as long as both are taken in general terms. Condemnation is too often only a way of displaying superiority; it speaks from outside the scene; it discloses symptoms but not causes. It is impotent to produce; it can only reproduce its own kind." (Dewey 147).

Essentially, reducing complex phenomena as good or evil puts an end to any meaningful examination of their cause. Simply condemning something as evil, for example, does nothing to address the root cause of said evil, and is thus unproductive toward preventing it from happening again. As a result, discussions of good and evil are not serious discussions; they are juvenile and simplistic, and fail to enact meaningful change. A better option would be to treat evil like a disease; something which has symptoms and causes and can be diagnosed. This perspective enables investigation and education, and could more effectively reduce the amount of tragedy in the world.

A response to this concern could be that breaking evil down into categories is, despite still using the term "evil," a productive form of analysis similar to what Dewey was advocating for. Arendt, for example, compared evil to a fungus that thoughtlessly spreads and obliterates.

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Evil as a fungus seems similar to evil as a disease. Indeed, Arendt did examine the conditions which led to Eichmann participating in the Holocaust, rather than simply condemning him as evil. This paper attempts to build upon Arendt's work by digging into the true essence of evil and categorizing it into different subtypes. Rather than simply labeling the Nazis as evil and unproductively condemning them, this paper attempts to examine the underlying conditions that led to the various forms of violence committed by them. This paper may still use the term "evil," but its project is different from the condemnation Dewy spoke of. Interestingly, Arendt, who previously had examined the essence of evil and who was the inspiration for this project, was largely criticized for her work. After World War Two, many Israelis obviously condemned the Nazis as evil. It's possible that the horrors they experienced were so extreme that it was impossible for them to rationalize. What Dewey would consider as reducing the complexity of the situation to a vague notion of evil may have been the only way some Israelis could comprehend it. When Arendt studied the exact nature of this evil and defined it in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, many Israeli scholars criticized her. Many of them thought that the Nazis needed to be condemned as indescribable monsters, and that rationalizing and analyzing Nazi evil was inappropriate. "For the very phrase 'banality of evil' was offensive. It seemed to trivialize not only what Eichmann had done, but the full horror of the Holocaust" (Bernstein 138). It seems like Arendt's analysis was viewed as contrary to the narrative that Nazis should be reduced to evil monsters and that the factors which led to their involvement should not be examined. In dissecting the story of Eichmann and trying to determine what drove him to participate in genocide, Arendt was accused of making excuses for his behavior when she should be holding him accountable. However, Arendt simply did not do this. "It was claimed that Arendt had 'exonerated' Eichmann but 'condemned' the Jews. She had done nothing of the sort … She

supported the death sentence as meted out by the court but would have preferred a differently

formulated verdict" (Elon ix). Essentially, Arendt agreed that Eichmann should be held

responsible, and she agreed that he was evil. But she wanted to describe what exactly was meant

by "evil," which led to her investigation of Eichmann's story and her formulation of the 'banality

of evil.' Arendt was not simply condemning Nazis and attempting to display moral superiority

over them, but rather she was attempting analysis similarly to how Dewey suggested.

The backlash Arendt drew came from those that didn't want to investigate the matter

further; those who Dewey would accuse of preventing analysis by assigning a vague and over-

simplified notion of evil. To them, examining the conditions that led to Eichmann's behavior

made it seem as if there were other factors, beyond Eichmann's "badness," at play.

Acknowledging such other factors would suggest that it wasn't entirely Eichmann's *fault,*

because it wasn't entirely his own doing. This opens up questions regarding responsibility and

culpability. As was stated earlier, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper – this paper

is focused on describing the qualitative differences between categories of evil, not on assigning a

hierarchy of "goodness" or "badness," and it does not suggest that said categories result in

differing levels of responsibility. However, it is worth acknowledging these questions and the

future discussions they can bring. Arendt did discuss her position on responsibility, at least

briefly. For her, Eichmann was guilty and his execution was appropriate. The fact that he was

acting according to the banality of evil rather than radical or conventional evil did not make him

any less responsible. She concluded *Eichmann in Jerusalem* with her version of a verdict, which

states:

> "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 … we find that no one … can be expected to want to share the Earth with

you." (Arendt, Eichmann 279).

Arendt thought it was irrelevant to argue over whether or not Eichmann actually hated Jews. His

thoughtlessness did not absolve him of responsibility or allow for a reduced punishment. I would

imagine her opinion of those who thoughtlessly engaged in Kristallnacht would be the same.

Concluding Thoughts

This project, in examining the conditions and consequences that led to various forms of evil in Nazi Germany, could also be helpful in understanding modern issues. The most recent discussion of Dewey shows why it is important to delve deeper into the term "evil," to understand its components, as well as the different forms it can take. Understanding the Nazi phenomenon requires understanding the many factors that brought it about. Analyzing the conditions that brought about evil in Nazi Germany will hopefully enable preventing the same conditions from occuring again.

Unfortunately, frenzied evil has been seen in recent times, albeit in less severe forms. During the infamous Jan. 6 riots, a mob, furious over the recent U.S Presidential Election, stormed the capitol. Analyzing this event shows concerning similarities to riots during the Nazi era. Donald Trump has widely been considered to invoke fear for political support and blame immigrants for much of the crime and problems the United States currently faces. After losing the election, he claimed it was rigged, and many claimed to believe him. Despite no evidence the election was actually rigged, an angry mob invaded the capitol, vandalizing it and beating a police officer to death (Healy). Clearly, there were markings of frenzied evil. People who were fearful and frustrated got caught up in a passionate group setting, did not think critically or acknowledge that there was no evidence in support of their cause, and then acted violently and did great harm.

Perhaps the most striking connection to frenzied evil, however, was the regret many of the rioters felt afterwards. Journalist Michael Kunzelman documented this phenomenon in his article for the Associated Press, titled "Capital Rioter's Tears, Remorse Do Not Spare Them From Jail." While Donald Trump has indignantly and unapologetically faced down the

accusations brought against him, his supporters from the Capitol Riots appear far less committed.

They also seem to have reacted differently from Eichmann, who rejected the notion that he was

legally responsible."Robert Palmer cheered on the violence at the U.S Capitol on Jan. 6 before he

joined the fray. Screaming obscenities, he hurled a wooden plank and a fire extinguisher at

police officers trying to ward off the mob. Nearly a year later, Palmer fought back tears when he

faced the federal judge who sentenced him to more than five years in prison. He said he was

'horrified, absolutely devastated,' at what he had done" (Kunzelman). While the disappointment

of facing years in prison almost certainly contributed to his tears, the fact remains that Palmer

was not morally committed enough to consistently maintain his position in the face of the

consequences. This would imply there was not a significant grounding for his cause – at least not

significant enough to be worth the punishment. The zeal and excitement he expressed during the

riots appear to have completely faded, and reality has set in, similarly to how reality set in for the

mother of Pentheus in Euripides' "The Bacchae." Many other rioters expressed similar

sentiments, such as Michael Daughtry, who said before court "I made one mistake in my life and

I have immediately taken responsibility for it … I apologize to the court for my indiscretion. But

does a person not get to make at least one mistake in their entire life?" (Mallin). While there are

surely those who have stoutly remained in support of their conspiracy theories, and who even in

the wake of the attack remain deliberately and thoughtfully committed to their position, the fact

remains that many did not. Many got swept away by the excitement and energy of their

movement's hateful and fearful rhetoric, and without allowing clear thinking to inform their

actions, acted violently without acknowledging the consequences.

     These events happened four years ago, but there is another election around the corner that

involves the exact two candidates who ran against each other before Jan 6. The conditions that

gave rise to past violence are being recreated. While this project is important for understanding history with greater subtlety, it is even more important in a modern context. Frustration and unrest seem to be the norm in America, affecting more than just those in support of Trump. For those who are not frustrated, the alternative seems to be apathy – a dangerous situation that could allow frustration to explode unchecked.

If the source of a violent act is mislabelled, then attempts at repairing it or preventing it from happening again will be less effective because they could be missing the actual cause. Diagnosing the source of evil accurately is key in knowing how to treat it. For example, understanding the banality of evil shows that complex systems can estrange individuals from the system's end, potentially leading "normal" people to engage in evil behavior. This in turn can inform how systems are constructed; they can be made to inform individuals of the significance of their work rather than treating them like cogs in a machine. Similarly, analyzing frenzied evil shows the conditions that make it possible – underlying frustration, group energy, a demagogue, etc. so that they are more identifiable. Hopefully, this will help in healing such patterns before they develop into something devastating.

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