

EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM—I

Adolf Eichmann and the banality of evil.

By Hannah Arendt

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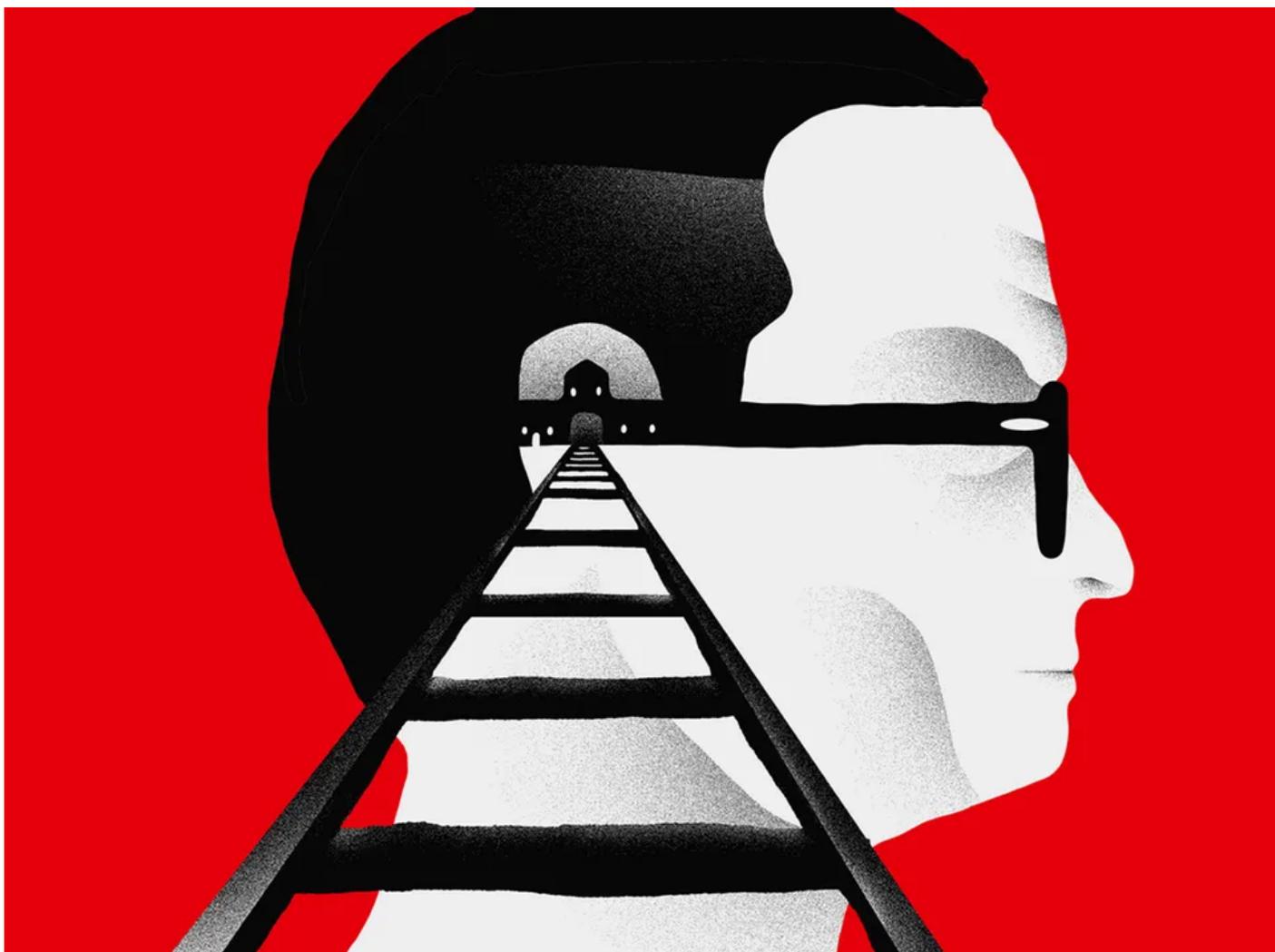


Illustration by Daniel Zender



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Every morning, the words “*Beth Hamishpath*” (“The House of Justice”), shouted by the court usher at the top of his voice, make us jump to our feet as they announce the arrival of the three judges, who, bare-headed and in black robes, walk into the courtroom from a side entrance to take their seats on the highest tier of the raised platform at the front of the long hall. They sit at a long table, which is eventually to be covered with innumerable books and more than fifteen hundred documents. Immediately below the judges are the translators, whose services are needed for direct exchanges between the defendant or his counsel and the court; otherwise, Adolf Eichmann, the German-speaking accused party, like all the other foreigners in the courtroom, follows the Hebrew proceedings through the simultaneous radio transmission, which is excellent in French, bearable in English, and sheer comedy—frequently incomprehensible—in German. (In view of the scrupulous fairness of all the technical arrangements for the trial, it is among the minor mysteries of the new State of Israel that, with its high percentage of German-born people, it was unable to find an adequate translator into the only language the accused and his counsel could understand. The old prejudice against German Jews, once very pronounced in Israel, is no longer strong enough to account for it.) One tier below the translators are the glass booth of the accused and the witness box, facing each other. Finally, on the bottom tier, with their backs to the spectators, are the prosecutor, Attorney General Gideon Hausner, with his staff of four assistant attorneys, and Dr. Robert Servatius, counsel for the defense—a lawyer from Cologne, chosen by Eichmann and paid by the Israeli government (just as at the Nuremberg Trials all attorneys for the accused were paid by the tribunal of the victorious powers), who during the first weeks is accompanied by an assistant. Whoever planned this auditorium in the newly built House of the People, *Beth Ha’am*—now guarded from roof to cellar by heavily armed police, and surrounded by high fences, as well as by a wooden row of barracks in the front courtyard, in which all comers are expertly frisked—obviously had a theatre in mind, complete with orchestra and balcony, with proscenium and stage, and with

side doors for the actors' entrances.

At no time, however, is there anything theatrical in the conduct of the judges—Moshe Landau, the presiding judge, Judge Benjamin Halevi, and Judge Yitzhak Raveh. Their walk is unstudied; their sober and intense attention, visibly stiffening under the impact of grief as they listen to the tales of suffering, is natural; their impatience with the prosecutor's attempt to drag out the hearings is spontaneous and refreshing; their attitude toward the defense is perhaps a shade over-polite, as though they had it always in mind that, to quote the judgment they handed down, "Dr. Servatius stood almost alone in this strenuous legal battle, in an unfamiliar environment;" their manner toward the accused is always beyond reproach. They are so evidently three good and honest men that one is not surprised to see that none of them yields to the greatest of all the temptations to play-act in this setting—that of pretending that they, all three born and educated in Germany, must wait for the Hebrew translation of anything said in German. Judge Landau hardly ever waits to give his answer until the translator has done his work, and he frequently interrupts the translation to correct and improve it, appearing grateful for this bit of distraction from the grim business at hand. In time, during the cross-examination of the accused, he even leads his colleagues to use their German mother tongue in the dialogue with Eichmann—a proof, if proof were still needed, of his remarkable independence of current public opinion in Israel.

There is no doubt from the very beginning that it is Judge Landau who sets the tone, and that he is doing his best—his very best—to prevent this trial from becoming a "show" trial under the direction of the prosecutor, whose love of showmanship is unmistakable. Among the reasons he cannot always succeed is the simple fact that the proceedings happen on a stage before an audience, with the usher's marvellous shout at the beginning of each session producing the effect of a rising curtain. Clearly, this courtroom is well suited to the show trial that David Ben-Gurion, Prime Minister of Israel, had in

mind when he decided to have Eichmann kidnapped in Argentina and brought to the District Court of Jerusalem to answer the charge that he had played a principal role in “the Final Solution of the Jewish question,” as the Nazis called their plan to exterminate the Jews. And Ben-Gurion, who has rightly been given the title of “architect of the state,” is the invisible stage manager of the proceedings. He does not attend a single one of the sessions; in the courtroom, he speaks with the voice of his Attorney General, who, representing the government, does his best—his very best—to obey his master. And if his best often turns out not to be good enough, the reason is that the trial is presided over by someone who serves Justice as faithfully as Mr. Hausner serves the State of Israel. Justice demands that the accused be prosecuted, defended, and judged, and that all the other questions, though they may seem to be of greater import—of “How could it happen?” and “Why did it happen?,” of “Why the Jews?” and “Why the Germans?,” of “What was the role of other nations?” and “What was the extent to which the Allies shared the responsibility?,” of “How could the Jews, through their own leaders, cooperate in their own destruction?” and “Why did they go to their death like lambs to the slaughter?”—be left in abeyance. Justice insists on the importance of Adolf Eichmann, the man in the glass booth built for his protection: medium-sized, slender, middle-aged, with receding hair, ill-fitting teeth, and nearsighted eyes, who throughout the trial keeps craning his scraggy neck toward the bench (not once does he turn to face the audience), and who desperately tries to maintain his self-control—and mostly succeeds, despite a nervous tic, to which his mouth must have become subject long before this trial started. On trial are his deeds, not the sufferings of the Jews, not the German people or mankind, not even anti-Semitism and racism.

And Justice turns out to be a much sterner master than the Prime Minister. The latter’s rule, as Mr. Hausner is not slow in demonstrating, is permissive; it permits the prosecutor to give press conferences and interviews for television during the trial (the American program, sponsored by the

Glickman Corporation, is constantly interrupted—business as usual—by real-estate advertising), and even “spontaneous” outbursts to reporters in the court building (he is sick of cross-examining Eichmann, who answers all questions with lies); it permits frequent side glances into the audience, and the theatrics characteristic of a conspicuous vanity, which finally achieves its triumph in the White House with a compliment on “a job well done” by the President of the United States. Justice does not permit anything of the sort; it demands seclusion, it requires sorrow rather than anger, and it prescribes the most careful abstention from all the nice pleasures of putting oneself in the limelight.

Yet no matter how consistently the judges shun the limelight, there they are, seated at the top of the platform, facing the audience as from a stage. The audience is supposed to represent the whole world, and in the first few weeks it indeed consisted chiefly of newspapermen and magazine writers who had flocked to Jerusalem from the four corners of the earth. They were to watch a spectacle as sensational as the Nuremberg Trials; only this time, Mr. Hausner noted, “the tragedy of Jewry as a whole was the central concern.” In fact, said Hausner, “if we charge him [Eichmann] also with crimes against non-Jews . . . this is” not because he committed them but, surprisingly, “*because we make no ethnic distinctions.*” That was certainly a remarkable sentence for a prosecutor to utter in his opening speech; it proved to be the key sentence in the case for the prosecution. For this case was built on what the Jews had suffered, not on what Eichmann had done. And, according to Mr. Hausner, that amounted to the same thing, because “there was only one man who had been concerned almost entirely with the Jews, whose business had been their destruction, whose role in the establishment of the iniquitous regime had been limited to them. That was Adolf Eichmann.” Was it not logical to bring before the court all the facts of Jewish suffering (which, of course, were never in dispute) and then look for evidence that, in one way or another, would connect Eichmann with what had happened? The Nuremberg Trials, where the defendants had been “indicted for crimes against members of

many and various nations,” had left the Jewish tragedy out of account, Hausner said, for the simple reason that Eichmann had not been there. Did Hausner really believe the Nuremberg Trials would have paid greater attention to the fate of the Jews if Eichmann had been in the dock? Hardly. Like almost everybody else in Israel, he believed that only a Jewish court could render justice to Jews, and that it was the business of Jews to sit in judgment on their enemies.

If the audience was to be the world and the play was to be the huge panorama of Jewish suffering, the reality was falling short of expectations and failing to accomplish its purpose. The journalists remained faithful for no more than two weeks, and then the audience changed drastically. It was now supposed to consist of Israelis, and, specifically, of those who were too young to know the story or, as in the case of Oriental Jews, had never been told it. The trial was supposed to show them what it meant to live among non-Jews, to convince them that only in Israel could a Jew be safe and live an honorable life. (For correspondents, the lesson was spelled out in a little booklet on Israel’s legal system, which was handed to the press. Its author, Doris Lankin, cites a decision of Israel’s Supreme Court whereby two fathers who had “abducted their children and brought them to Israel” were directed to send them back to their mothers, living abroad, who had a legal right to their custody. This, says the author—no less proud of such strict legality than Hausner of his willingness to prosecute a murder charge even when the victims of the murder were non-Jews—“despite the fact that to send the children back to maternal custody and care would be committing them to waging an unequal struggle against the hostile elements in the Diaspora.”) But in actuality there were hardly any young people in the audience, and it did not consist of Israelis, as distinguished from Jews. It was filled with “survivors”—middle-aged and elderly people, immigrants from Europe, like myself—who knew by heart all that there was to know, and who were in no mood to learn any lessons and certainly did not need this trial to draw their own conclusions. As witness followed witness and horror was piled upon

horror, they sat there and listened in public to stories they would hardly have been able to endure in private, when they would have had to face the storyteller. And the more “the calamity [in Hausner’s words] of the Jewish people in this generation” unfolded, and the more grandiose Hausner’s rhetoric became, the paler and more ghostlike became the figure in the glass booth, and no finger-wagging (“And there sits the monster responsible for all this”) could summon him back to life.

It was precisely the play aspect of the trial that collapsed under the weight of the hair-raising atrocities. A trial resembles a play in that both focus on the doer, not on the victim. A show trial, to be effective, needs even more urgently than an ordinary trial a limited and well-defined outline of what the doer did, and how. In the center of a trial can only be the one who did—in this respect, he is like the hero in the play—and if he suffers, he must suffer for what he has done, not for what he has caused others to suffer. No one knew this better than the presiding judge, before whose eyes the trial began to deteriorate into a bloody spectacle, or, as the judgment called it, “a rudderless ship tossed about by the waves.” But if his efforts to prevent this were often defeated, the defeat was, strangely, in part the fault of the defense, which hardly ever rose to challenge any testimony, no matter how irrelevant or immaterial it might be. *Dr. Servatius* (as everybody invariably addressed him) was a bit bolder when it came to the submission of documents, and the most impressive of his rare interventions occurred when the prosecution introduced as evidence the diaries of Hans Frank, wartime Governor General of Poland and one of the major war criminals hanged at Nuremberg. “I have only one question,” *Dr. Servatius* said. “Is the name Adolf Eichmann, the name of the accused, mentioned in those twenty-nine volumes [in fact, it was thirty-eight]? . . . The name Adolf Eichmann is not mentioned in all those twenty-nine volumes. . . . Thank you, no more questions.”

Thus, the trial never became a play, but the show that Ben-Gurion had had

in mind did take place—or, rather, the “lessons” he thought should be offered to Israelis and Arabs, to Jews and Gentiles; that is, to the whole world. These lessons to be drawn from an identical show were meant to be different for the different recipients. Ben-Gurion had outlined them before the trial started, in a number of articles that were designed to explain why Israel had kidnapped the accused. There was the lesson to the non-Jewish world: “I want to establish before the nations of the world how millions of people, because they happened to be Jews, and one million babies, because they happened to be Jewish babies, were murdered by the Nazis.” Or, in the words of *Davar*, the organ of Ben-Gurion’s *Mapai* party: “Let world opinion know this, that not Nazi Germany alone was responsible for the destruction of six million Jews of Europe.” Hence, again in Ben-Gurion’s own words, “We want the nations of the world to know . . . and they should be ashamed.” The Jews in the Diaspora were to remember how “four-thousand-year-old Judaism, with its spiritual creations, its ethical strivings, its Messianic aspirations, had always faced a hostile world,” how the Jews had degenerated until they went to their death like sheep, and how only the establishment of a Jewish state had enabled Jews to hit back, as Israelis had done in the War of Independence, in the Suez adventure, and in the almost daily incidents on Israel’s unhappy borders. And if the Jews outside Israel had to be shown the difference between Israeli heroism and Jewish submissive meekness, there was a complementary lesson for the Israelis; for “the generation of Israelis who have grown up since the holocaust” were in danger of losing their ties with the Jewish people and, by implication, with their own history. “It is necessary that our youth remember what happened to the Jewish people. We want them to know the most tragic facts in our history.” Finally, one of the motives in bringing Eichmann to trial was “to ferret out other Nazis—for example, the connection between the Nazis and some Arab rulers.”

If these had been the only justifications for bringing Adolf Eichmann to the District Court of Jerusalem, the trial would have been a failure on most

counts. In some respects, the lessons were superfluous, and in others they were positively misleading. Thanks to Hitler, anti-Semitism has been discredited, perhaps not forever but certainly for the time being, and this is not because the Jews have become more popular all of a sudden but because not only Ben-Gurion but most people have “realized that in our day the gas chamber and the soap factory are what anti-Semitism may lead to.” Equally superfluous was the lesson to the Jews in the Diaspora, who hardly needed a great catastrophe in which a third of their people perished to be convinced of the world’s hostility. Not only has their conviction of the eternal and ubiquitous nature of anti-Semitism been the most potent ideological factor in the Zionist involvement since the Dreyfus Affair; it must also have been the cause of the otherwise inexplicable readiness of the German-Jewish community to negotiate with the Nazi authorities during the early stages of the regime. This conviction produced a fatal inability to distinguish between friend and foe; the German Jews underestimated their enemies because they somehow thought that all Gentiles were alike.

The contrast between Israeli heroism and the submissive meekness with which Jews went to their death—arriving on time at the transportation points, walking under their own power to the places of execution, digging their own graves, undressing and making neat piles of their clothing, and lying down side by side to be shot—seemed a telling point, and the prosecutor, asking witness after witness, “Why did you not protest?,” “Why did you board the train?,” “Fifteen thousand people were standing there and hundreds of guards facing you—why didn’t you revolt and charge and attack these guards?,” harped on it for all it was worth. But the sad truth of the matter is that the point was ill taken, for no non-Jewish group or non-Jewish people had behaved differently. Sixteen years ago, while still under the direct impact of the events, a former French inmate of Buchenwald, David Rousset, described, in “*Les Jours de Notre Mort*,” the logic that obtained in all concentration camps: “The triumph of the S.S. demands that the tortured victim allow himself to be led to the noose without protesting, that he

renounce and abandon himself to the point of ceasing to affirm his identity. And it is not for nothing. It is not gratuitously, out of sheer sadism, that the S.S. men desire his defeat. They know that the system which succeeds in destroying its victim before he mounts the scaffold . . . is incomparably the best for keeping a whole people in slavery. In submission. Nothing is more terrible than these processions of human beings going like dummies to their death.” The court received no answer to this cruel and silly question, but one could easily have found an answer had he permitted his imagination to dwell for a few minutes on the fate of those Dutch Jews who in 1941, in the old Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, dared to attack a German security police detachment. Four hundred and thirty Jews were arrested in reprisal, and they were literally tortured to death, being sent first to Buchenwald and then to the Austrian camp of Mauthausen. Month after month, they died a thousand deaths, and every single one of them would have envied his brethren in Auschwitz had he known about them. There exist many things considerably worse than death, and the S.S. saw to it that none of them was ever very far from the mind and imagination of their victims. In this respect, perhaps even more significantly than in others, the deliberate attempt in Jerusalem to tell only the Jewish side of the story distorted the truth, even the Jewish truth. The glory of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto and the heroism of the few others who fought back lay precisely in their having refused the comparatively easy death that the Nazis offered them—before the firing squad or in the gas chamber. And the witnesses in Jerusalem who testified to resistance and rebellion, to “the small place the uprising had in this history of the holocaust,” confirmed the known fact that only the very young had been capable of taking the “decision that we cannot go and be slaughtered like sheep.”

In one respect, Ben-Gurion’s expectations for the trial were not altogether disappointed, for it did indeed become an important instrument for ferreting out other Nazis and criminals—but not in the Arab countries, which had openly offered refuge to hundreds of them. The wartime relationship

between the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis was no secret; he had hoped they would help him in the implementation of some “Final Solution” of the Jewish question in the Near East. Hence, newspapers in Damascus and Beirut, in Cairo and Amman, did not hide their sympathy for Eichmann or their regret that he had not “finished the job;” a broadcast from Cairo on the day the trial opened went as far as to inject a slightly anti-German note into its comments, complaining that there was not “a single incident in which one German plane flew over one Jewish settlement [in Palestine] and dropped one bomb on it throughout the last world war.” That Arab nationalists have been in sympathy with Nazism is notorious, and neither Ben-Gurion nor this trial was needed “to ferret them out;” they were never in hiding. The trial revealed only that all rumors about Eichmann’s connection with Haj Amin el Husseini, the wartime Mufti of Jerusalem, were unfounded. (Along with other departmental heads, he had once been introduced to the Mufti during a reception at an S.S. office in Berlin.) Documents produced by the prosecution showed that the Mufti had been in close contact with the German Foreign Office and with Himmler, but this was nothing new. But if Ben-Gurion’s remark about “the connection between the Nazis and some Arab rulers” was pointless, his failure to mention present-day West Germany in this context was surprising. Of course, it was reassuring to hear that Israel “does not hold Adenauer responsible for Hitler,” and that “for us a decent German, although he belongs to the same nation that twenty years ago helped to murder millions of Jews, is a decent human being.” (There was no mention of decent Arabs.) While the German Federal Republic has not yet recognized the State of Israel—presumably out of fear that the Arab countries might thereupon recognize Ulbricht’s Germany—it has paid seven hundred and thirty-seven million dollars in reparation to Israel during the last ten years; the reparation payments will soon come to an end, and Israel is now trying to arrange with West Germany for a long-term loan. Hence, the relationship between the two countries, and particularly the personal relationship between Ben-Gurion and Adenauer,

has been quite good, and if, as an aftermath of the trial, some deputies in the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, succeeded in imposing certain restraints on the cultural-exchange program with West Germany, this certainly was not hoped for, or even foreseen, by Ben-Gurion. It is more noteworthy that he did not foresee, or did not care to mention, the fact that Eichmann's capture would trigger the first serious effort made by West Germans to bring to trial at least those war criminals who were directly implicated in murder. The Central Agency for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes, which was belatedly set up by the eleven West German states in 1958 (barely two years before—in May, 1960—the West German statute of limitations wiped out all offenses except first-degree murder, for which the time limit is twenty years), and of which Prosecutor Erwin Schüle is the head, had run into all kinds of difficulties, caused partly by the unwillingness of German witnesses to coöperate and partly by the unwillingness of the local courts to prosecute on the basis of material sent to them from the Central Agency. It was not that the trial in Jerusalem produced any important new evidence of the kind needed for the discovery of Eichmann's associates but that the news of Eichmann's sensational capture and the prospect of his trial had an impact strong enough to persuade the local courts to use Mr. Schüle's findings and to overcome the native reluctance to do anything about the "murderers in our midst" by the time-honored expedient of posting rewards for the capture of well-known criminals.

The results were amazing. Seven months after Eichmann's arrival in Jerusalem—and four months before the opening of the trial—Richard Baer, successor to Rudolf Höss as commandant of Auschwitz, was finally arrested. Then, in rapid succession, most of the members of the so-called Eichmann Commando—Franz Novak, Eichmann's transportation officer, who had been living as a printer in Austria; Dr. Otto Hunsche, his legal expert and his assistant in Hungary, who had settled as a lawyer in West Germany; Hermann Krumei, Eichmann's second in command in Hungary, who had become a druggist; Gustav Richter, former "Jewish adviser" in Rumania; and

Dr. Günther Zöpf, who had filled the same post in Amsterdam—were arrested, too. (Although evidence against these five had been published in Germany years before, in books and magazine articles, not one of them had found it necessary to live under an assumed name.) For the first time since the close of the war, German newspapers were full of stories about trials of Nazi criminals—all of them mass murderers—and the reluctance of the local courts to prosecute these crimes still showed itself in the fantastically lenient sentences meted out to those convicted. (Thus, Dr. Hunsche, who was personally responsible for a last-minute deportation of some twelve hundred Hungarian Jews, of whom at least six hundred were killed, received a sentence of five years of hard labor; Dr. Otto Bradfisch, of the *Einsatzgruppen*, the mobile killing units of the S.S. in the East, was sentenced to ten years of hard labor for the killing of fifteen thousand Jews; and Joseph Lechthaler, who had “liquidated” the Jewish inhabitants of Slutsk and Smolevichi, in Russia, was sentenced to three years and six months.) Among the new arrests were people of great prominence under the Nazis, most of whom had already been denazified by the German courts. One was S.S. *Obergruppenführer* Karl Wolff, former chief of Himmler’s personal staff, who, according to a document submitted in 1946 at Nuremberg, had greeted “with particular joy” the news that “for two weeks now a train has been carrying, every day, five thousand members of the Chosen People” from Warsaw to Treblinka, one of the Eastern killing centers. He still awaits trial. The trial of Wilhelm Koppe, who had at first managed the gassing of Jews in Chelmno and then become the successor of Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger in Poland, in a high post in the S.S. whose duties included making Poland *judenrein* (Jew-clean)—in postwar West Germany, he was the director of a chocolate factory—has not yet taken place. Occasional harsh sentences were even less reassuring, for they were meted out to offenders like Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, a former S.S. *Obergruppenführer*. He was tried in 1961 for his participation in the Röhm rebellion in 1934, was sentenced to four and a half years, and then was indicted again in 1962 for the killing of six German

Communists in 1933, tried before a jury in Nuremberg, and sentenced to life. Neither indictment mentioned that Bach-Zelewski had been anti-partisan chief on the Russian front or that he had participated in the Jewish massacres at Minsk and Mogilev, in White Russia. Should a German court, on the pretext that war crimes are no crimes, make “ethnic distinctions”? And is it possible that what was an unusually harsh sentence (for a German postwar court) was arrived at because Bach-Zelewski was among the very few Nazi leaders who had tried to protect Jews from the *Einsatzgruppen*, suffered a nervous breakdown after the mass killings, and testified for the prosecution in Nuremberg? (He was also the only such leader who in 1952 had denounced himself publicly for mass murder, but he was never prosecuted for it.) There is little hope that things will change now, even though the Adenauer administration has been forced to weed out of the judiciary a hundred and forty-odd judges and prosecutors, along with many police officers, with a more than ordinarily compromising past, and to dismiss the chief prosecutor of the Federal Supreme Court, Wolfgang Immerwahr Fränkel, because, his middle name notwithstanding, he had been less than candid when he was asked about his Nazi past. It has been estimated that of the eleven thousand five hundred judges in the *Bundesrepublik*, five thousand were active in the courts under the Hitler regime. In November, 1962, shortly after the purging of the judiciary and six months after Eichmann’s name had disappeared from the news, the long awaited trial of Martin Fellenz took place at Flensburg in an almost empty courtroom. The former Higher S.S. and Police Leader, who had been a prominent member of the Free Democratic Party in Adenauer’s Germany, was arrested in June, 1960, a few weeks after Eichmann’s capture. He was accused of participation in, and partial responsibility for, the murder of forty thousand Jews in Poland. After more than six weeks of detailed testimony, the prosecutor demanded the maximum penalty—a life sentence, to be served at hard labor. And the court sentenced him to four years, two and a half of which he had already served while waiting in jail.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the Eichmann trial had its deepest and most far-reaching consequences in Germany. The attitude of the German people toward their own past, which all experts on the German question had puzzled over for fifteen years, could hardly have been more clearly demonstrated: they themselves did not care much about it one way or the other, and did not particularly mind the presence of murderers at large in the country, since none of these particular murderers were likely to commit murder now, of their own free will; however, if world opinion—or, rather, what the Germans call *das Ausland*, collecting all countries outside Germany into a singular noun—became obstinate and demanded that these people be punished, they were perfectly willing to oblige, at least up to a point. When Eichmann was captured, Chancellor Adenauer had foreseen embarrassment and had voiced a fear that the trial would “stir up again all the horrors” and produce a new wave of anti-German feeling throughout the world—as it did. During the ten months that Israel needed to prepare the trial, Germany was busy bracing herself against its predictable results by showing an unprecedented zeal for searching out and prosecuting Nazi criminals within the country. At no time, however, did either the German authorities or any significant segment of public opinion demand Eichmann’s extradition, which seemed the obvious move, since every sovereign state is jealous of its right to sit in judgment on its own offenders. (The official objection of the Adenauer government that such a move was not possible because there existed no extradition treaty between Israel and West Germany is not valid; it meant only that Israel could not have been forced to extradite. Fritz Bauer, Attorney General of Hessen, applied to the federal government in Bonn to start extradition proceedings. But Mr. Bauer’s feelings in this matter were the feelings of a German Jew, and they were not shared by German public opinion. His application was not only refused by Bonn, it was hardly noticed and remained totally unsupported. Another argument against extradition, offered by the observers the West German government sent to Jerusalem, was that Germany had abolished capital punishment and hence was unable

to mete out the sentence Eichmann deserved. In view of the leniency shown by German courts to Nazi murderers, it was difficult not to suspect that this objection was made in bad faith. Surely, the greatest political hazard of an Eichmann trial in Germany would have been that a German court might not have given him the maximum penalty under German law.)

Another aspect of the matter was at once more delicate and more relevant to the political situation in Germany. It was one thing to ferret out mass murderers and other criminals from their hiding places, and it was another thing to find them prominent and active in the public realm—to encounter innumerable men in the federal and state administrations whose careers had bloomed under the Hitler regime. To be sure, if the Adenauer administration had been too sensitive in employing officials with a compromising Nazi past, there might have been no administration at all. For the truth is, of course, the exact opposite of what Dr. Adenauer asserted it to be when he said that only “a relatively small percentage” of Germans had been Nazis, and that “a great majority were happy to help their Jewish fellow-citizens when they could.” (At least one West German newspaper, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, asked itself the obvious question, long overdue—why so many people who must have known, for instance, the record of Wolfgang Immerwahr Frankel had kept silent—and then came up with the even more obvious answer: “Because they themselves felt incriminated.”) The logic of the Eichmann trial, as Ben-Gurion conceived of it—a trial stressing general issues, to the detriment of legal niceties—would have demanded exposure of the complicity of all German bureaus and authorities in the so-called Final Solution of the Jewish question; of all civil servants in the state ministries; of the regular armed forces, with their General Staff; of the judiciary; and of the business world. But although the prosecution went as far afield as to put witness after witness on the stand who testified to things that, while gruesome and true enough, had only the slightest connection, or none, with the deeds of the accused, it carefully avoided touching upon this highly explosive matter—upon the almost ubiquitous complicity, stretching far

beyond the ranks of the Party membership. (There were widespread rumors prior to the trial that Eichmann had named “several hundred prominent personalities of the Federal Republic as his accomplices,” but these rumors were not true. In his opening speech, Mr. Hausner still mentioned Eichmann’s “accomplices in the crime [who] were neither gangsters nor men of the underworld,” and promised that we should “encounter them—the doctors and lawyers, scholars, bankers, and economists—in those councils that resolved to exterminate the Jews.” This promise was not kept—nor could it have been kept in the form in which it was made, for in the Nazi regime there were no “councils that resolved” anything, and the “robed dignitaries with academic degrees” made no decision to exterminate the Jews; they came together only to plan the necessary steps in carrying out an order given by Hitler.) Still, one case of complicity was brought to the attention of the court—that of Dr. Hans Globke, who, more than twenty-five years ago, was co-author of an infamous commentary on the Nuremberg Laws and, somewhat later, author of the brilliant idea of compelling all German Jews to take “Israel” or “Sarah” as a middle name, and who is today one of Adenauer’s closest advisers. And Globke’s name—and only his name—was inserted into the proceedings by the defense, and probably only in the hope of “persuading” the Adenauer government to start proceedings to extradite Eichmann. Still, former Ministry Official and present Undersecretary of State Globke doubtless had more right than the former Mufti of Jerusalem to figure in the history of what the Jews had actually suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

And it was history that, as far as the prosecution was concerned, stood at the center of the trial. “It is not an individual that is in the dock at this historic trial, and not the Nazi regime alone,” Ben-Gurion said, “but anti-Semitism throughout history.” The tone set by Ben-Gurion was faithfully followed by Hausner. He began his opening address (which lasted through three sessions) with Pharaoh In Egypt and Haman’s decree “to destroy, to slay, and to cause them [the Jews] to perish.” He then proceeded to quote from

Ezekiel's words "And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee: 'In thy blood, live!,' " explaining that they must be understood as "the imperative that has confronted this nation ever since its first appearance on the stage of history." It was bad history and cheap rhetoric; worse, it was clearly at cross-purposes with putting Eichmann on trial at all, since it suggested that perhaps he was only an innocent executor of some mysteriously foreordained destiny, or even, for that matter, of anti-Semitism, which had been necessary to blaze the trail of "the bloodstained road travelled by this people" to fulfill its destiny. A few sessions later, after Salo W. Baron, Professor of Jewish History at Columbia University, had testified to the more recent history of Eastern European Jewry, Dr. Servatius could no longer resist temptation and asked the obvious questions: "Why did all this bad luck fall upon the Jewish people?" and "Don't you think that irrational motives are at the basis of the fate of this people? Beyond the understanding of a human being?" Is not there perhaps something like "the spirit of history, which brings history forward . . . without the influence of men?" Is not Mr. Hausner basically in agreement with "the school of historical law"—an allusion to Hegel—and has he not shown that what "the leaders do will not always lead to the aim and destination they wanted?" And Dr. Servatius added, "Here the intention was to destroy the Jewish people and the objective was not reached and a new flourishing state came into being." The argument of the defense had now come perilously close to the newest anti-Semitic theory about the Elders of Zion, which had been set forth in all seriousness a few weeks earlier in the old Egyptian National Assembly by Hussain Zulficar Sabri, Nasser's Deputy Foreign Minister: Hitler was innocent of the slaughter of the Jews; he was a victim of the Zionists, who had compelled "Hitler to perpetrate crimes and to create the legend that would eventually enable them to achieve their aim—the creation of the State of Israel." Except that Dr. Servatius, following the philosophy of history expounded by the prosecutor, had put History in the place of the Elders of Zion.

Despite the intentions of Ben-Gurion and the efforts of the prosecution, there remained an individual in the dock, a person of flesh and blood, and even if Ben-Gurion, as he claimed, did not “care what verdict is delivered against Eichmann,” it was undeniably the sole task of the Jerusalem court to deliver one.

Otto Adolf, son of Karl Adolf Eichmann and Maria née Schefferling, caught in a suburb of Buenos Aires on the evening of May 11, 1960, flown to Israel nine days later, brought to trial in the District Court of Jerusalem on April 1, 1961, stood accused on fifteen counts; “together with others,” he had committed crimes against the Jewish people, crimes against humanity, and war crimes during the whole period of the Nazi regime and especially during the period of the Second World War. The Israeli Nazis and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law of 1950, under which he was tried, provides that “a person who has committed one of the . . . [three] offenses . . . is liable to the death penalty.” To each count Eichmann pleaded, “In the sense of the indictment, not guilty.” In which sense, then, did he think he was guilty? During the long cross-examination of the accused—Eichmann asserted that it was “the longest ever known”—neither the defense nor the prosecution nor any of the three judges ever bothered to ask him this obvious question. Dr. Servatius answered the question in a press interview—“Eichmann feels guilty before God, not before the law”—but this answer was never confirmed by the accused himself. The defense would apparently have preferred him to plead not guilty on other grounds: that under the Nazi legal system he had not done anything wrong; that the deeds he was accused of were not crimes but “acts of state,” over which no other state has jurisdiction (*par in parem imperium non habet*); that it had been his duty to obey; and that, in Dr. Servatius’ words, he had committed acts “for which you are decorated if you win and go to the gallows if you lose.” In Germany (at a meeting of the Catholic Academy in Bavaria that was devoted to “the ticklish problem” of “the possibilities and limits of coping with historical and political guilt through criminal proceedings”), Dr. Servatius went a step

further, and declared that “the only legitimate criminal problem of the Eichmann trial lies in pronouncing judgment against his Israeli captors, which so far has not been done”—a statement, incidentally, that is somewhat difficult to reconcile with certain of his most often repeated and most widely publicized utterances in Israel, in which he called the conduct of the trial “a great spiritual achievement” and compared it favorably with the Nuremberg Trials.

Eichmann’s own attitude, it appeared, was different. First of all, the indictment for murder was wrong: “But I had nothing to do with the killing of the Jews. I never killed a Jew, or, for that matter, I never killed a non-Jew—I never killed any human being. I never gave an order to kill a Jew nor an order to kill a non-Jew; I just did not do it.” Or, as he was later to qualify this statement, “It so happened . . . that I had not once to do it”—for he said explicitly that he would have killed his own father if he had received an order to that effect. Thus, he repeated over and over a statement that he had first made in the so-called Sassen documents—an interview that he had given in 1955 in Argentina to the Dutch journalist Willem S. Sassen, a former S.S. man who was also a fugitive from justice, and that, after Eichmann’s capture, was published, in part, by *Life* in this country and by *Der Stern* in West Germany. He said that he could be accused only of “aiding and abetting” the almost successful annihilation of the Jews, and in Jerusalem he declared this annihilation to have been “one of the greatest crimes in the history of humanity.” The defense paid no attention to Eichmann’s own theory, but the prosecution wasted much time on an unsuccessful effort to prove that Eichmann had once, at least, killed with his own hands (he was supposed to have beaten to death a Jewish boy in Hungary). It spent more time, more successfully, on a note that Franz Rademacher, the Jewish expert in the German Foreign Office, had scribbled on a document dealing with Yugoslavia, made during a telephone conversation, which read, “Eichmann proposes shooting.” This turned out to be the only “order to kill,” if that is what it was, for which there existed a shred of evidence.

The evidence that he had “proposed shooting” was more questionable than it appeared to be during the trial, when the judges accepted the prosecutor’s version as against Eichmann’s categorical denial that he had ever killed or given an order to kill—a denial that was very ineffective, since it involved an implication that he had forgotten, as Dr. Servatius put it, “a brief incident [the killing of a mere eight thousand people], which was not so striking.” The incident took place in the autumn of 1941. The German Army had occupied the Serbian part of Yugoslavia six months earlier, and had been plagued by partisan warfare ever since. At length, the military authorities had decided to solve two problems at a stroke by shooting a hundred Jews and Gypsies as hostages for every dead German soldier. To be sure, neither Jews nor Gypsies were partisans, but, in the words of the responsible civilian officer in the military government, a certain *Staatsrat* Harald Turner, “the Jews we had in the camps [anyhow]; after all, they too are Serb nationals, and besides, they have to disappear.” The camps had been set up by General Franz Böhme, military governor of the region, and housed Jewish males only; neither General Böhme nor *Staatsrat* Turner had sought Eichmann’s approval before starting to shoot Jews—or Gypsies, for that matter—by the thousand. The trouble began when Böhme, without consulting the appropriate police and S.S. authorities, decided to *deport* all his Jews, probably in order to show that no special troops, under a different command, were required to make Serbia *judenrein*. Eichmann was informed, since it was a matter of deportation, and this was precisely his job. He refused to coöperate, because it interfered with other plans of the S.S. outfit to which he belonged, the Head Office for Reich Security, or R.S.H.A. (the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*), but it was not Eichmann, it was a man named Martin Luther, of the Foreign Office, who reminded General Böhme that “in other territories [meaning Russia] other military commanders have taken care of considerably greater numbers of Jews without even mentioning it.” In any event, if Eichmann actually did “propose shooting,” he was only telling the military that they should go on doing what they had been doing all

along, implying that questions of hostages were entirely in their own competence. This was an Army affair, obviously, since only males were involved. (In Serbia, the implementation of the Final Solution started about six months later, when women and children were rounded up and disposed of in mobile gas vans.) During cross-examination, Eichmann, characteristically, chose the most complicated and least likely explanation: Rademacher had needed the support of the Head Office for Reich Security for his own stand on the matter, and had therefore forged the document. Rademacher himself explained the incident much more reasonably at his own trial, before a West German court in 1952: “The Army was responsible for order in Serbia and had to kill rebellious Jews by shooting.” (This sounded more plausible but was a lie, for we know—from Nazi sources—that the Jews were not “rebellious.”) If it was difficult to interpret a remark made over the phone as an order, it was more difficult to believe that Eichmann had been in a position to give orders to Army generals.

Would Eichmann, then, have pleaded guilty if he had been indicted as an accessory to murder? Perhaps, but with certain important qualifications. What he had done was a crime only in retrospect, and he had always been a law-abiding citizen, because Hitler’s orders, which he had certainly executed to the best of his ability, had possessed “the force of law” in the Third Reich. (The defense could have quoted in support of Eichmann’s thesis the testimony of one of the best-known experts on constitutional law in the Third Reich, Theodor Maunz, who is currently Minister of Education and Culture in Bavaria. In 1943, in “Gestalt und Recht der Polizei,” he stated, “The command of the Führer . . . is absolutely the center of the present legal order.”) Those who today told him that he could have acted differently simply did not know, or had forgotten, how things had been. He did not want to be one of those who now pretended that they “had always been against it,” whereas in fact they had been very eager to do what they were told to do. However, times change, and he, like Professor Maunz, had “arrived at different insights.” What he had done he had done; he did not

want to deny it. Rather, he proposed to “hang myself in public as a warning example for all anti-Semites on this earth.” By this he did not mean to say that he regretted anything. “Repentance is for little children.”

Even under considerable pressure from his lawyer, Eichmann did not change this position. During a discussion of the offer Heinrich Himmler had made to Zionist representatives in Hungary, in 1944, to exchange a million Jews for ten thousand trucks, and of Eichmann’s role in this plan, Dr. Servatius asked, “Mr. Witness, in the negotiations with your superiors, did you express any pity for the Jews and did you say there was room to help them?”

Eichmann replied, “I am here under oath and must speak the truth. Not out of mercy did I launch this transaction”—which would have been acceptable, except that it was not Eichmann who “launched” it. He then continued, quite truthfully, “The reasons which made me think of this transaction I explained this morning.” They were as follows: Himmler had sent his own man to Budapest to deal with matters of Jewish emigration. (Incidentally, Jewish emigration had become a flourishing business; for enormous amounts of money, Jews could buy their way out. Eichmann, however, did not mention this.) It was the fact that “here matters of emigration were dealt with by a man who did not belong to the police force” that made Eichmann indignant, “because I had to help and to implement deportation, and matters of emigration, where I considered myself an expert, were assigned to a man who was new to the unit. . . . I was fed up. . . . I decided that I had to do something to take matters of emigration into my own hands.”

Throughout the trial, Eichmann tried to clarify, mostly without success, the point in his plea of his being “in the sense of the indictment, not guilty.” The indictment implied not only that he had acted on purpose, which he did not deny, but that he had acted out of base motives and in full knowledge of the criminal nature of his deeds. As for the base motives, he was sure that he was not what he called an *innerer Schweinehund*—a dirty bastard in the depths of his heart—and as for his conscience, he recalled perfectly well that he would

have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do—to ship millions of men, women, and children to their death with great zeal and most meticulous care. This last statement, admittedly, was hard to take. Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified Eichmann as “normal.” “More normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him,” one of them was said to have exclaimed, while another had found that Eichmann’s whole psychological outlook, including his relationship with his wife and children, his mother and father, his brothers and sisters and friends, was “not only normal but most desirable.” And, finally, a minister who paid regular visits to him in prison after the Supreme Court had finished hearing his appeal reassured everybody by declaring that Eichmann was “a man with very positive ideas.” Behind the comedy of the soul experts lay the hard fact that Eichmann’s was obviously no case of moral insanity. (Hausner’s recent revelations—in the *Saturday Evening Post*—of things he “could not bring out at the trial” have contradicted the information given informally in Jerusalem. Eichmann, we are now told, had been attested to be “a man obsessed with a dangerous and insatiable urge to kill,” “a dangerous, perverted, sadistic personality.” In which case he would have belonged in an insane asylum.) Worse, it was just as obviously no case of insane hatred of Jews, of fanatical anti-Semitism. He “personally” never had anything whatever against Jews; on the contrary, he had plenty of “private reasons” for not being a Jew hater. To be sure, there were fanatic anti-Semites among his closest friends—for instance, Vitez László Endre, State Secretary in Charge of Political (Jewish) Affairs in the Ministry of the Interior, in Hungary, who was hanged in Budapest in 1946—but this, it appeared, was more or less in the spirit of “some of my best friends are anti-Semites.”

Alas, nobody believed him. The prosecutor did not believe him, because that was not his job. Counsel for the defense paid no attention, because, unlike Eichmann, he was to all appearances not interested in questions of conscience. And the judges did not believe him, because they were too good, and perhaps also too conscious of the very foundations of their profession, to

admit that an average, “normal” person, neither feeble-minded nor indoctrinated nor cynical, could be perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong.

Eichmann was born on March 19, 1906, in Solingen, in the Rhineland—a German city that is famous for its knives, scissors, and surgical instruments. Fifty-four years later, indulging in what had become his favorite pastime—writing his memoirs—he described this memorable event as follows: “Today, fifteen years and a day after May 7, 1945, I begin to lead my thoughts back to that 19th of March of the year 1906, when at five o’clock in the morning . . . I entered life on earth in the aspect of a human being.” According to his religious beliefs, which had not changed since the Nazi period (in Jerusalem, he declared himself to be a *Gottgläubiger*—literally, a believer, but the Nazi term for those who had broken with Christianity—and he refused to take his oath on the Bible), this event was to be ascribed to a “*Höheren Sinnesträger*,” or “Higher Bearer of Meaning,” an entity somehow identical with “the movement of the universe,” to which human life, in itself devoid of “higher meaning,” is subject. The terminology is quite suggestive. To call God a *Höheren Sinnesträger* meant, linguistically, to give him some place in the military hierarchy, because the Nazis had changed the military “recipient of orders,” the *Befehlsempfänger*, into a *Befehlsträger*, “bearer of orders,” indicating, as in the ancient phrase “bearer of ill tidings,” the importance and the burden of responsibility that were supposedly conferred upon those who had to execute orders. Moreover, Eichmann, like everyone else connected with the Final Solution, was officially a *Geheimnisträger*, or “bearer of secrets,” as well, which in the way of catering to self-importance was certainly nothing to sneeze at. But Eichmann, not very much interested in metaphysics, remained silent on any more intimate relationship between the Bearer of Meaning and the bearer of orders, and proceeded to a consideration of the other possible source of his existence, his parents: “They would hardly have been so overjoyed at the arrival of their first-born had they been able to watch how in the hour of my birth the Norn of misfortune, to

spite the Norn of good fortune, was already spinning threads of grief and sorrow into my life. But a kind, impenetrable veil kept my parents from seeing into the future.”

The misfortune started soon enough; it started in school. Eichmann’s father, who was first an accountant for the Tramways & Electricity Co. in Solingen and in 1914 became an official of the same corporation in Linz, in Austria, had five children—four sons and a daughter—of whom only Adolf, the eldest, it seems, was unable to finish high school, or even to graduate from a vocational school for engineering, into which he was put when his incapacity first became manifest. Throughout his life, Eichmann deceived people about his early “misfortunes” by hiding behind certain financial misfortunes of his father’s, which cast no discredit on him. In Israel, however, during his first sessions with a police examiner, Captain Avner Less, who spent approximately thirty-five days with him and produced 3,564 typewritten pages from seventy-six recorder tapes, he was in an ebullient mood, full of enthusiasm for this unique opportunity “to pour forth everything I know” and, by the same token, to advance to the rank of the most coöperative defendant ever. (His enthusiasm was soon dampened, though never quite extinguished, when he was confronted with concrete questions based on irrefutable documents.) The best proof of his initial boundless confidence—obviously wasted on Captain Less—was that for the first time in his life he admitted his early disasters, although he must have been aware of the fact that he thus contradicted several important entries in the records he had supplied to Nazi authorities.

Well, the misfortunes were ordinary. Since he “had not exactly been the most hard-working” pupil—or, one may add, the most gifted—his father had taken him first from high school and then from vocational school, long before graduation. Hence, the profession that appears on all his official documents (construction engineer) had about as much connection with reality as the statement that his birthplace was Palestine and that he was

fluent in Hebrew and Yiddish—another outright lie he had liked to tell both to his S.S. comrades and to his Jewish victims. In the same vein, he had always pretended that he was later dismissed from a job as salesman for the Vacuum Oil Company, in Austria, because of membership in the National Socialist Party. The version he confided to Captain Less was less dramatic, but it was probably not the truth, either: He had been fired, he said, because it was a time of unemployment, in which unmarried employees were the first to lose their jobs. (This explanation, which may at first seem plausible, is not really satisfactory, because he lost his job in the spring of 1933, when he had been engaged for two full years to Veronika, or Vera, Liebl, who eventually became his wife. Why had he not married her while he still held a good job? He finally married in March, 1935, probably because bachelors in the S.S., as in the Vacuum Oil Company, were never sure of their jobs and could not be promoted.)

While young Eichmann was wasting his time in school, his father left the Tramways & Electricity Co. and went into business for himself. He bought a small mine, in Salzburg, and put his unpromising youngster to work in it as a mining laborer, but only until he could find a job for him in the sales department of the Upper Austrian Elektrobau Company. Here Eichmann remained for over two years. At the conclusion of that period, he was about twenty-two years old and without any prospects for a career; the only thing he had learned, perhaps, was how to sell. What then happened he himself described as his first break, and, again, we have two rather different versions of it. In a handwritten biographical record that Eichmann submitted in 1939 to win promotion in the S.S., he described it as follows: “I worked during the years of 1925 to 1927 as a salesman for the Upper Austrian Elektrobau Company. I left this position of my own free will, as the Vacuum Oil Company of Vienna offered me the representation for Upper Austria.” The key word here is “offered,” since, according to the story Eichmann told Captain Less in Israel, nobody had offered him anything. His mother had died when he was ten years old, and his father had married again in the same

year. A cousin of his stepmother's—a man he called “uncle”—who was president of the Austrian Automobile Club and was married to the daughter of a Jewish businessman in Czechoslovakia, was acquainted with the general manager of the Austrian Vacuum Oil Company, a Jew named Weiss, and used this connection to get his unfortunate relative a job as travelling salesman. Eichmann was properly grateful; in fact, the Jews in his family were among his “private reasons” for not hating Jews. Even in 1943 or 1944, when the Final Solution was in full swing, he had not forgotten: “The daughter of this marriage, I believe, was half-Jewish according to the Nuremberg Laws. . . . She came to see me in order to obtain my permission for her emigration into Switzerland. Naturally, I granted this request, and the same uncle came also to see me to ask me to intervene for some Viennese Jewish couple. I mention this only to show that I myself had no hatred against Jews, for my whole education through my mother and my father had been strictly Christian, and my mother, because of her Jewish relatives, had different opinions from those current in S.S. circles.” He went to considerable lengths to prove that he had never harbored any ill feelings against his victims, and, what is more, had never made any secret of that fact: “I explained this to Dr. [Josef] Löwenherz [head of the Jewish Community in Vienna] as I explained it to Dr. [Rudolf] Kastner [associate president of the Zionist Organization in Budapest]; I think I told it to everybody, each of my men knew it, they all heard it from me sometime. Even in elementary school, I had a [Jewish] classmate with whom I spent my free time, and he came to our house—a family in Linz by the name of Sebba. The last time we met, we walked together through the streets of Linz, I already with the Party emblem of the N.S.D.A.P. [the Nazi Party] in my buttonhole, and he did not think anything of it.” Had Eichmann been a bit less prim or the police examination less discreet (it did not extend to cross-examination, presumably so that the examiner would be assured of his coöperation), his “lack of prejudice” might have shown itself in another aspect as well. It seems that in Vienna, where he was extraordinarily successful in forcing Jews to leave the

country, he had a Jewish mistress, an “old flame” from Linz. *Rassenschande*—a word that literally means “race-defilement” but that in the Nazi vocabulary simply meant sexual intercourse with Jews—was probably the greatest crime a member of the S.S. could commit; though during the war the raping of Jewish girls became a favorite pastime at the front, it was by no means common for a higher S.S. officer to have an affair with a Jewish woman. Thus, Eichmann’s repeated violent denunciations, in Jerusalem, of Julius Streicher, the insane and obscene editor of *Der Stürmer*, and Streicher’s pornographic anti-Semitism were perhaps personally motivated, expressive of more than the routine contempt that an “enlightened” S.S. man was supposed to show toward the vulgar passions of lesser Party luminaries.

Eichmann spent five and a half years with the Vacuum Oil Company, and they must have been among the happier ones of his life. He was able to make a good living during a time of severe unemployment, and he was still living with his parents, except when he was out on the road. The moment when this idyll came to an end—on Pentecost, 1933—was among the few dates he always remembered. Actually, things had taken a turn for the worse somewhat earlier. At the end of 1932, he was unexpectedly transferred from Linz to Salzburg, very much against his inclinations: “I lost all joy in my work, I no longer liked to sell, to make calls.” From such sudden losses of *Arbeitsfreude* Eichmann was to suffer throughout his life. The worst of them, he explained to Captain Less, occurred when he was told of the Führer’s order (always officially called, to indicate its preëminence among his orders, the Führer Order) for the “physical extermination of the Jews,” in which he was to play such an important role. This, too, came unexpectedly; he himself had “never thought of such a thing, such a solution through violence,” and he described his reaction in almost the same words: “I lost everything, all joy in my work, all initiative, all interest; I was, so to speak, blown out.” A similar blowing out must have occurred in 1932 in Salzburg, and from his own account it is clear that he cannot have been very much surprised when he was fired, though one need not believe his testimony that he had been “very

happy” about his dismissal.

In any event, the year 1932 marked a turning point of his life. It was in April of this year that he joined the National Socialist Party and entered the S.S., upon the invitation of Ernst Kaltenbrunner, who was then a young lawyer in Linz and later became chief of the R.S.H.A., in one of whose six (later seven) main sections—Bureau IV, under the command of Heinrich Müller—Eichmann was employed, in charge of subsection B-4. In court, Eichmann gave the impression that he was a typical member of the lower middle classes, and this impression was more than borne out by every sentence he spoke or wrote while he was in prison. This was misleading; he was rather the déclassé son of a solid middle-class family, and it was indicative of his comedown that although his father was a good friend of Kaltenbrunner’s father, who was also a Linz lawyer, the relationship of the two sons was a rather cool one, in which Eichmann was unmistakably treated by Kaltenbrunner as his social inferior. Before Eichmann entered the Party and the S.S., he had proved that he was a joiner, and May 7, 1945, the official date of Germany’s defeat, was significant for him mainly because it then dawned upon him that thenceforward he would have to live without being a member of something or other: “I sensed I would have to live a leaderless and difficult individual life, I would receive no directives from anybody, no orders and commands would any longer be issued to me, no pertinent ordinances would be there to consult—in brief, a life never known before lay ahead of me.” When he was a child, his parents, who were uninterested in politics, had enrolled him in the Young Men’s Christian Association, from which he later went into the German youth movement, the *Wandervogel*. During his unsuccessful years in high school, he had joined the *Jungfrontkämpferverband*, the youth section of the German-Austrian organization of war veterans, which, though violently pro-German and anti-republican, was tolerated by the Austrian government. When Kaltenbrunner suggested that he enter the S.S., he was a probationary member—and just on the point of becoming a full-fledged member—of an altogether different

outfit, called the Schlaraffia, “an association of businessmen, physicians, actors, civil servants, etc., who came together to cultivate merriment and gaiety and so on,” as he described it, adding, “Each member had to give a lecture from time to time whose tenor was to be humor, refined humor.” Kaltenbrunner explained to Eichmann that he would have to give up this merry society, because as a Nazi he could not be a Freemason—a word that at the time was unknown to Eichmann. The choice between the S.S. and the Schlaraffia (the name derives from Schlaraffenland, the gluttons’ Cloud-Cuckoo-Land of German fairy tales) might have been hard to make, but he was “kicked out” of Schlaraffia anyhow; he had committed a sin that even now, as he told the story in the Israeli prison, made him blush with shame: “Contrary to my upbringing, it happened that I had tried, though I was the youngest, to invite my companions to a glass of wine.”

A leaf in the whirlwind of the time, Eichmann was blown from Schlaraffia, the never-never land of magically set tables and of roast chickens that would fly into your mouth—or, more accurately, he was blown from the company of respectable Philistines with degrees and assured careers and “refined humor,” whose worst vice was probably an irrepressible desire for practical jokes—into the marching columns of the Thousand-Year Reich, which lasted exactly twelve years and three months. At any rate, he did not enter the Party out of conviction, nor did he ever become convinced by it; whenever he was asked to give his reasons, he repeated a set of embarrassed clichés about the Treaty of Versailles and unemployment. Rather, “it was like being swallowed up by the Party against all expectations and without previous decision,” he said in court, adding, “it happened so quickly and suddenly.” He had no time and less desire to be properly informed; he did not even know the Party program, and he had not read (as he never did read) “Mein Kampf.” Kaltenbrunner had said to him, Why not join the S.S.? And he had replied, Why not? That was how it had happened, and that was about all there was to it.

Of course, that was *not* all there was to it. What Eichmann failed to tell the

presiding judge in cross-examination was that he had been an ambitious young man who was fed up with his job as travelling salesman even before the Vacuum Oil Company became fed up with him, and that from a humdrum life without significance or consequence the wind had blown him into History, as he understood it; namely, into a Movement that always kept moving and in which somebody like him—already a failure in the eyes of his social class, in the eyes of his family, and hence in his own eyes as well—could start from scratch and make a career. And if he did not always like what he had to do (for example, dispatching people to their death by the trainload instead of forcing them to emigrate); if he guessed, rather early, that the whole business would come to a bad end, with Germany losing the war; if all his most cherished plans came to nothing (an evacuation of European Jewry to Madagascar, the establishment of a Jewish territory in the Nisko region of Poland, an experiment with carefully built defense installations, around his Berlin office, to repel Russian tanks); and if, to his great “grief and sorrow,” he never advanced beyond the grade of S.S. *Obersturmbannführer* (a rank equivalent to lieutenant colonel)—in brief, if, with the exception of one year in Vienna, his life was beset with frustrations, he never forgot what the alternative would have been. Not only in Argentina, leading the unhappy existence of a refugee, but also in the courtroom of Jerusalem, with his life as good as forfeited, he might still have expressed a preference—if anybody had asked him—for being hanged as an S.S. *Obersturmbannführer a.D.* (that is, in retirement) over living out his life quietly and normally as a travelling salesman for the Vacuum Oil Company.

Eichmann’s new career did not start very promisingly. In the spring of 1933, while he was out of a job, the Nazi Party and all its affiliations were suspended in Austria because of Hitler’s rise to power. But even without this new calamity a career in the Austrian Nazi Party would then have been out of the question; those who enlisted in the S.S. went on working at their regular jobs. (Kaltenbrunner was still a partner in his father’s law firm.) Eichmann therefore decided to go to Germany—a decision that was all the

more natural because his family had never given up its German citizenship. (This fact was of some relevance to the trial. Dr. Servatius had asked the West German government to demand extradition of the accused and, failing this, to pay the expenses of the defense, and Bonn had refused, on the ground that Eichmann was not a German national—which was not true.) At Passau, on the German border, he was suddenly a travelling salesman again, and when he reported to the local *Gauleiter*, he asked him eagerly “if he had perhaps some connection with the Bavarian Vacuum Oil Company.” Well, this was one of his not infrequent relapses from one period of his life into another; whenever he was confronted with telltale signs of his unregenerate Nazi outlook—whether in Argentina or in the Jerusalem jail—he excused himself with “There I go again, the old song and dance [*die alte Tour*].” But the relapse in Passau was quickly cured; he was told that he had better enlist for military training (“All right with me, I thought to myself, why not become a soldier?”), and, having done so, he was sent to two Bavarian S.S. camps, one after the other—in Lechfeld and in Dachau (he had nothing to do with the concentration camp there)—where “the Austrian Legion in exile” received its training. Thus he did become an Austrian after a fashion, despite his German passport. He remained in one or the other of these military camps from the beginning of August, 1933, to the end of September, 1934, a period in which he advanced to the rank of *Scharführer* (corporal) and had plenty of time to reconsider his willingness to embark upon the career of a soldier. According to his own account, there was only one thing in which he distinguished himself during these fourteen months, and that was punishment drill, which he performed with great obstinacy, in the wrathful spirit of “Serves my father right if my hands freeze. Why doesn’t he buy me gloves?” But apart from this rather dubious pleasure, to which he owed his first promotion, he had a miserable time; “The humdrum of military service, that was something I couldn’t stand, day after day always the same, over and over again the same.” Thus bored to distraction, he heard that the Security Service of the *Reichsführer* S.S. (the *Sicherheitsdienst*, or

S.D.) had jobs open, and applied for one immediately. His application was approved.

In 1934, the S.D. was a relatively new apparatus in the S.S. It had been founded two years earlier by Heinrich Himmler, to serve as the intelligence service of the Party, and it was now headed by Reinhardt Heydrich, a former Navy Intelligence officer, who was to become, as Gerald Reitlinger, author of “The Final Solution,” put it, “the real engineer of the Final Solution.” Its initial task had been to spy on Party members—an activity giving the S.S. an ascendance over the regular Party apparatus. Then it had taken on some additional duties, becoming the information and research center for the *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Secret State Police, or Gestapo). This was the first step toward the merger of the S.S. and the police, which was not carried out until September of 1939, though Himmler held the double post of *Reichsführer* S.S. and Chief of the German Police from 1936 on. Eichmann, of course, could not at that time have known anything of this, but he seems to have known nothing even of the nature of the S.D. when he entered it—a state of affairs that was not really strange, since the operations of the S.D. had always been top-secret. According to what he told Captain Less, he joined the S.D. under a misapprehension. “When the high Party officials drove along,” he said, “there were commando guards with them, men standing on the running boards of the cars. . . . In brief, I had mistaken them [Himmler’s S.D.] for the Reich Security Service (*Reichssicherheitsdienst*), which I only much later distinguished from the commando guard (*Begleitkommando*) with whom I had made this confusion [in the first place], but nobody made this clear to me and no one told me anything.” (The question of whether this was the truth had a certain bearing on the trial, where it had to be decided whether he had volunteered for his position in the S.D. or had been drafted into it.) Furthermore, he testified to having suffered “a great disappointment” in the S.D. His disappointment consisted chiefly in the fact that he was back at the bottom and had to start all over again; his only consolation was that other members of the S.D. had

made the same mistake. He was put into the research division, in Berlin, where his first job was to file all information concerning Freemasonry—which in the early Nazi ideological muddle was somehow lumped with Judaism, Catholicism, and Communism—and to help in the establishment of an Anti-Freemasonry Museum. He now had ample opportunity to learn what this strange word meant that Kaltenbrunner had thrown at him in their discussion of the Schlaraffia. (Incidentally, an eagerness to establish museums to be used as propaganda against their enemies was characteristic of the Nazis. During the war, several German bureaus competed bitterly for the honor of establishing anti-Jewish museums and libraries. We owe to this strange craze the preservation of many great cultural treasures of European Jewry.) Unfortunately, things were again very, very boring, so Eichmann was greatly relieved when, after four or five months of Freemasonry, he was put into a brand-new department, concerned with Jews. This was the real beginning of the career that was to end in the Jerusalem court.

It was the year 1935, when Germany, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, introduced general conscription and publicly announced plans for rearmament, including the building of an air force and a navy. This was also the year when Germany, having left the League of Nations in 1933, prepared, far from secretly, the occupation of the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. It was the year of Hitler's peace speeches ("Germany needs peace and desires peace," "We recognize Poland as the home of a great and nationally conscious people," "Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria, or to conclude an *Anschluss*"), and, above all, it was the year when the Nazi regime won general and genuine recognition both in Germany and abroad, Hitler being admired almost everywhere as a great national statesman. In Germany itself, this was a time of transition. Because of the enormous rearmament program, unemployment had ceased to exist, and the initial resistance of the working class was thereby broken. The aggressions of the regime, which had at first been directed primarily against "anti-Fascists"—Communists, Socialists, left-

wing intellectuals, and Jews in prominent positions—had not yet shifted entirely to the persecution of the Jews qua Jews. To be sure, one of the first steps taken by the Nazi government, back in 1933, had been the exclusion of Jews from the civil service (which in Germany included all teaching positions, from grammar school to university, and most branches of the entertainment industry; namely, the theatre, the opera, concerts, and radio) and, in general, their removal from public office, but private business and the legal and medical professions were not touched until 1938, though Jews were no longer permitted to take the state examinations leading to these professions. The emigration of Jews in these years proceeded, on the whole, in an orderly and not unduly accelerated fashion, and the currency restrictions that made it difficult, but not impossible, for Jews to take their money—or, at least, the greater part of it—out of the country were the same for non-Jews; they dated back to the days of the Weimar Republic. There were a certain number of *Einzelaktionen*—individual actions putting Jews under pressure to sell their businesses and real property at absurdly low prices—but they usually occurred in small towns and, indeed, could be traced to the spontaneous, “individual” initiative of some enterprising Storm Troopers, the so-called S.A. men, or Brown Shirts, who, except for their officer corps, were mainly recruited from the lower classes. The police, it is true, never stopped these “excesses,” but the Nazi authorities were not entirely happy about them, because they affected the value of real estate all over the country. The Jewish emigrants, unless they were political refugees, were mostly young people who realized that there was no future for them in Germany—and since they soon found out that there was hardly any future for them in other European countries either, some of them actually returned during this period. When Eichmann was asked how he had reconciled his personal feelings about Jews with the outspoken and violent anti-Semitism of the Party he had joined, he replied with the proverb “Nothing is as hot when you eat it as when it’s being cooked”—a proverb that was then on the lips of many Jews as well. They lived in a fool’s paradise, in which, for a few years,

even Streicher spoke of a “legal solution” of the Jewish problem. It took the organized pogroms of November, 1938—the so-called *Kristallnacht*, or Night of Broken Glass, when seventy-five hundred Jewish shop-windows were broken, all synagogues went up in flames, and twenty thousand Jewish men were taken off to concentration camps—to expel them from it.

One frequently forgotten point of the matter is that the famous Nuremberg Laws, issued in the fall of 1935, had failed to do the trick. At the trial, the testimony of three witnesses from Germany—former high-ranking officials of the Zionist Organization who left Germany shortly before the outbreak of the war—gave only the barest glimpse into the true state of affairs during the first five years of the Nazi regime. The Nuremberg Laws had deprived the Jews of their political rights but not of their civil rights; they were no longer citizens (*Reichsbürger*), but they remained members of the German state (*Staatsangehörige*)—which meant that if they emigrated, they were not automatically stateless. Sexual intercourse between Jews and Germans and the contraction of mixed marriages were forbidden, and no German woman under the age of forty-five could be employed in a Jewish household. Of these provisions, only the last was of practical significance; the others merely legalized a *de-facto* situation. Hence, it was felt that the Nuremberg Laws stabilized the new situation of Jews in the German Reich. They had been second-class citizens, to put it mildly, since January 30, 1933; their almost complete separation from the rest of the population had been achieved in a matter of weeks, through terror but also through the more than ordinary connivance of those around them. “There was a wall between Gentiles and Jews,” Dr. Benno Cohn, from Berlin, testified at the trial. “I cannot remember speaking to a Christian during all my journeys over Germany.” Now, the Jews felt, having been given laws of their own, they would no longer be outlawed; if they kept to themselves—as they had been forced to do anyhow—they would be able to live unmolested. In the words of the *Reichsvertretung* of the Jews in Germany (the national association of all communities and organizations, which had been founded in September,

1933, on the initiative of the Berlin Community, and was in no way Nazi-appointed), the intention of the Nuremberg Laws was “to establish a level on which a bearable relationship between the German and the Jewish people [became] possible”—to which, around the same time, a member of the Berlin Community who was a radical Zionist added, “Life is possible under every law. However, in complete ignorance of what is permitted and what is not one cannot live. One can also be a useful and respected citizen as a member of a minority in the midst of a great people.” And since Hitler, in the Röhm purge of the summer of 1934, had broken the power of the S.A., whose brown-shirted Storm Troopers had been almost exclusively responsible for the early pogroms and atrocities, and since the Jews were blissfully unaware of the growing power of the black-shirted S.S., who ordinarily abstained from what Eichmann contemptuously called “the *Stürmer* methods,” Jews generally believed that a modus vivendi would be possible; in fact, they even offered to coöperate in “the solution of the Jewish question.” In short, when Eichmann entered upon his apprenticeship in Jewish affairs (on which, four years later, he was the recognized “expert”), and made his first contacts with Jewish functionaries, both Zionists and Assimilationists talked in terms of a great “Jewish revival,” a “great constructive movement of German Jewry,” and quarrelled among themselves in ideological terms about the desirability of Jewish emigration, as though this depended upon their own decisions.

Eichmann’s account, during the police examination, of how he was introduced into the new department—an account that was, of course, distorted but not wholly devoid of truth—oddly recalls this fool’s paradise. The first thing that happened was that his new boss, a certain von Mildenstein, who shortly thereafter got himself transferred to Albert Speer’s *Organisation Todt*, where he was in charge of highway construction (he was what Eichmann pretended to be—an engineer by profession), required him to read Theodor Herzl’s “Der Judenstaat,” the famous Zionist classic, which converted Eichmann immediately and forever to Zionism. From then on, as

he repeated over and over, he thought of hardly anything but a “political solution” (as opposed to the later “physical solution,” the first meaning expulsion and the second extermination) and how to “get some firm ground under the feet of the Jews.” To this end, he began spreading the gospel among his S.S. comrades—giving lectures and writing pamphlets. He then acquired a smattering of Hebrew, which enabled him to read, haltingly, a Yiddish newspaper—not a very difficult accomplishment, since Yiddish is basically an old German dialect written in Hebrew letters, and can be understood by any German-speaking person who has mastered a few dozen Hebrew words. He even read one more book, Adolf Böhm’s “The History of Zionism” (during the trial he kept confusing it with Herzl’s “Der Judenstaat”), and this was perhaps a considerable achievement for a man who, by his own account, had always been utterly reluctant to read anything except newspapers, and, to the distress of his father, had never paid any attention to the books in the family library. Following up Böhm, he studied the organizational setup of the Zionist movement—its parties, its youth groups, its different programs. This did not make him an “authority,” but it was enough to earn him an assignment as official spy on the Zionist offices and Zionist meetings. It is worth noting that his schooling in Jewish affairs was almost entirely concerned with Zionism.

Eichmann’s first personal contacts with Jewish functionaries, all of them well-known Zionists of long standing, were thoroughly satisfactory. The reason he became so fascinated by the “Jewish question,” he explained, was his own “idealism;” these Jews, unlike the Assimilationists, whom he always despised, and unlike the Orthodox Jews, who bored him, were “idealists,” like him. An “idealist,” according to Eichmann’s notions, was not simply a man who believed in an “idea” or a man who did not steal or accept bribes, though these qualifications were indispensable. An “idealist” was a man who *lived* for his idea (hence he could not be a businessman, for example) and who was prepared to sacrifice for his idea everything and, especially, everybody. When he asserted during the police examination that he would

have sent his own father to his death if that had been required, he did not mean merely to stress the extent to which he was under orders, and ready to obey them; he also meant to show what an “idealist” he had always been. Of course, the perfect “idealist,” like everybody else, had his personal feelings, but if they came into conflict with his “ideal,” he would never permit them to interfere with his actions.

Eichmann was given his first opportunity to apply in practice what he had learned during his apprenticeship when, after the *Anschluss*, or incorporation of Austria into the Reich, in March, 1938, he was sent to Vienna to organize a kind of emigration that had thus far been utterly unknown in Germany, where up to the fall of 1938 the fiction was maintained that Jews were permitted to leave the country if they wished but were not forced to do so. Eichmann was made head of what was called the Center for Jewish Emigration, and his task was defined as “forced emigration.” The words meant exactly what they said; all Jews, regardless of their wishes and regardless of their citizenship, were to be forced to emigrate—an act that in ordinary language is called expulsion. Whenever Eichmann thought back to the twelve years that were the core of his life, he declared this year in Vienna to have been its happiest and most successful period. Shortly before he left Berlin, he had been promoted to officer’s rank, becoming an *Untersturmführer*, or second lieutenant, and he had been recommended for his “comprehensive knowledge of the methods of organization and ideology of the opponent, Jewry.” The job in Vienna was his first important one; his whole career, which had progressed rather slowly, was in the balance. He must have been frantic to make good, and certainly his success was spectacular. In eight months, forty-five thousand Jews left Austria, whereas no more than nineteen thousand Jews left Germany in the same period; in less than eighteen months, Austria was “cleansed” of close to a hundred and fifty thousand people (roughly fifty per cent of its Jewish population), all of whom left the country “legally.” How did Eichmann do it? The basic idea that made all this possible was not his but, almost certainly, was contained in

a specific directive from Heydrich, who had sent him to Vienna in the first place. (Eichmann was vague about the question of authorship, though he claimed it by implication; the Israeli authorities, being bound to the fantastic “thesis of the all-inclusive responsibility of Adolf Eichmann,” as an Israeli judge who prepared material for the trial expressed it, and to the even more fantastic supposition that, in the words of another government-appointed researcher, “one [i.e. his] mind was behind it all,” helped him considerably in his efforts to deck himself in borrowed plumes.) The idea, as Heydrich explained it in a conference with Göring on the morning of the *Kristallnacht*, was simple and ingenious enough. “Through the Jewish Community, we extracted a certain amount of money from the rich Jews who wanted to emigrate,” Heydrich said. “By paying this amount, and an additional sum in foreign currency, they made it possible for a number of poor Jews to leave. The problem was not to make the rich Jews leave but to get rid of the Jewish mob.” Still, there remained enough problems that could be solved only in the course of the operation, and there is no doubt that here Eichmann, for the first time in his life, discovered in himself some special qualities. There were two things he could do well, or better than many other people: he could organize and he could negotiate.

Immediately upon his arrival in Vienna, Eichmann opened negotiations with the representatives of the Jewish Community—whom he had to liberate from prisons and concentration camps for the purpose, since the “revolutionary zeal” in Austria, greatly exceeding the early “excesses” in Germany, had resulted in the imprisonment of practically all prominent Jews. Having undergone such imprisonment, the Jewish functionaries did not need Eichmann to convince them of the desirability of emigration. Rather, their concern was to inform him of the enormous difficulties that lay ahead. Apart from the financial problem—already “solved”—the chief difficulty was the great number of papers every emigrant had to assemble before he could leave the country. Each of the papers was valid only for a limited time, and this meant that the validity of the first had usually expired

long before the last could be obtained. Once Eichmann understood how the whole thing worked—or, rather, did not work—he “took counsel with himself,” as he said in Jerusalem, and “gave birth to the idea that I thought would do justice to both parties.” He imagined “an assembly line, at whose beginning the first document is put, and then the other papers, and at its end the passport would have to come out as the end product.” This plan could be realized if all the offices concerned—the Ministry of Finance, the income-tax people, the police, the Jewish Community, and so forth—were housed under the same roof and forced to do their work on the spot, in the presence of the applicant, who would no longer have to run from office to office, and who, presumably, would also be spared some humiliating chicanery and certain expenses for bribes. When everything was ready, the assembly line did its work smoothly and quickly, and Eichmann thereupon “invited” the Jewish functionaries from Berlin to inspect it. They were appalled. “This is like an automatic factory, like a flour mill connected with some bakery,” one of them said. “At one side you put in a Jew who still has some property and, let us assume, a factory, or a shop, or some bank account, and he goes through the whole building from counter to counter, from office to office, and he comes out at the other end without any money, without any rights, with only a passport in which it says: ‘You must leave the country within a fortnight. Otherwise, you will go to a concentration camp!’ ” This, of course, was essentially the truth about the procedure, but it was not the whole truth. Actually, these Jews could not be left “without any money,” for the simple reason that no country at this date would have received them in that condition. They needed, and were given, their *Vorzeigegeld*—the amount they had to show in order to obtain their visas and to pass the immigration inspection of the recipient country. For this amount, they needed foreign currency, which the Reich had no intention of wasting on its Jews. These needs were not covered by Jewish accounts in foreign countries, which, in any event, were difficult to get at, because they had been illegal for many years. Eichmann therefore sent a number of Jewish functionaries abroad to

solicit funds from the great Jewish organizations, and these funds were then sold by the Jewish Community to the prospective emigrants for a considerable profit. One dollar, for instance, was sold for ten or twenty marks when its market value was 4.20 marks. It was chiefly in this way that the Community acquired not only the money necessary for the poor Jews and people without accounts abroad but also the funds it needed for its own, hugely expanded activities. Eichmann had not arranged the deal without encountering considerable opposition from the German financial authorities, who, after all, could not remain unaware of the fact that these transactions amounted to a devaluation of the mark.

Bragging was the vice that was Eichmann's undoing. It was sheerrodomontade when he told men working under him during the last days of the war, "I will jump into my grave laughing, because the fact that I have the death of five million Jews [or "enemies of the Reich," as he always claimed to have said] on my conscience gives me extraordinary satisfaction." He did not jump, and if he had anything on his conscience, it was not murder but, as it turned out, the fact that he once had slapped the face of Dr. Löwenherz, head of the Jewish Community in Vienna, who later became one of his favorite Jews. (He had apologized in front of his staff at the time, but this incident kept bothering him.) The claim that he was responsible for the death of five million Jews—the approximate total of the losses suffered from the combined efforts of all Nazi bureaus and authorities—was preposterous, as he knew very well, but he had kept repeating the damning sentence *ad nauseam* to everyone who would listen, even long after the war, when he was in Argentina. (Former Consular Official Horst Grell, who had known Eichmann in Hungary and had heard him make the claim there, testified in a court, in Berchtesgaden, in 1961, that in his opinion Eichmann was boasting. That must have been obvious to everyone who heard him utter his absurd claim.) Certainly Eichmann was boasting when he pretended that he had "invented" the ghetto system, or that he "gave birth to the idea" of shipping all European Jews to Madagascar. The Theresienstadt ghetto, in

Czechoslovakia, of which Eichmann claimed the “paternity,” was established years after the ghetto system had been introduced into the occupied territories of Eastern Europe, and the setting up of a special ghetto for certain privileged categories—which is what Theresienstadt was—was the “idea” of Heydrich; so, indeed, was the whole Nazi ghetto system. The Madagascar plan seems to have been “born” in the bureaus of the German Foreign Office, and Eichmann’s own contribution to it turned out to owe a good deal to Dr. Löwenherz, whom he had called upon to put down “some basic thoughts” on how some four million Jews might be transported from Europe after the war—presumably to Palestine, since the Madagascar project was top-secret. (Upon being confronted at the trial with the Löwenherz report, Eichmann did not deny that he had enlisted Dr. Löwenherz’s help; it was one of the few moments when he appeared genuinely embarrassed.) What eventually led to his capture in Argentina was his compulsion to talk big, even there—he was, he said at the time, “fed up with being an anonymous wanderer between two worlds”—and the compulsion must have grown considerably stronger as time passed, not only because he had nothing to do that he could consider worth doing but also because the postwar era had bestowed so much unexpected “fame” upon him.

But bragging is a common vice. A more specific, and also a more decisive, flaw in Eichmann’s character was his almost total inability ever to look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view. Nowhere was this flaw more conspicuous than in his account of his good year in Vienna. He and his men and the Jews were all “pulling together,” and whenever there were any difficulties, the Jewish functionaries would come running to him “to unburden their hearts,” to tell him “all their grief and sorrow,” and to ask his help. The Jews “desired” to emigrate, and he, Eichmann, was there to help them, because it happened that at that time the Nazi authorities had expressed a desire to see their Reich *judenrein*. The two desires coincided, and he, Eichmann, could “do justice to both parties.” At the trial, he never gave an inch when it came to this part of the story, though he agreed that

today, when “times have changed so much,” the Jews might not be too happy to recall this “pulling together,” and he said he did not want “to hurt their feelings.”

The German text of the taped police examination, which was conducted by Captain Less between May 29, 1960, and January 17, 1961, and each page of which was corrected and approved by Eichmann, demonstrates that the horrible can sometimes be not only ludicrous but downright funny. Some of the comedy cannot be conveyed in English, because it lies in Eichmann’s heroic fight with the German language, which invariably defeats him. It is funny when he speaks, *passim*, of “winged words” (“*geflügelte Worte*,” a German colloquialism for famous quotes from the classics), because he means “stock phrases” (“*Redensarten*”) or “slogans” (“*Schlagworte*”). It was both funny and confusing when, during the cross-examination conducted by Judge Landau on the Sassen documents, he used the phrase “*kontra geben*” (“to give tit for tat”), which is a term used in a card game called skat, to indicate that he had resisted Sassen’s efforts to liven up his stories; Judge Landau, obviously ignorant of the mysteries of card games, did not understand, and Eichmann could not think of any other way to put it. He himself seemed dimly aware of a defect that must have plagued him even in school—it amounted to a mild case of aphasia—for he apologized by saying, “Officialese [*Amtssprache*] is my only language.” The real point here is that officialese became his language because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché. (Was it these clichés that the psychiatrists thought so “normal” and “desirable”? Are these the “positive ideas” a clergyman hopes for in those to whose souls he ministers?) Eichmann’s best opportunity to show this positive side of his character in Jerusalem came when the young police officer, in charge of his mental and psychological well-being, handed him “Lolita” for relaxation. After two days Eichmann returned it, visibly indignant; “That is quite an unwholesome book [*Das ist aber ein sehr unerfreuliches Buch*],” he told his guard.) The judges were right when they finally told the accused that all he had said was “empty

talk”—except that they thought the emptiness feigned, and believed that the accused wished to cover up other thoughts, which were not empty but hideous. This supposition seems refuted by the striking consistency with which Eichmann, despite his rather bad memory, constantly repeated, word for word, the same stock phrases and self-invented clichés (when he did succeed in constructing a sentence of his own, he thereupon repeated it until it became a cliché) in referring to every event or incident that was of some importance to him. Whether he wrote his memoirs in Argentina or in Jerusalem, whether he talked to the police examiner or to the court, what he said was always the same, expressed in the same words. The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*; that is, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication with him was possible, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words of others, or even the presence of others, and hence against reality as such. Thus, confronted for eight months with the reality of being examined by a Jewish policeman, Eichmann did not have the slightest hesitation in explaining to him at considerable length, and repeatedly, how he had been unable to attain a higher grade in the S.S., and why this was not his fault. He had done everything; he had even asked to be sent to active military duty. (“Now, off to the front, I said to myself, then the *Standartenführer* [colonelcy] will come quicker.”) In court, on the contrary, he pretended that he had asked to be transferred because he wanted to escape his murderous duties. He did not insist much on this, though, and, strangely, he was not confronted with his statements to the police examiner, to whom he had said that he had hoped to be nominated for the *Einsatzgruppen*, the S.S. mobile killing units in the East, because by the time they were officially organized, in March, 1941, his office was “dead;” that is, there was no longer any emigration, and deportations had not yet been started. There was, finally, his greatest ambition—to be promoted to the job of police chief in some German town. Again, nothing doing. What makes these pages of the police

examinations so funny is that Eichmann related all this in the tone of someone who was sure to find, as he put it, “normal, human” sympathy for a hard-luck story. “Whatever I prepared and planned, everything went wrong,” he said. “My personal affairs as well as my years-long efforts to obtain land and soil for the Jews came to naught. I don’t know—everything in my life was as if under an evil spell; whatever I planned and whatever I wanted and desired to do, fate prevented it somehow. I was frustrated in everything, no matter what.” When Captain Less asked his opinion on some damning and possibly lying evidence furnished by a former colonel of the S.S., he exclaimed, suddenly stuttering with rage, “I am very much surprised that this man could ever have been S.S. *Standartenführer!* That surprises me very much indeed. It is altogether, altogether unthinkable. I don’t know what to say.” He never said these things in a spirit of defiance, as though he wanted, even now, to defend the standards by which he had lived in the past. The very word “S.S.” or “career” or “Himmler” (whom he always spoke of by his long official title, *Reichsführer* S.S. and Chief of the German Police, although he by no means admired him) triggered in him a mechanism that had become completely unalterable. The presence of Captain Less, a Jew from Germany, who was unlikely to think that members of the S.S. advanced in their careers through the exercise of high moral qualities, did not for a moment throw this mechanism out of gear.

Now and then, the comedy breaks into the horror itself, and the result is stories, presumably true enough, whose macabre humor easily surpasses that of any Surrealist invention. Such was the story that Eichmann told during the police examination about the unlucky Commercial Councillor Bertold Storfer, one of the representatives of the Viennese Jewish Community. Eichmann had received a telegram from Rudolf Höss, Commandant of Auschwitz, telling him that Storfer had arrived and had urgently requested to see Eichmann. “I said to myself, O.K., this man has always behaved well; that is worth my while. . . . I’ll go there myself and see what is the matter with him. And I go to Ebner [chief of the Gestapo in Vienna], and Ebner

says—I remember it only vaguely—‘Yes,’ he said, ‘if only he had not been so clumsy! He went into hiding and wanted to escape,’ or something of the sort. And the police arrested him and sent him to the concentration camp, and, according to the orders of the *Reichsführer* [Himmler], no one could get out once he was in. Nothing could be done; neither Dr. Ebner nor I nor anybody else could do anything about it. I went to Auschwitz, looked up Höss, and said: ‘Storfer is here?’ ‘Yes, yes [he replied], he is in one of the labor gangs.’ With Storfer afterward, well, it was normal and human; we had a normal, human encounter. He told me all his grief and sorrow. I said, ‘Well, my dear old friend [*Ja, mein Lieber guter Storfer*], we certainly got it! What rotten luck!’ And I also said, ‘Look, I really cannot help you, because according to orders of the *Reichsführer* nobody can get you out. I can’t get you out. Dr. Ebner can’t get you out. I hear you made a mistake, that you went into hiding or wanted to bolt, which, after all, you did not need to do.’ [Eichmann meant that Storfer, as a Jewish functionary, had immunity from deportation.] I forget what his reply to this was. And then I asked him how he was. And he said, yes, he wondered if he couldn’t be let off work; it was heavy work. And then I said to Höss, ‘Work—Storfer won’t have to work!’ Höss said, ‘Everyone works here.’ So I said, ‘O.K. I’ll make out a chit to the effect that Storfer has to keep the gravel paths in order with a broom’—there were little gravel paths there—‘and that he has the right to sit down with his broom on one of the benches.’ I said, ‘Will that be all right, Mr. Storfer? Will that suit you?’ Whereupon he was very pleased, and we shook hands, and then he was given the broom and sat down on the bench. It was a great inner joy to me that I could at least see the man with whom I had worked for so many long years, and that we could speak with each other.” Six weeks after this normal, human encounter, Storfer was dead—not gassed, apparently, but shot.

Is this a textbook case of bad faith combined with outrageous stupidity? Or is it simply the case of the eternally unrepentant criminal (Dostoevski once mentions in his diaries that in Siberia, among scores of murderers,

rapists, and burglars, he never met a single man who would admit that he had done wrong)—of the wrongdoer who cannot afford to face reality because his crime has become part and parcel of it? Yet Eichmann's case is different from the case of the ordinary criminal, who can shield himself effectively against the reality of a non-criminal world only within the narrow limits of his gang. Eichmann needed only to recall the past in order to feel sure that he was not lying and that he was not deceiving himself, for he and the world he lived in had once been in perfect harmony. Eighty million Germans had been shielded against reality and factuality by exactly the same self-deception, lies, and stupidity that had now become ingrained in Eichmann's nature. These lies changed from year to year, and they frequently contradicted each other; moreover, they were not necessarily the same for the various branches of the Party hierarchy or the people at large. But the practice of self-deception had become so widespread—almost a moral prerequisite for survival—that even now, eighteen years after the collapse of the Nazi regime, when most of the specific content of its lies has been forgotten, it is sometimes difficult not to believe that mendacity has become an integral part of the German national character. During the war, the lie that was most effective with the whole of the German people was the slogan calling the war “the battle of destiny for the German people” (“*der Schicksalskampf des deutschen Volkes*”). This slogan, which was coined either by Hitler or by Goebbels, made self-deception easier on three counts, for it suggested, first, that the war was no war; second, that it was started by destiny and not by Germany; and, third, that it was a matter of life and death for the Germans, who must annihilate their enemies or be annihilated.

Eichmann's astounding willingness, both in Argentina and in Jerusalem, to admit his crimes was due less to his own criminal capacity for self-deception than to the aura of systematic mendacity that had constituted the general, and generally accepted, atmosphere of the Third Reich. “Of course” he had played a role in the extermination of the Jews; of course if he “had not transported them, they would not have been delivered to the butcher.” He

went on to ask, “What is there to ‘admit?’” Now, he proceeded, he “would like to find peace with [his] former enemies”—a sentiment he shared not only with Himmler (who had expressed it during the last year of the war) and with the Labor Front leader Robert Ley (who, before he committed suicide in Nuremberg, had proposed the establishment of a “conciliation committee” consisting of the Nazis responsible for the massacres and the Jewish survivors) but also, unbelievably, with many ordinary Germans, who were heard to express themselves in exactly the same terms at the end of the war. This outrageous cliché was no longer issued to them from above; it was a self-fabricated stock phrase, as devoid of reality as those clichés by which the people had lived for twelve years.

Eichmann’s mind was filled to the brim with such sentences. His memory proved to be very unreliable about what actually happened. In a rare moment of exasperation, Judge Landau asked the accused, “What *can* you remember?” (if you don’t remember the discussions at the so-called Wannsee Conference, which dealt with the various methods of killing Jews); the answer, of course, was that Eichmann remembered the turning points in his own career rather well but that they did not necessarily coincide with the turning points in the story of Jewish extermination, or, as a matter of fact, with the turning points in history. (He always had trouble remembering the exact date of the outbreak of the war or of the invasion of Russia.) But the point of the matter is that he had not forgotten a single one of the sentences that at one time or another had served to give him what he repeatedly called a “sense of elation.” Hence, whenever, during the cross-examination, the judges tried to appeal to his conscience, they were met with “elation,” and they were outraged as well as disconcerted when they learned that the accused had at his disposal a different elating cliché for each period of his life and each of his activities. In his mind, there was no contradiction between “I will jump into my grave laughing,” appropriate for the end of the war, and “I am ready to hang myself in public as a warning example for all anti-Semites on this earth,” which now, under vastly different circumstances, fulfilled

exactly the same function—that of giving him a lift.

These habits of Eichmann's created considerable difficulty during the trial—less for Eichmann himself than for those who had come to prosecute him, to defend him, to judge him, or to report on him. For all this, it was essential that one take him seriously, and this was very hard to do, unless one sought the easiest way out of the dilemma between the unspeakable horror of the deeds and the undeniable ludicrousness of the man who perpetrated them, and declared him a clever, calculating liar—which he obviously was not. His own convictions in this matter were far from modest: “One of the few gifts fate bestowed upon me is a capacity for truth insofar as it depends upon myself.” This gift he had claimed even before the prosecutor wanted to ascribe to him crimes he had not committed. In the disorganized, rambling notes he made in Argentina, in preparation for the interview with Sassen, when he was still, as he pointed out at the time, “in full possession of my physical and psychological freedom,” he had issued a fantastic warning to “future historians [to] be objective enough not to stray from the path of truth recorded here”—fantastic because every line of these scribblings shows his utter ignorance of everything that was not directly, technically, bureaucratically connected with his job, and also shows an extraordinarily faulty memory.

Despite all the efforts of the prosecution, everybody could see that this man was not a “monster,” but it was difficult indeed not to suspect that he was a clown. And since this suspicion would have been fatal to the whole enterprise, and was also rather hard to sustain, in view of the sufferings he and his like had caused so many millions of people, his worst clowneries were hardly noticed. What could you do with a man who first declared, with great emphasis, that the one thing he had learned in an ill-spent life was that one should never take an oath (“Today no man, no judge could ever persuade me to make a sworn statement. I refuse it; I refuse it for moral reasons. Since my experience tells me that if one is loyal to his oath, one day he has to take the

consequences, I have made up my mind once and for all that no judge in the world or other authority will ever be capable of making me swear an oath, to give sworn testimony. I won't do it voluntarily and no one will be able to force me"), and then, after being told explicitly that if he wished to testify in his own defense he might "do so under oath or without an oath," declared without further ado that he would prefer to testify under oath? Or who, repeatedly and with a great show of feeling, assured the court, as he had assured the police examiner, that the worst thing he could do would be to try to escape his true responsibilities, to fight for his neck, to plead for mercy—and then, upon instruction of his counsel, submitted a handwritten document that contained a plea for mercy? As far as Eichmann was concerned, these were questions of changing moods, not of inconsistencies, and as long as he was capable of finding, either in his memory or on the spur of the moment, an elating stock phrase to go with them, he was quite content. ♦

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