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THE SHALLOW WATERS OF EVIL – ARENDT AND KANT[ab]

Abstract: In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) Hannah Arendt will introduce a concept of *radical evil* as an historical appearance of something "we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand, a phenomenon that confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know". Arendt will not insist on her initial conception of radical evil and in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem a Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), the radical evil will be replaced by the *banality of evil*. According to this last view "evil is a surface phenomenon, and instead of being radical, it is merely extreme", is "thought defying," and that is its "banality." Only the good has depth and can be radical. Arendt contrasts this banality with her own former conception of radical evil as also with Kant's conception of radical evil (the latter wrongly in our opinion). In this paper, we will try to show the conceptual closeness between the *banality of evil* in Arendt and *radical evil* in Kant, as well as the radicality of good in Arendt as equal to the acquisition of good character in Kant's *Religion*. Henry Allison claims that "Kant, by 'radical evil', does not mean a particular, especially perverse, form of evil but rather the root or ground of the very possibility of all moral evil." In Kant, radical evil is deflationed from political and religious empirical elements. The term seems to be an olive branch which Kant offers to the church and the doctrine of original sin which he deconstructs in *Religion* as meaningless *in time* while he accepts its limited value *in reason* (morally). Evil for Kant is something that simply exists in the *radix* of our choices, as a propensity, the same as good does. Kantian *radical* evil acquires the *banal* aspect of evil character.

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For Kant, Eichmann has an evil heart the same way a thief has it. That's why it is the Arendtian banality of evil that comes closer to Kantian radical evil. On the other hand, good heart for Kant demands our struggle to acquire it. That's why the radicality of good in Arendt seems to be on a par with the acquisition of good heart in Kant.
Keywords: evil, good, radical, banality, Kant, Arendt, Zionism, Practical Reason, in time, in reason, humanity, animality, personality

INTRODUCTION

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) Hannah Arendt will initially introduce a concept of radical evil which is formulated by the historical facts of the unprecedented and abominable crimes, committed by the Nazi totalitarian regime against the Jewish people. While analyzing the peculiar state of the concentration camps as "death factories" and the iconic appearance of evil in 20th century history, she will observe:

> "And if it is true that in the final stages of totalitarianism an absolute evil appears (absolute because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives), it is also true that without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil."[2]

This conception of "radical evil", according to Arendt has not been possible in our entire philosophical tradition as also in for Christian theology "which conceded even to the Devil himself a celestial origin". Kant, seems to have "suspected the existence of this evil even" as he coined it, but Arendt believes that he finally rationalized it as a "perverted ill will" that could be rationalized.[3] Evil as radical in this period of her thought, is not conceivable, not understandable, "a phenomenon that nevertheless confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know". This conception of evil consists in an historical appearance (in time) of something "we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand".[4] It is a historical event and not the appearance of a moral quality of human beings, something that happened once and maybe cannot happen again. Shoah is the "revelation" of supernatural evil which cannot be rationalized in terms and

2 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (San Diego, New York, London: A Harvest Book Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), Preface to the first edition p. ix.
3 *Ibid*., p. 459.
4 Ibid.

limits of till then known human savagery. Her conception flirts dangerously with an aesthetic understanding of evil as a "dark –satanic greatness", as the grounding element of a "cult of evil" established by the totalitarian regime.[5]

Arendt will not insist on her initial conception of radical evil in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, as her philosophical stance towards evil changes. On the contrary, in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963), which was written while she was attending Eichman's trial in Jerusalem as a special status reporter, one can perceive the radical change already from the title. The radical evil became banal. This provocative to many language concerning evil during the Shoah, will condemn her to the repudiation of Jewish leadership and the disruption of her ties with her Zionist friends. The evil in Holocaust is no more radical but banal (shallow). What will follow is the famous "Eichman scandal" which we do not intent to describe here in its many nuances, as our focus in this paper will be on the philosophical implications of the terms: *radical* and *banal*. We will examine their formulation and transformation in Arendt's work, their connection with Kant's "radical evil" and the possibility to attribute a sense of "banality of evil" to Kantian conception of radical evil too.[6]

5 Karl Jaspers in his 1946 letter to Arendt, commenting on her notion of evil, 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. I regard any hint of myth and legend with horror." (Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish Question* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), p. 148.-emphasis added-)
In her December 17, 1946, responding letter to Jaspers she writes: "I found what you say about my thoughts on 'beyond crime and innocence' in what the Nazis did, half convincing; that is, I realize completely that in the way I've expressed this up to now I come *dangerously close to that 'satanic greatness*' that I, like you, totally reject."(Bernstein, *op. cit*., 148-149, emphasis added) One can identify here the root of the banality of evil in Arendt's thought, as an impact of Jasper's comment on her initial approach of evil.

6 Hannah Arendt was a highly eclectic thinker who embraced ideas from the traditions of liberalism and republicanism. Her stance towards naturalness or metaphysical grounding of moral concepts as human rights is repudiating. She will accept one universal and inalienable right, 'the right to have rights,' i.e. the right to belong to political community. (Ioannes Chountis, "Reconsidering Burke's and Arendt's Theories on

ARENDT: FROM THE RADICALITY TO THE BANALITY OF EVIL

During the time she was writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt had already published the article "Zionism Reconsidered"[7] as a first sign of her future critical stance towards her Zionist friends. Nevertheless, her conception of the Shoah, in the *Origins* as supernatural- radical evil, is on a par with the notion of "[…] *singularity* [which] signifies *incomparability*, which is also designated by *uniqueness*" (emphasis added) of the Holocaust, as Paul Ricoeur puts it in *Memory, History, Forgetting.*[8] This conception of the uniqueness of the Holocaust was adopted by the Zionists, but was widely rejected by other historians like Dirk Moses, who consider it to be an idealization of victim's identity, a quasi-religious transformation of it. This conception of the sacred nature of the trauma, is analyzed in Durkheim's theory according to which the sacred "is constituted by a shared sense of the basic division of the world into two domains, the sacred and the profane […] the sacred is special, and the profane is not. Without a shared sense of the sacred, group identity would dissolve."[9] Moses discards the incomparability of the Shoah and suggests instead "the mutual recognition [which] can aid […] in stimulating the critical reflection needed to rethink the relationship between the Holocaust and the indigenous genocides that preceded it".[10] He concludes that the "mutual recognition of common suffering is a powerful moral source for the solidarity needed to prevent future victims of progress".[11] So, such views put the Holocaust *inside the history* and compare it with other genocides, rationalizing it, the way radical evil in Kant does as

'The Rights of Man': A Surprising Plot Twist?" *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy*, *6*(1), (2021): 19–32. https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.25171

7 Hannah Arendt, "Zionism reconsidered" in *The Jewish Writings*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2007).

8 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* Translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 330.

9 Dirk Moses, "Conceptual blockages and definitional dilemmas in the 'racial century': genocides of indigenous peoples and the Holocaust," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 36:4(2002): 11. DOI: 10.1080/003132202128811538 p.11

10 *Ibid*., p. 10.

11 *Ibid*., p. 36.

we will analyze in the progress of this paper.[12] On the other side, views of singularity, incomparability, and uniqueness of the Shoah, as lying "outside, if not beyond, history" (Elie Wiesel)[13], render it sacred, and appeal to a conception of the radical evil as Arendt initially formulated it. This initial conception was very popular in Arendt's Zionistic audience so the change from radicality to banality socked them.[14] The shift of her conception of evil is partly explained by the influence of Karl Jaspers 1946 letter about the "banality" and "prosaic triviality" of Nazi crimes,[15] but it must have of course undergone an elaboration in her thought during the years. So, in her 1963 responding letter to Gershom Sholem's criticism, she admits: "You are quite right: I changed my mind and do 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 any demonic dimension."[16]

Next, we will examine on the reasons why this change of Arendt's stance towards evil in Shoah erased such outrageous reaction of Jewish leadership and not only. In tracing the root of her thought on evil, her correspondence with Samuel Grafton, in "Answers to Questions Submitted by Samuel Grafton" appears to be very important.[17] In that letter first, she answers a question she thinks he ought have asked her: "Why did I, a writer and teacher of political philosophy who had never done a reporter's job, want to go to Jerusalem for the Eichmann trial?"[18] To that question posed by herself, she responds by giving three reasons: First,

12 For the Holocaust's grounding on preexisting eugenic theories and practices see: D. Chousou, Theodoridou, D., Boutlas, G., Batistatou, A., Yapijakis, C., & Syrrou, M., "Eugenics between Darwin's Era and the Holocaust," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy*, *4*(2), (2019): 171–204. https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.21061

13 *Ibid*., p.12

14 Gershom Scholem in his letter to Arendt from 23 June 1963, accuses her that from her initial conception that "of that 'radical evil,' to which your then analysis bore such eloquent and erudite witness, nothing remains but this slogan — to be more than that, it would have to be investigated, at a serious level, as a relevant concept in moral philosophy or political ethics. (Bernstein, *op.cit*., p.138.)

15 Bernstein, *op.cit*., p.148.

16 Arendt, "A Letter to Gershom Scholem," 470-471.

17 Hannah Arendt, "Answers to Questions Submitted by Samuel Grafton," in *The Jewish Writings*, ed. by Jerome Kahn and Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 472-484.

18 This was the first time she had been given an assignment (by *The New Yorker*) to cover a specific event. (*ibid*., 477, editor's note.)

she "wanted to see one of the chief culprits", one of the criminal leaders with her own eyes as he appeared in flesh. Second, and most important, as a philosopher she was interested in the impact of this kind of crimes in political philosophy and she aimed to examine in juridical context

> "the uncertainties of 'political justice,' with the difficulties of judging crimes committed by a sovereign state, or with the 'difficult position' of a soldier who may be 'liable to be shot by a court-martial if he disobeys an order, and to be hanged by a judge and jury if he obeys it' (Dicey, *Law of the Constitution*)[19]. There is finally the legally most important question: To what an extent did the accused know he was doing wrong when he committed his acts? This question, as you may know, has played a decisive role in many trials of war criminals in Germany."

Third, her philosophical thinking for above thirty years on the nature of evil.[20]

It seems that this casuistic empirical study of "the Eichmann case", while she was watching the trial in Jerusalem, concluded an almost thirty years philosophical struggle in her final conception of the nature of evil, by which she aimed to contribute to the formulation of political justice in International Law, with a more precise definition of possible crimes (past and future) that could be on a par with Shoah, where Eichmann had a leading role.[21] The term "banality" which was the bone of contention in the scandal following the book, was only referred in the title and in the last page of the text. The latter appears where Arendt describes his last moments as being "elated" while he declared he was *Gottglaubiger,* according to the Nazi fashion to confirm they were no

19 She is referring to: V. Dicey and Hon. D. C. L. *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (London, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Melbourne: Macmillan &Co, 1915-one of the many publications from the first edition 1885).

20 *Ibid*., 474-475.

21 At the time, the International Law would classify Shoah in the kind of crimes termed "crimes against humanity" as it was coined by the preparatory meeting of the victorious powers – the United States, Britain, Russia and France, in London, especially for this case. In late August 1945 the Charter of the MIT was drafted, agreed and signed, and "it specified four crimes for which Nazi leaders would be tried: conspiracy to carry out aggressive war, the launching of aggression, killing and destroying beyond the justification of military necessity, and 'crimes against humanity'". (A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities – The History and Moral Legacy of the WWII – Bombing of Civilians in Germany and Japan* (London, Berlin, New York Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014), 230).

Christians and did not believe in life after death. "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."[22] In the Postscript of the book, referring on the "controversy arisen over the subtitle of the book" she admits speaking of the banality of evil on the strictly factual level. "Eichmann was not Iago and not Macbeth […] he never realized what he was doing […] It was sheer thoughtlessness-something by no means identical with stupidity-that predisposed to become one of the greatest criminals of that period."[23] It was that image, of the killer- next door, the bureaucrat that from torturing the lower class employees in his office, he passes without any thought to exterminating Jews in gas chambers just because everybody was doing so, the little man without any critical ability who goes with the flow of the times, the image that made Arendt's Zionist friends so angry with her. Shoah's evil was not any more singular or incomparable and committed only once in history. Banal evil could easily appear again, it was a snake that could be borne by snake's eggs incubated in every domestic yard, just waiting for the proper temperature to warm them, it could be repeated by the victims of Nazi atrocities, they were not the only victims and so they were suddenly deprived of their forever innocence.

The term 'banality' is referred and defended more clearly, at the period of the Eichmann scandal in two texts. In "Answers to Questions" – questions put to her by Samuel Grafton – and in the last paragraphs of her "Letter to Scholem".

In the former, after making it clear that by banality she didn't want to mean commonplace because "something can be banal even if it is

One can perceive the effort of the legal system to legislate the radical evil as 'crimes against humanity', i.e. rationalizing it by ascribing certain characteristics: crimes that can happen in one country against a group of people under a plotted extermination policy even in time of peace and usually turned against non-combatants or *in-noscent* persons. This was a new category of crimes in the International Law and did not coincide with war crimes as its target was the Holocaust.

22 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 252.

23 *Ibid*., 287-288.

not common", she will contrast banality with Kant's "radical evil"[24] and the more popular "widely held opinion that there is something demonic, grandiose, in great evil, that there is even such a thing as the power of evil to bring forth something good".[25] In "Answers" she delivers a definition of evil as surface phenomenon:

> "[…] evil is not radical, going to the roots (radix), that it has no depth, and that for this very reason it is so terribly difficult to think about, since thinking, by definition, *wants to reach the roots*. Evil is a surface phenomenon, and instead of being radical, it is merely *extreme*. We resist evil by not being swept away by the surface of things, by stopping ourselves and beginning to think-that is, by reaching another dimension than the horizon of everyday life. In other words, the more superficial someone is, the more likely he will be to yield to evil.[26]" (emphasis added)

In the "Letter to Scholem" she will adopt another definition, interesting enough. After the novelty of "banality of evil",[27] here she coined still another seemingly controversial term, the "radical good", which as critical thought reaches to the roots.

> "It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never 'radical,' that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any 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,

24 Arendt, "Answers to Questions," p. 479. Here Arendt contrasts banality with her own former conception of radical evil from the *Origins* as also with Kant's conception of radical evil, although the two conceptions differ. In the last part of this paper, we will show that it is her banality of evil that comes closer to Kantian radical evil.

25 At that point, she refers to European Zionism "who has often thought and said that the evil of antisemitism was necessary for the good of the Jewish people" (*Ibid*), putting so even Holocaust between the historical expressions of evil antisemitism that could be "for the good of the Jewish people". In "Zionism Reconsidered" she focuses on Zionist "absurd doctrine" containing the "truth" that the enemies (antisemites) are friends (contributing to the "final cause" of Jewish Diaspora). "These Zionists concluded that without antisemitism the Jewish people would not have survived in the countries of the Diaspora; and hence they were opposed to any attempt to liquidate antisemitism on a large scale. On the contrary, they declared that our foes, the antisemites, "will be our most reliable friends, the antisemitic countries our allies" (Herzl)." (Arendt, "Zionism reconsidered," p.359.)

26 Arendt, "Answers to Questions," p. 479.

27 Scholem characterizes the term 'banality' as "a catchword [...] a discovery, that evil is banal". (Bernstein, *op. cit*., p.138.)

> because thought tries to reach some depth, *to go to the roots*,[28] and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its 'banality.' *Only the good has depth and can be radical*.[29]" (emphasis added)

In conclusion, Arendt's conception of radical evil has undergone a conceptual shift or even turn in the texts we presented above, that represents the evolution of her thought on evil during the decades between the *Origins* and *Eichmann*. In the former, one can find (if I'm exact) 45 references of the word radical, but only three of them are used as adjective to evil. In all the other cases e.g. radical intellectuals, radical antisemitism, radical change of social conditions, radical press, radical wings of Parliament, radical means of pacification etc. it is connected to political or ideological in general radicalism of any kind, meaning something that operates a violent change or reformation of existing situation usually with sentimental speech without reasonable foundation. In this context, radical evil is also meant as a violent change of human condition, a massacre without anything to think about, a demonic appearance of "*something* be involved in modem politics that actually should never be involved in politics as we used to understand it".[30] We could say that Arendt in *The Origins*, uses a political, empirical, notion of radical evil, impossible to grasp by critical though, a kind of extremism. In the latter, in *Eichmann*, her conception comes closer to Kant, as critical thought wants to examine it, but "thinking, by defini-

28 For Kant, it is not the critical thought that "tries to go to the roots" as Arendt insists in this letter as also in the previous passage from the "Answers". In *Religion* Kant declares: "there is in the human being a natural propensity to evil […] This evil is radical, because it corrupts the basis of all maxims. [It exists in the roots of choice between incentives of one's maxims.] But it must nonetheless be possible to outweigh this propensity, because it is found in the human being as a freely acting being." (RL 37)

29 Arendt, "A Letter to Gershom Scholem," p.471.

30 "It is the appearance of some radical evil, previously unknown to us, that puts an end to the notion of developments and transformations of qualities. Here, there are neither political nor historical nor simply moral standards but, at the most, the realization that *something seems to be involved in modem politics* that actually should never be involved in politics as we used to understand it, namely all or nothing-all, and that is an undetermined infinity of forms of human living-together, or nothing, for a victory of the concentration-camp system would mean the same inexorable doom for human beings as the use of the hydrogen bomb would mean the doom of the human race." (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 443.) (emphasis added)

tion, wants to reach the roots [and] evil is a surface phenomenon".[31] It's not "satanic greatness" but thoughtlessness what characterizes it. "Eichmann was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period."[32] In that second period of her conception of evil as banal, she parallels her initial conception of evil as radical, with that of Kant. This cannot stand though, because Kant's radical evil does not *want* to reach to the roots, it *exists* in the roots of intention as a personal free choice of one's evil incentive to form her maxims, although she could have chosen differently. It is not something empirical or political which is imposed on people by a demonic power, it is not "in time" (history) but "in reason" (free choice) (RL40).[33] It is a propensity which "must consist in unlawful maxims of the power of choice" (RL32) radical (at the radix) of free choice, easiest chosen than the good, but it is always a personal free choice a moral factor, not something imposed by historical necessity.

What is very interesting though, in Arendt's late conception of evil, is her contrast of banal evil with radical good which is a moral predisposition delivered by critical thought. She won't say much more on it,

31 Arendt, "Answers to Questions," p. 479.

32 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 288.

33 The doctrine of original sin and the Fall in the Scripture is "in time" for Kant. Palmquist commends on that: "To find the 'origin' or 'first cause' of a given effect (e.g., evil) [Kant argues] we can look either for the 'rational origin' of its existence or for the 'temporal origin' of its occurrence. But a temporal origin of a free choice would be 'a contradiction'" (RL, from the Introduction by Stephen R. Palmquist, p. XXVII). Kant considers free choice of sin to be "in reason" rendering the agent responsible for his maxims. "An origin can be taken into consideration either as *rational origin* [in reason] or as temporal origin [in time] […] When the effect is referred to a cause that is still linked with it according to laws of freedom, as is the case with moral evil, then the determination of the power of choice to the effect's production is thought as linked with its determining basis not in time but merely in the presentation of reason, and then it cannot be derived from some preceding state." (RL39)
Palmquist notices that Kant does not expose his personal religious beliefs in *Religion* because it is, a work of philosophical theology, not biblical theology: "The First Piece (especially Section IV) thus assesses the rational stability of the Christian doctrine of original sin: its typical historical-hereditary interpretation [in time] is 'inappropriate'; but if understood as referring to the rational origin of all evil [in reason], it is a perfectly acceptable account of the practical (moral) problem that cries out for a religious solution (i.e., the problem of the evil propensity in human nature)."(RL, from the Introduction by Stephen R. Palmquist, p. xlviii.)

though it is a far more interesting idea than the radical evil, and here is the meeting point with Kant who believes that in the *radix* of human choice, against common beliefs about radical evil, there is always a choice between the latter and the good.

KANT'S THEORY OF RADICAL EVIL

Radical evil in Kantian philosophy is a controversial concept which has provoked several and at times controversial interpretations. In Kant's mature writings "the only objects of a practical reason are therefore those of the good and the evil" (CPrR, 58). Kant will ascribe "ambiguities in practical laws" to the schools and their use of the terms *boni* and *mali* containing "an ambiguity owing to the poverty of the language", which leads to a double sense (CPrR, 59). But we are lucky to appeal to the German language that possess expressions "which do not allow this difference to be overlooked". For the Latin *bonum* (single word), there are two very different concepts and expressions: *das Gute* and *das Wohl*, for malum *das Böse* and *das Übel* (or *Weh*) (CPrR, 59-60). *Wohl* as *bonum* and *Übel* as *malum* on one side relate to pleasure or displeasure, or well-being and woe (ill-being) and so connected with sensitivity. *Gut* as *bonum* and *Böse* as *malum* on the other side, are connected "to the will insofar as it is determined by the law of reason to make something its object", to the incentive of action and good or evil maxim. In other words, the latter belong to the domain of morality while the former to that of sensitivity (CPrR, 60). In the same text Kant declares that the principle of happiness (appraisal of what is good and evil with reference to well-being or ill-being) is clearly distinguished from the principle of morality (appraisal of what is good and evil in itself) (CPrR, 62). In evaluating good and evil he makes the following remarks as of special importance. Either the determining ground of the will is a pure lawful form of the maxim, and that principle is a *practical law* a priori and pure reason is taken to be practical of itself. Or the determining ground of the faculty of desire precedes the maxim of the will, and the maxim determines actions which are good with reference to our inclination and hence good only mediately. The latter can never be called laws but *rational practical precepts*. The end here is good according to our sensitivity (*Wohl*) and not according to reason (*Gut*) (CPrR, 62). In this text, Kant is focusing on the different notions

of good mainly, but we can extract the correlative notions of evil as their opposites. In that way we could perceive between an empirical evil (*Übel* or *Weh*) and an evil in itself (*Böse*). The latter would be an evil maxim of an evil person, the former an evil object of desire of one person who cannot resist his desires. One could perceive here a dialectic between *reason* and *psychological forces*. Arendt's radical evil as it was exposed above, seems to be an extreme form of an empirical evil, an appearance of transcendent demonic powers, an historical fact not conceivable by reason (kind of *Übel* or *Weh*), while Kant's radical evil – as we will examine its evolution in *Religion* – is immanent and stays in the domain of human decision and reason, an evil in itself (*Böse*), so the agency of such evil can always be rendered responsible for his actions.

In *Religion,* from the title of 'Fist Piece": "On the Inherence of the Evil alongside the Good Principle, or, On the Radical Evil in Human Nature", Kant's intention is obvious. What is true according to Kant, is "the inherence of the evil to the good" and that is what he is going to prove. The "or" before the "radical evil in human nature" signals what is commonly believed and that is what is going to be deconstructed next, as a belief of «the religion of the priests»[34] about radical evil (the hyper title of this piece is 'Philosophical doctrine of religion') (RL, 19). Common perception of human nature "is a lament as ancient as history". With an ironic style Kant will wander around beliefs on human nature, from ancient times till his days. First, the belief of "Golden Age, from life in Paradise […] [and then] the decline into evil (moral evil, with which physical evil has always gone hand in hand)" (RL, 19). Then, "the opposite, heroic opinion, which – I suppose – has found its place solely among philosophers and, in our times, above all among pedagogues: that the world advances incessantly (though scarcely noticeably) in precisely the reverse direction, namely from the bad to the better" (RL, 19-20).[35] The latter seems to Kant historically ungrounded and the former superstitious. He will except the Aristotelian middle way by wondering if it is "not at least possible, namely that the human

34 The narrative of the Fall in the Scripture.

35 He refers to Rousseau (among other pedagogues), whose conception of freedom as self legislation had a major impact on Kant's moral philosophy. (see Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe, Two essays*, Translated by James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1970).

being, in his genus, may be neither good nor evil, or perhaps the one as well as the other, partly good, partly evil" and concluding "In order to call a human being evil, therefore, one would have to be able to infer a priori from a few consciously evil actions, indeed from a single one, an evil maxim lying at their basis, and from it again a basis, itself in turn a maxim and lying in the subject universally, of all particular morally evil maxims." (RL, 20) Here the conflict between nature and actions that come out of human freedom becomes obvious, so all we can say by the term "human nature" we mean "only the subjective basis of the use of his freedom […] This subjective basis itself, however, must always in turn be an of freedom (for otherwise […] the good or evil in him could not be called moral). Hence the basis of evil cannot lie in any object determining the power of choice through inclination, not in any natural impulse, but can lie only in a rule of that the power of choice itself-for the use of its freedom-makes for itself, i.e., in a maxim." (RL, 20-21) Thereby, the ground in the *radix* of evil cannot be an object of deliberation but only a maxim that the will delivers for the use of its freedom, which can never be middle, only good of evil.[36] There is not any empirical object of evil, an appearance of transcendent demonic powers, *intime* (*Übel* or *Weh*), only a maxim of decision *in reason*, an evil in itself (*Böse*).[37]

The common belief about human nature which "is a lament as ancient as history" (RL, 19) will be clarified with Kant's theory on the roots of human predisposition to the good (and as vices to the evil) according to which theory there are "three classes [of disposition] as elements of the determination of the human being". Those three classes are: 1. the predisposition to the animality of the human as a living be-

36 Henry Allison declares that Kant's ethical "rigorism," is obvious here. Kant contrasts his rigorism with "latitudinarianism." "By the former, he understands the position that holds that with respect to both morally relevant actions and character, there *is no moral middle ground*, that is, every action to which moral categories are applicable at all and every moral agent must be characterizable as either good or evil. (Henry Allison, *Kant's theory of freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 147.

37 For a thorough analysis of the importance of Kant's account of public use of reason and the constitutive role of rational judgment and justification as a means to rationalize evil (in reason) and prevent its appearance in social life (in time) see: Kenneth R. Westphal, "Autonomy, Enlightenment, Justice, Peace – and the Precarities of Reasoning Publically," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy*, 8(2), (2023): 725–758. https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.35297

ing, 2. to the humanity of him as a living and at the same time rational being, 3. to his personality as that of a being who is rational and at the same time capable of imputation [of actions to him]. (RL, 26) We can perceive here a novelty from evil's exposition in CPrR. The two predispositions to the good and to the evil, the first empirical *Wohl* and *Übel* (or *Weh*) the second in reason *Gut* and *Böse* has seemingly become three with the addition of predisposition to the humanity a mediating predisposition between animality (empirical) and personality (in reason, moral) that probably is the only possible middle way here. However, in the analysis of the three predispositions that follows "the first [animality] is rooted in no reason; the second [humanity] indeed in practical reason, but only as subservient to other incentives; but the third alone [personality] in reason practical on its own, i.e., legislative unconditionally». (RL, 28) Finally, we conclude again in a dualism of evil and good, as the first two predispositions even if they aim at a good object they are possibly evil, so they have both good and evil possible incentives, while the third predisposition as "the receptivity to respect for the moral law, as an incentive, sufficient by itself, of the power of choice" (RL, 27) is a pure moral predisposition grounded on the good character which must be grounded on our nature "on which absolutely nothing evil can be grafted" (RL, 27-28), the Kantian equivalent of Arendt's radical good (no Aristotelian middle way at last).

The evil—good dualism in human will, concerning the practical judgement, appears to exist between evil incentives according to animality (living being) and humanity (living and at the same time rational being) on one side and the personality as "the idea of the moral law alone, [which] is personality itself (the idea of humanity considered entirely intellectually) (RL, 28) on the other. Here, "arises a natural dialectic, that is, a propensity to ratiocinate against those strict laws of duty and to bring into doubt their validity, or at least their purity and strictness" and thus the "*common human reason* is impelled […] to take a step into the field of practical philosophy […] [to] escape from its embarrassment concerning the claims of both sides and not run the risk of being deprived […] of all genuine ethical principles". (GMM, 405) So the choice of good demands the struggle of practical reason and not the easy way of "needs and inclinations, whose satisfaction he summarizes under the name of 'happiness'". (GMM, 405) Allison believes that this physical dialectic "is between principles competing for

supremacy in the practical judgment of the agent rather than between reason and inclination as psychic forces or psychological cause".[38]

Kant declares that the three predispositions "are not only (negatively) good (they do not conflict with the moral law) but are also predispositions to the good (they further compliance with that law). They are original; for they belong to the possibility of human nature. He means by that that they all have a positive side complying with the law. Allison thinks that it is not clear what Kant means here but certainly he ascribes to the first two predispositions the possibility to be used contrary to their ends. This is proven in The Doctrine of Virtue where he recognizes duties to ourselves insofar as we are mere animal or living beings and as rational animals, as also as moral beings.[39] Though, the first two can be contaminated by vices: animality by "vices of the crudeness of nature, and, in their utmost deviation from the natural purpose […] bestial vices, of gluttony, of lust, and of savage lawlessness (in relation to other human beings)" (RL, 26-27), humanity by "jealousy and rivalry […] the greatest vices of secret and overt hostilities against all whom we regard as alien to us […] and in the highest degree of their wickedness [...] envy, ingratitude, malicious glee, etc., they are called diabolical vices" (RL, 27). If we consider that the fist does not use reason and the second uses it only "as subservient to other incentives" it becomes obvious how shallow or banal is the root of the predispositions to their vices, as the propensities, the inclinations, the instincts and the passion, drive almost naturally to the adoption of evil maxims. This is the banality of evil, the everyday choice between good and evil, the lighthearted choice of *evil heart*. Evil can spread easily even as "diabolical vices". This is the Kantian (quasi) radical evil, a term to satisfy the priests and the censors, another kind of radicality though appears here, meaning just lying in the roots of free choice together with the radical (in the same sense) good. Propensity to moral evil "if [it] may be assumed to belong to the human being universally (and hence to belong to the character of his genus), it will be called a natural propensity of the human being to evil" (RL, 29). Kant will accept 'radical evil' by changing its religious nuances of the original sin and the Fall in the Scripture "in the limits of reason" but he will not accept "natural

38 Allison, *op. cit*. p.152.
39 *Ibid*., p. 148.

evil" except as a predisposition.[40] Because evil exists in human nature as a choice according to freedom, when the first two predispositions are used against their ends, otherwise, it "could be reduced entirely to determination by natural causes-which, however, contradicts freedom" (RL, 21). So, there is always responsibility for choosing between moral and immoral maxims.

The natural propensity to evil in human nature, the evil heart, has many expressions. "Wickedness ([…] corruption of the human heart […] perversity" are common vices spread to humankind "shallow" because "the propensity to evil […] is interwoven with human nature" (RL, 30). The good heart on the opposite, is subjected to the idea of the moral law "it is personality itself (the idea of humanity considered entirely intellectually) (RL, 28). The choice of good heart needs critical thought, education, conscious choice, for the "the restoration only of the purity of the moral law as the supreme basis of all our maxims" (RL, 46). This difficult choice of good heart, the fight at the *radix* of deliberation for the extrusion of the radical evil and the acquisition of good character, could possibly be proportional to what Arendt calls radical good.[41]

THE BANALITY (AT LAST) OF EVIL IN KANT

Kant's main reference to radical evil will appear in the III chapter of the first part of *Religion*:

> "[…] the proposition, The human being is evil, can signify nothing other than this: He is conscious of the moral law and yet has admitted the (occasional) deviation from it into his maxim. He is evil by nature, means the same as that this holds for him considered in his genus – not as if such a quality can be inferred from the concept of his genus (the concept of a human being as such); rather, according to what acquaintance we have with him through experience, we cannot judge him otherwise, or we may presuppose this as subjectively necessary

40 "[…]'in Adam we all sinned'[…] is called a fall into sin, whereas in our case it is conceived as resulting from the already innate wickedness of our nature." (RL,42) Pluhar refers to "in Adam we all sinned," as the Augustinian interpretation which supports the doctrine of original sin, based on the Vulgate translation of the original Greek. (RL 43, note of the translator 223, p 48.)

41 Arendt, "A Letter to Gershom Scholem," p.471.

> in every human being, even in the best. This propensity, then, must itself be considered morally evil, hence not a natural predisposition but something that can be imputed to the human being, and it consequently must consist in unlawful maxims of the power of choice. On the other hand, because of freedom, these maxims by themselves must be regarded as contingent, which in turn cannot be reconciled with this evil's universality unless the subjective supreme basis of all maxims is, no matter through what, interwoven with humanity itself and, as it were, rooted in it. Presumably, therefore, we may call this basis a *natural propensity to evil*, and, since it must yet always be something of which one is oneself guilty, we may even call it a radical, *innate* evil in human nature (yet *nonetheless brought upon us by ourselves*)." (RL, 32) (emphasis added)

The passage appears controversial. Evil can be natural, but *we* bring it to ourselves. This stance made Schiller and Goethe, between others, to accuse Kant's whole account of evil as a concession to Christian orthodoxy and the censorship, against the "critical" spirit of his moral philosophy,[42] and partly it must be so. "Radical evil" seems to be an "as you like it" to the priests and the censors, who would anyway condemn the book.[43] Kant keeps "radical evil" to satisfy the narrative of the Fall in the Scripture, but this evil is not natural and having its roots in time, i.e. in the original sin, it's a moral choice in reason, every time a practical deliberation is raised.[44] It exists in the root of deliberation together with good and each time they fight for the supremacy in the choice of a maxim. Evil is not radical as existing in human nature but as propensity to choose the evil maxims which "corrupts the basis of all maxims" (RL, 37).

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42 Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*. p. 146.

43 Palmquist considers the Second Piece of Religion to contain Kant's assess of the Christian doctrine of grace through Jesus' atoning sacrifice as morally harmful but "completely valid"(RL, 66) "holding also as a precept to be followed" (RL, 64), as depicting the archetype of a perfect human being (in reason) that everybody should strive to imitate. Those were "Critical" assessments of the doctrines of the church. (RL, from the Introduction by Stephen R. Palmquist, p. xlviii.) This was not enough to render *Religion* immune to censorship.

44 "Every evil action must be regarded, when one seeks its rational origin, as if the human being had fallen into it directly from the state of innocence [...] his action is free [...] therefore can and must always be judged as an original use of his power of choice." (RL, 41)

The root of evil and its shallowness is heralded already in the *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*:

> "The human being feels in himself a powerful counterweight against all commands of duty, which reason represents to him as so worthy of esteem, in his needs and inclinations, whose satisfaction he summarizes under the name of 'happiness'. Now reason commands its precepts unremittingly […] From this, however, arises a natural dialectic, that is, *a propensity to ratiocinate against those strict laws of duty and to bring into doubt their validity*, or at least their purity and strictness, and, where possible, to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations, i.e., at ground to corrupt them and deprive them of their entire dignity, which not even common practical reason can in the end call good." (GMM, 405) (emphasis added)

Radicality of evil is observed in human being not *a priori* but empirically "according to what acquaintance we have with him through experience" (RL, 32) and if we accept its universality it will clash with freedom and therefore with moral agency. Human being seems to be naturally prone to evil but potentially moral personality who chooses the good. The expression of the propensity to evil is expressed in three levels which are, the weakness of human heart to comply with adopted maxims, the propensity to mix immoral incentives with the moral ones i.e. impurity, and finally the propensity to adopt evil maxims, i.e., the wickedness of human nature, or of the human heart. (RL, 29) Those three levels are proportional to shallowness of character, the easy acceptance of sensual incentives, and the lack of critical thought. The moral person who is the expression of the propensity to personality, chooses actively and with pain the good maxims "through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law." (GMM, 421 – First formulation of categorical imperative.)

Now, it seems that we want to claim something inconsistent: the acceptance of the conceptual closeness of banality of evil in Arendt and radical evil in Kant. First, Arendt's expressed view stands against it: "the phrase […] 'banality of evil' […] is contrasted with 'radical evil' (Kant)". (Arendt, "Answers to Questions," p. 479.) Nevertheless, the ambiguity by which those two terms are used by the two philosophers helps us towards our end. First, we can conclude that obviously radical evil in Kant and Arendt are totally different. Arendt's radical evil is political, irrational, and its radicality has the sense of extreme

ideology political or other, it is an evil in time, the revelation of a satanic sublime that overpowers us as irreversible and uncontrollable. In Kant, radical evil is deflationed from political and religious empirical elements. It's something that simply exists in the *radix* of our choices as a propensity the same as good does. As Allison concludes: "Kant, by 'radical evil', does not mean a particular, especially perverse, form of evil but rather the root or ground of the very possibility of all moral evil."[45] This moral predisposition exists in the root of practical deliberation but in every decision, the beginning of sin[46] is chosen again and again inwards by the agent herself, and not imposed by an historical necessity outward. It is not in history (time) but in character (reason). Second, we may perceive as radical the ease of evil's spreading as the outcome of an evil character which is shallow (banal). This character lets himself loose to be driven by the predispositions of animality and humanity and the call of passions that enter her practical deliberations by the promise of happiness. So *radical* evil acquires in the end this *banal* aspect of evil character. For Kant, Eichmann has an evil heart the same way a thief has it. Both, just let the evil predispositions predominate them. On the other hand, good heart demands our struggle to acquire it. "The command that we ought to become better human beings yet resounds undiminished in our soul (RL, 46) […] if the moral law commands that we ought to be better human beings now, then it follows inescapably that we must also be capable of this (RL, 50)." The radicality of the good consists in "the firm resolve in complying with one's duty" (RL, 47) and this "virtue is acquired little by little and means to some a long habituation (in observing the law), whereby the human being, through gradual reforms of his conduct and stabilization of his maxims, has passed over from the propensity to vice to an opposite propensity." (RL, 47) One can perceive here the struggle, the dedication, the sacrifices demanded for the acquisition of good heart, the radicality, the depth of this march. That's why the radicality of good in Arendt seems to be on a par with the acquisition of good heart in Kant.

45 Allison, *op. cit*., p.147.

46 Steven Palmquist will say that "treating the biblical story of the Fall as an account of evil's 'inheritance from the first parents' is 'the most inappropriate' interpretation, because it offers an empirical solution to a philosophical problem" (RL, from the Introduction by Stephen R. Palmquist, p. XXVII)

On the other hand, the shallowness, the idleness of staying tied to the passions of animality or the consequalist arithmetic of humanity, make obvious the banality of evil.

In concluding, taking a glimpse backwards at the precritical *A new Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition* (Proposition IX), Kant moves there from the theological discussion on good and evil (what he called evil in time later) to the conception of evil grounded on an inner principle of self-determination (the radical evil of the mature writings). There, he makes the distinction between a negative evil of defect (*malum defectus*) of the will as negation of the good and a positive evil of privation (*malum privationis*) which proposes positive means for displacing the good. Kant's radical evil and the shallow- banal evil of mature Arendt belong to the first category while the radical evil in young Arendt's *Origins* could belong to the second.

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ENDNOTES

a Abbreviations (from the corresponding publications in Bibliography):
RL *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*
CPrR *Critique of Practical Reason*
GMM *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*

b Shallow here, means banal. Shallow contrasts with deep the same way banal do. Arendt refers to it in *The Jewish writings,* "Answers to Questions Submitted by Samuel Grafton": "I meant [in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*] that evil is not radical, going to the roots (radix), that it *has no depth*, and that for this very reason it is so terribly difficult to think about, since thinking, by definition, wants to reach the roots." (emphasis added) In this passage, the similarity of the term shallow with the Arendtian use of term banal, is evident.

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PLITKE VODE ZLA – ARENT I KANT

Sažetak: U *Izvorima totalitarizma* (1951) Hana Arent uvešće pojam *radikalnog zla* kao istorijske pojave nečega povodom čega „mi zapravo nemamo na šta da se oslonimo da bismo ga razumeli, kao fenomena koji nas suočava sa svojom nadmoćnom realnošću i ruši sve standarde za koje znamo“. Arent neće insistirati na svojoj početnoj koncepciji radikalnog zla, a u knjizi *Ajhman u Jerusalimu: Izveštaj o banalnosti zla* (1963) radikalno zlo zameniće *banalnošću zla*. Prema potonjem gledištu, „zlo je površinski fenomen, a umesto da bude radikalno, ono je samo ekstremno“, ono „prkosi mišljenju“, i u tome jeste njegova „banalnost“. Jedino dobro ima dubinu i može biti radikalno. Arent suprotstavlja tu banalnost svom vlastitom ranijem shvatanju radikalnog zla, kao i Kantovoj koncepciji radikalnog zla (u potonjem, po našem mišljenju, greši). U ovom radu, pokušaćemo da pokažemo konceptualnu bliskost između *banalnosti zla* kod Arent i *radikalnog zla* kod Kanta, a takođe i radikalnost dobra kod Arent kao jednaku sticanju dobrog karaktera u Kantovoj *Religiji unutar granica samog uma*. Henri Alison tvrdi da „Kant pod ‘radikalnim zlom’ ne misli pojedinačnu, naročito izopačenu formu zla, nego radije koren ili osnov same mogućnosti sveg moralnog zla“. Kod Kanta, radikalno zlo je odvojeno od političkih i religijskih empirijskih elemenata. Ovaj pojam se čini „maslinovom grančicom“ koju Kant pruža crkvi i učenju o istočnom grehu, koje u *Religiji* dekonstruiše kao besmisleno *u vremenu*, prihvatajući pak njegovu ograničenu vrednost *u umu* (moralno). Zlo za Kanta jeste nešto što prosto postoji u *korenu* (*radix*) naših izbora, kao sklonost, isto kao i dobro. Kantovsko *radikalno* zlo dobija *banalni* aspekat zlog karaktera. Za Kanta, Ajhman ima zlo srce na isti način kao što ga ima lopov. To je razlog zbog kojeg arentovska banalnost zla dolazi u blizinu kantovskog radikalnog zla. S druge strane, dobro srce, prema Kantu, zahteva našu borbu da ga steknemo. To je razlog zbog kojeg se čini da radikalnost dobra kod Arent jeste u istoj ravni sa sticanjem dobrog srca kod Kanta.

Ključne reči: zlo, dobro, radikalno, banalnost, Kant, Arent, cionizam, praktički um, u vremenu, u umu, čovečnost, animalnost, personalnost

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