

Thinking Prevents Grave Evil: An Analysis of Thinking According to Hannah Arendt

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Abstract: Hannah Arendt identifies that, in most cases, human evil is banal. People who committed grave evil did not think profoundly about what they were doing, and it did not come from what we consider their “optio Fundamentalis”. This study endeavors to critically explore Hannah Arendt’s account of “Thinking” as a fundamental capacity of human existence. This study aims to investigate Hannah Arendt’s thoughts on Thinking and its relation to other human capacities and actions. We will utilize a critical analysis of Arendt’s works as the method of this study. We will critically analyze her important works, such as *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, *The Life of the Mind*, and *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954*, while her other works will also be considered. After this study, we find that the activity of Thinking is an essential capacity of the human being as a moral being. Only if human beings think profoundly, he/she can they produce meaningful actions that can hinder them from banal actions, which could even lead them to commit grave evils. The moral capacity of human beings remains in their act of Thinking. The need for exercising the activity of profound thinking is, therefore, implied.

Keywords: Thinking, Banality of Evil, Dialogue, Imagination, Conscience

Abstrak: Hannah Arendt mengidentifikasi bahwa dalam banyak kasus kejahatan manusia adalah banal. Orang-orang yang melakukan kejahatan besar tidak berpikir secara mendalam tentang apa yang mereka lakukan, dan itu tidak berasal dari apa yang kita anggap sebagai “*optio Fundamentalis*” mereka. Kajian ini merupakan upaya untuk mengeksplorasi secara kritis pemikiran Hannah Arendt tentang “Berpikir” sebagai kapasitas fundamental dari keberadaan manusia. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi pemikiran Hannah Arendt tentang Berpikir dan hubungannya dengan kapasitas dan tindakan manusia lainnya. Kami akan menggunakan analisis kritis atas karya Arendt sebagai metode penelitian ini, seperti: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, *The Life of the Mind*, dan *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954* dan karya-karya yang lain. Sebagai kesimpulan dari penelitian ini, kami menemukan bahwa aktivitas berpikir adalah kapasitas esensial manusia sebagai makhluk moral. Hanya jika manusia berpikir secara mendalam akan dapat menghasilkan tindakan-tindakan yang berarti, yang juga dapat menghalangi mereka dari tindakan-tindakan banal, yang bahkan dapat menyebabkan mereka melakukan kejahatan-kejahatan besar. Kapasitas moral manusia terletak pada aktivitas berpikirnya. Oleh karena itu, kebutuhan untuk melatih aktivitas berpikir yang mendalam tersirat di dalamnya.

Kata kunci: Berpikir, Banalitas Kejahatan, Dialog, Imaginasi, Kesadaran

Introduction

Nowadays we often encounter various forms of crime and terror plaguing society. There are lots of crimes against humanity that occurred in different parts of the world in the last century, for example the genocide in Rwanda in the late twentieth century that led to more than 500,000 civilians killed, the genocide of Jews during the NAZI, riots and persecution of some ethnic groups, the civil wars in various countries, violence in the name of religion, suicide bombings, ISIS, and so on. Many leaders only see the economic and political aspects so that they unconsciously perpetuate a crime as well against

humanity. The major tragedy that has been occurring in recent times is the war between Russia and Ukraine which left many civilians dead. One thing that should be our concern is that often the culprit did not have the slightest feeling of guilt. They have not realized what they had done was a very grave evil. Hannah Arendt, one of the most influential philosophers in our century, argues that many people in modern times have lost their conscience. Many people do not realize the things that they have done. They have just done it without considering whether it was good or bad.

Hannah Arendt was a German philosopher of Jewish descent who had an accurate and sharp view in politics. She was a free thinker who was not tied to any philosophical system. She was known to have a keen and critical view of the problems of the common life and the state in modern times. Her view was influenced by the background of her personal life, where she lived at the time when the savage Nazis committed genocide against the Jews. She devoted much of her life to making sense of totalitarianism. She wrote many books on politics. She discusses so many issues about totalitarianism, revolution, the nature of freedom, and the importance of thinking in every human being.

Hannah Arendt argues that every human being as a rational animal has the capability to think. Thinking is a reflective process in human beings that distinguishes them from other creatures. She discusses it, especially in her book, *The Life of the Mind and The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1978, 1998).¹ According to her, thinking is a mental activity in every human being that occurs throughout a human's life. Hannah Arendt took Socrates as a model of thinker. Taking the idea of Socrates, she argues that thinking is a time in which I have a dialogue with myself to consider and decide something. Myself is my partner when I am thinking. Therefore, the activity of thinking happens in silence within us. Arendt also relates the process of thinking to man's conscience. She believes that conscience connects strongly with morality. A man with a good conscience really realizes what he does.

A person who can think well can also imagine when he or she was in someone else's position since for her thinking is related to the faculty of imagination. She argues that imagination plays an important role in the activity of thinking. By thinking, man can bring his imagination to the past and the future. To think properly, man needs to use his imagination. Man, who uses the faculty of thinking, and the faculty of imagination well can also act well. Therefore, thinking can prevent someone from committing a grave evil. She concluded this after attending a trial against Adolf Eichmann, one of the Nazi soldiers tasked with organizing the transportation of Jewish prisoners to concentration camps. In his defense, Eichmann innocently said that he was just doing his job and had no other motive against the Jews. Eichmann's defense is something that is difficult to accept with common sense. Hannah Arendt argues that this is due to an inability to think. Eichmann could not think from the standpoint of somebody else. She was concerned about the thoughtlessness in Eichmann that made him do such an evil thing. She called it the banality of evil. She uses the term banality to describe the motivations of the culprits. For her, crimes can be banal because the conscience of the culprit is not working well. Evil becomes banal because the

¹ Hannah Arendt argues that there are two fundamental activities in every human being. These are the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*. The term *vita activa* corresponds to the three basic conditions under which humans live: labor, work, and action. While the term *vita contemplativa* etymologically comes from the Latin words: *vita* which means life, and *contemplativa* which means contemplative or unanimity of thought or reflection with full attention. Therefore, *vita contemplativa* means a life characterized by the activity of contemplating and thinking intently. There are three mental activities in *vita contemplativa*: thinking, willing, and judging. Arendt argues that *vita contemplativa* is a process or mental activity in every human being that is higher than *vita activa*. "Contemplation is the highest state of the mind". Moreover, she says, "thinking aims at and ends in contemplation, and contemplation is not an activity but a passivity".

culprits do not use their thinking abilities properly. The culprits simply do things without really realizing what they are doing.

According to Hannah Arendt, many grave evils that occur in our world are caused by a person's inability to think. This is a concern for us. Therefore, we are interested in analyzing it based on Hannah Arendt's view since according to us, Arendt's views are still relevant to be practiced today. In this article, we want to explore her views, especially about thinking and the banality of evil. What is the banality of evil according to Hannah Arendt? What is thinking? What are the aspects of thinking? What is the relationship between thinking and the banality of evil? Or, as she herself put it, "Might the problem of good and evil, our faculty of telling right from wrong, be connected with our faculty of thought? (Arendt, 1978, p. 5). In this article, we will discuss these problems. This paper is presented in several sections that are interconnected with each other.

Method

As the scope of this work is to investigate the importance of the thinking process in morality according to Hannah Arendt, the method that is applied in this article is a critical reading analysis. We will critically analyze her important works, such as *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, *The Life of the Mind*, and *Essays in Understanding: 1930-1954*, while her other works will also be considered. We also use previous studies conducted by other researchers on the concept of thinking and the banality of evil in Hannah Arendt's view. This work shall describe Arendt's thought in reference to the importance of the process of thinking, as described in her writings, and critically analyzed.

In the first part, we will introduce the figure of Adolf Eichmann that is of concern to Hannah Arendt. Our primary source is Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In this book, she talks about the trials that Eichmann had to face and her analysis of Eichmann's crimes. Then, we analyze her view of the Banality of Evil. The study is continued by explaining the concept of thinking in Hannah Arendt's view and the relation of thinking to imagination and conscience. The primary source we use in this section is Hannah Arendt's work *The Life of the Mind*. Next, we will look at the relevance of Hannah Arendt's views today. Finally, we will conclude the results of the analysis of the concept of thinking in Hannah Arendt's view about the various crimes that occur around us nowadays.

Findings and Discussion

A Look at Adolf Eichmann and His Trial

Otto Adolf Eichmann was one of the Nazi leaders who played important role in the annihilation of Jews during World War II. He organized the transport of the Jews to the concentration and extermination camps, which means their death. After the Nazi regime fell, Eichmann fled to Argentina with his family. He was caught in a suburb of Buenos Aires on the evening of May 11, 1960, by Israeli secret agents and immediately deported to Israel to face responsibility for what he had done (Arendt, 2006, p. 21). Hearing about Eichmann's trial, Hannah Arendt went to Jerusalem in 1961 and came to Jerusalem as a reporter for *The New Yorker* (Elon, 2006, p. xi).

Adolf Eichmann's trial was held in the District Court in Jerusalem on April 11, 1961. Arendt described Eichmann's physique as an ordinary man: "medium-sized, slender, and middle-aged, with receding hair, ill-fitting teeth, and nearsighted eyes" (Arendt, 2006). It was the first time for her to see

Eichmann directly. She argues, “The deeds were monstrous, but the doer was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous.” (Arendt, 1978, p. 4). According to her, Eichmann did not look like a scary monster or devil, but just like an ordinary person. Physically, there was nothing particular about Eichmann.

Eichmann was “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” (Arendt, 2006, p. 21). It was really a surprise when Eichmann stated during the trial that he has never hated the Jews. Eichmann admitted that he had not had any motives of hatred toward the Jews. He professed that he did not have the slightest intention to exterminate the Jews. In fact, he even had a special relationship with some Jews. Eichmann defended himself against the charge brought against him that he was not guilty. To each count, Eichmann pleaded, “Not guilty in the sense of the indictment” (Arendt, 2006, p. 21). Eichmann had not felt guilty about the things that he had done, not even a little. According to him, he just followed his leader’s commands, nothing else. From Eichmann’s perspective, he was a law-abiding citizen and obeyed the law. Robert Servatius of Cologne, Eichmann’s lawyer, argues that Eichmann did not commit any crime under the Nazi legal system: “Eichmann feels guilty before God, not before the law” (Arendt, 2006, p. 21). Therefore, Eichmann rejected the accusations against him. For him, “He could be accused only of “aiding and abetting” the annihilation of the Jews” (Arendt, 2006, p. 21).

Eichmann himself believed that “he had lived his whole life according to Kant’s moral precepts, especially Kant’s definition of duty” (Arendt, 2006, pp. 135-136). He also added that he had read Kant’s famous work, *Critique of Practical Reason*. He had consoled himself with the thought that he was not “master of his own deeds” and “he was unable to change anything” (Arendt, 2006, p. 136). Therefore, he only could do what had been ordered to him.

The Banality of Evil in the Thought of Hannah Arendt

Hannah Arendt used the term *banality of evil* for the first time in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* after she followed Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem. She used this term to illustrate what Eichmann had done. In his defense, Eichmann said over and over that he did not at all intend to commit genocide against the Jews. He claimed that he had just tried to do his job properly. Hannah Arendt argues that Eichmann’s conscience did not function well since he just did what his leader ordered him without thinking and reflecting first on what the order was (Arendt, 2006, p. 95). For her, “The banality of evil describes the character and motivations of the culprit (Eichmann), not his deeds—the monstrous actions that he committed, and for which he was fully responsible”(Bernstein, 2010, p. 131).

Banal does not imply that evil is simply common to everyone. Evil can become banal even if the evil itself is not merely a trivial matter. Thus, the banality of evil does not mean that the evil itself is trivial and common to everybody (Assy, 1998). The “ordinary people” can commit evil deeds without being vicious monsters or even having evil intentions (Bernstein, 2010, p. 135). Simply we can say that banality of evil is doing something evil without any motives. In other words, we just follow what other people do without knowing the reason properly, “we did it because others also did it”. Evil becomes something banal when it becomes something “natural” or “normal”.

Hannah Arendt did not want to propose a general theory when she spoke about the banality of evil. “No theory or doctrine but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a

gigantic scale, which could not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was a perhaps extraordinary shallowness” (Arendt, 1971, p. 417). The banality of evil is not evil action that came from something serious or deep, but it came from something ordinary. The banality of evil came from the inability of a person to think. Arendt says, “The sad truth of the matter is that most evil is done by people who never made up their minds to be or do either evil or good” (Arendt, 1978, p. 180).

The person who has done the banality of evil just did something like an automatic machine would do it, without thinking and reflecting first on what he would do, as happened in Eichmann. Eichmann’s actions did not come from a moral decision which he reflected carefully and deeply. Eichmann was just like a machine in his party since what he had done could not have come from his own will. He just obeyed what was ordered to him by his blind obedience, without understanding and thinking about what happened. Consequently, he had done something very evil, which Arendt termed the “banality of evil”.

In a debate held at Hofstra College (New York) in 1964 about *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt emphasized that the banality of evil does not have any roots. The notion that the banality of evil has "no roots" is inherently connected with Arendt's understanding that only the faculty of thinking can reach the profundity, and consequently reach the roots (Assy, 1998). The banality of evil itself relates to man’s inability to think. “Evil comes from a failure to think”, as Arendt concluded after following Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem (Elon, 2006, p. xiv). What Eichmann did, according to her, was because of “his incapacity to think, or to think from another person’s point of view” (Elon, 2006, p. xiii). The banality of evil arises because of the absence of the process of thinking in human beings, which leads to the absence of the ability to distinguish good and bad morally, the ability to make a moral decision, and the ability to consider the implications of one’s actions. The crime is banal when a moral agent failed to use his ability to think in understanding the various orders, laws, or liabilities, and justifies his actions based only on certain general moral principles or laws (Jena, 2009, pp. 155-156).

Thinking in the Thought of Hannah Arendt

Arendt discusses her thoughts about “thinking”, especially in her book *The Life of the Mind*. She emphasizes the importance of thinking in every human being. In her book *Responsibility and Judgment*, Arendt also relates the activity of thinking to the faculty of willing and the faculty of judging. Let us discuss what thinking is in the thought of Hannah Arendt.

Socrates as the Model of A Thinker

“What makes us think?” This question is posed by Hannah Arendt in *The Life of the Mind*. By this question, she does not mean to ask for either causes or purposes. Every man according to Arendt needs to think. Thinking is the need of every human being, as a rational animal. Arendt takes the figure of Socrates as the model of thinkers. Many of the classic philosophers also confessed the wisdom of Socrates. Not only was Socrates a thinker, says Arendt, but he also “sought to provoke his fellow citizens into becoming thinking persons. And this thinking manifests itself in *logos* (speech)” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 281). Socrates believes that the philosopher has the task of giving courage to his fellow citizens to think for themselves.

Arendt refers to the work of Plato, *Gorgias* (Arendt, 1978, p. 180).² In *Gorgias*, Plato admitted the wisdom of Socrates. Plato illustrates two positive Socratic propositions that Arendt quoted in her book. The first is: “It is better to be wronged than to do wrong” (Arendt, 1978, p. 181), while the second is: “It would be better for me that my lyre or a chorus I directed should be out of tune and loud with discord, and that multitudes of men should disagree with me rather than that I, *being one*, should be out of harmony with myself and contradict me” (Arendt, 1978, p. 181). For Arendt, these two propositions “derive their validity from the idea that there is a silent partner within us to whom we render an account of our actions” (D’Entrèves, 2000, p. 249). The silent partner here is nothing else than our conscience. Conscience, according to Arendt, is “a kind of knowledge that is actualized in every thinking process” (Arendt, 1978, p. 5).

Socrates chose to suffer rather than to do wrong. According to Arendt, “only Socrates was able to practice both “ordinary” and “extraordinary” thinking without sacrificing one to the other” (D. R. Villa, 2000, pp. 18-19).³ She also argues that Socrates did not fear his death and always offered a new way of thinking to the citizens. “Socrates is a man who had the courage to confront his death, his disappearance from the world, as something entirely new, a sort of adventure” (Kohn, 2000, p. 122). Socrates had the capacity to influence others with the experience that he had. Arendt admired Socrates as a genuine thinker. She argues that not everyone has the capability to think well since “only people inspired by the Socratic *erōs*, the love of wisdom, beauty, and justice, are capable of thought and can be trusted” (Arendt, 1978, p. 180). Socrates himself argues that “only a few are capable of thought and that only certain objects of thought, visible to the eyes of the well-trained mind but ineffable in discourse, bestow dignity and relevance on the thinking activity” (Arendt, 1978, p. 180).

Socrates believes that “every man has his own *Doxa*”. It means that every man as a thinking being has his way of thinking which might be different from others. Here, he wants to encourage his citizens to become thinking people. He does not teach any doctrine, but he wants to encourage all the citizens to find the truth in their *Doxa* (Amiel, 1996, p. 76). For he believes that this is the truth that every man potentially has. As a social animal, man lives together with others. Man lives in a society where he can make relationships with other people. There is no one in this world who can live totally separate from others. In this regard, Socrates argues that to live harmoniously with others, first we must live harmoniously with ourselves. Without living harmoniously with ourselves, it is not possible for us to have a good relationship with other people. Arendt argues that Socrates concerns himself with friendship among all the citizens.

Thinking as An Activity in the Human Mind

Arendt argues, since thinking belongs to the field of philosophy or metaphysics, therefore it is not easy to answer what thinking is (Arendt, 1971, p. 419). We can say for sure that thinking is one of the activities which is supposed to be found in every rational animal. Again, every human being as a rational animal has the capability to think. Thinking is not an activity that can be found only in some groups of

² The *Gorgias* is the dialogue about rhetoric, the art of addressing and convincing the many. It does not belong among the early Socratic dialogues; it was written shortly before Plato became the head of the Academy.

³ In *The Life of the Mind*, however, Arendt is not concerned with engaged or political thought, but with what (for lack of a better term) might be called “extraordinary” or philosophical thinking. In fact, her last work is as adamant as *The Human Condition* in its insistence that this activity stands in the greatest possible tension not only with the life of the citizen, but with worldly existence in general. Thus, while she had the greatest possible respect for “extraordinary” thinkers from Plato to Heidegger, she continued to distrust them.

intelligent people. Thinking belongs to every man as a rational animal. Thinking is “the highest and perhaps the purest activity of which men are capable. Every man needs to think and can only be satisfied through thinking.

Arendt believes that thinking is a mental activity in human beings, and it happens continuously without stopping. Thinking is like a breathing process in the human mind. For she says, “the business of thinking is like Penelope’s web. It undoes every morning what it has finished the night before” (Arendt, 1978, p. 88). This is like the process of making networks continuously strung together, without stopping. Stephan Kampowski assumes that “thinking is not the same as an exercise of intelligence” (Kampowski, 2008, p. 92). Arendt believes that every human being, as a rational animal, has the intellectual abilities to think and has the inclination “to use them as an instrument for knowing and doing” (Arendt, 1971, p. 421). It is the characteristic of every human being in general. However, even though man has the capacity to think, “we are not pure thinking beings. As human beings, living our lives in a world of appearances, we may occasionally withdraw from this world to think in solitude” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 286).

As an independent thinker, Arendt also wants to show us a new form or a new way of thinking. She calls it independent thinking (*Selbstdenken*). Arendt elaborates on this idea in her speech *On Humanity in Dark Times: Thought about Lessing*, which she gave when she received the Lessing Prize in 1959 (Bernstein, 2000, p. 278). She argues that by becoming an independent thinker, “the individual can hope to avoid moral catastrophe in those situations where ‘everyone else is carried away by a wave of misguided conviction or enthusiasm’” (D. R. Villa, 2000, p. 18). For Arendt, *Selbstdenken* means “a new kind of thinking that needs no pillars and props, no standards and traditions to move freely without crutches over unfamiliar terrain” (Arendt, 1968, p. 10). On the contrary, Arendt argues that we should be critical of tradition. “We live today in a world in which not even common sense makes sense any longer” (Dolan, 2000, p. 273; Cfr. Arendt, 1990, p. 102-104). This was obvious to her after she saw totalitarianism in the twentieth century, especially during the annihilation of the Jews.

Thinking as A Dialogue between Me and Myself

Socrates believes that thinking itself is such a reflexive activity that involves me and myself. Thinking is a true activity by which I make dialogue with myself. Thinking is a soundless dialogue between me and myself. When I am thinking, at the same time I realize that I am thinking. When I am thinking, I am standing in my own presence. Moreover, since thinking goes through a questioning and answering process, it can become dialectical and critical. These ideas refer to Socrates’s idea of my ‘being one’ (Vetlesen, 2001, p. 10). According to Socrates when I am thinking, I am a “two-in-one” (See Arendt, 1978, pp. 179-193). Socrates believes that it is possible for us to have intercourse with ourselves and with others. “The duality of the two-in-one meant no more than that if you want to think, you must see to it that the two who carry on the dialogue be in good shape, that the partners be *friends*...” (Arendt, 1978, pp. 187-188). Here, Socrates wants to show us that we are also our own friends, and this makes the dialogue possible. It means that myself is my partner when I am thinking. When I am thinking, I am “speaking with myself; I live together with myself” (Arendt, 1990, p. 86). In thinking, I am the one who asks and answers. As I am thinking, I go into myself and can achieve a variety of things.

In *the Life of The Mind*, Arendt gives an example of such a dialogue in Shakespeare’s Richard III. Richard dialogues with himself after he has killed a whole group of people. He is troubled by what he

has done. Here, Arendt wants to show us the dialogue that happens when man's soul is not in harmony with itself. Richard III says to himself:

What do I fear? Myself? There's none else by:
Richard loves Richard: that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:
Then fly: what! from myself? Great reason why:
Lest I revenge. What! myself upon myself?
Alack! I love myself. Wherefore? For any good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O! no: alas! I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself.
I am a villain. Yet I lie, I am not.
Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter. (Arendt, 1978, p. 189)

As a dialogue between me and myself, Arendt argues that thinking is born from the experience of "absolute solitude" (Berkowitz, 2010, p. 241). Roger Berkowitz explains that Richard III is in solitude which makes him able to face himself (Berkowitz, 2010, p. 241). Here, solitude means dialogue between me and myself, a "two-in-one". In other words, we can say that even though a man is alone, he is not totally alone since he is accompanied by himself.

Thinking and Its Relation to the Faculty of Imagination

Thinking is "a creative activity which requires remembrance, story-telling, and imagination" (Bernstein, 2000, p. 279).⁴ It requires the virtues of both courage and independence. Thinking also requires a withdrawal from the world of appearances and deals with the invisible (Bernstein, 2000, p. 279, 286). Arendt believes that imagination plays an important role in the activity of thinking. Man needs to use his imagination to think properly. When she was attending Eichmann's trial, Arendt saw that Eichmann did not have the imagination necessary to be able to "think from the standpoint of somebody else" (Kampowski, 2008, p. 192). He did not have the imagination and empathy to make him feel the consequences of his actions on others. Consequently, he just had done his job with blind obedience without feeling guilty when he sent the Jews to concentration camps.

Eichmann is a "new type criminal" who "commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or feel that he is doing wrong" (Beatty, 1994, p. 69). He lived in the era of totalitarianism. In her essay *Understanding and Politics*, Arendt explains that "totalitarianism is *beyond human understanding*" (Arendt, 1994, p. 233). Yet according to her, the activity of understanding is an activity that is carried out continuously, without stopping. Totalitarianism, she believes, makes us unable to understand the meaning and eliminates the category of political thought and standards of our moral judgments. Totalitarianism destroys our accepted standards of judgment and our conventional categories of interpretation and assessment, be they moral or political (D'Entrèves, 2000, p. 247). The only way to repair this situation according to her is to use imagination. By imagination, we can see everything in its proper perspective. Arendt says:

Imagination alone enables us to see things in their proper perspective, to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see and understand it without bias and prejudice, to bridge

⁴ To express what she means by thinking, she again turns to Kafka. Commenting on a parable of Kafka and an aphorism of René Char, "*Notre héritage n'est précédé d'aucun testament*," she links thinking together with remembrance and storytelling. Remembrance is one of the most important "modes of thought," and it requires story-telling in order to preserve those "small hidden islands of freedom."

abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair. This "distancing" of some things and bridging the abysses to others is part of the dialogue of understanding. (Arendt, 1982, pp. 96-97).

As human beings, we always live in the present time, which is the moment between the past and the future. Arendt mentions these thoughts, especially in her book, *Between Past and Future*. When thinking, man can freely bring his imagination to the past and the future. Imagination is related to representative thinking. In this account, according to Kirstie M. McClure, imagination transforms worldly objects of perception into images and representations (McClure, 1997, p. 75). By imagination, "one can represent objects that are no longer present and thus establish the distance necessary for an impartial judgment" (D'Entrèves, 2000, p. 251). Imagination makes us see and understand things more clearly since it puts things in proper perspective. Consequently, as Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves says, imagination "makes possible our reconciliation with reality, even with the tragic reality of the twentieth century" (D'Entrèves, 2000, 248). The role of imagination is like a memory, which allows us to formulate various categories to understand the events that happened in the past and connect them with the present. By imagination, we can remember the past selectively, fix the meaning of life as well as shed light on contemporary circumstances, without having to use a traditional standard framework that according to Arendt has lost its validity.

Thinking and Its Relation to Conscience

Conscience plays an important role in every man as a rational animal. Etymologically, conscience "refers to the same phenomenon as consciousness or self-awareness" (Kampowski, 2008, pp. 102-103). In the introduction of *the Life of the Mind*, Arendt argues that "the very word 'conscience', at any rate, points in this direction insofar as it means "to know with and by myself," a kind of knowledge that is actualized in every thinking process (Arendt, 1978, p. 5). "Does the inability to think and a disastrous failure of what we commonly call conscience to coincide?" (Arendt, 1971, p. 418). Arendt raises this question at the beginning of her lecture *Thinking and Moral Considerations*.

Hannah Arendt believes that thinking does not have any direct product. But, the activity of thinking produces conscience as its byproduct. Conscience is the byproduct of thinking and not its product. Conscience, by forcing me to be in my own presence and thus develop an interest in making sure my own presence is something bearable. Because of a good conscience, a man will act well. Thinking and conscience relate to each other. Conscience is an "interiorized moral principle, which moves a person from "I ought not" to the "I can't". A man with good conscience rather says, "I can't kill" than "I ought not to kill" (Kampowski, 2008, p. 113).

Hannah Arendt is not totally sure whether conscience is the voice of God or of nature. But she believes that "whatever the voice of conscience may be, it cannot be said to be 'silent', and its validity depends entirely upon an authority that is above and beyond all merely human laws and rules" (Arendt, 1978, p. 215). She believes that "it is a metaphor for man's intercourse with himself – and especially for a 'side-effect' of such intercourse" (Ojakangas, 2010; Cfr. Arendt, 2003, p. 188). Arendt believes that our actions are affected by our conscience. The conscience, "told you, as the divine voice of either God or reason, what to do, what not to do, and what to repent of" (Arendt, 1978, p. 215). Therefore, she argues that conscience should be always present in every human being. Conscience plays a significant role in what we do.

Did Eichmann have a conscience? Arendt says very clearly that Eichmann had a conscience, but “his conscience functioned in the expected way for about four weeks, whereupon it began to function the other way around” (Arendt, 2006, p. 95). For Arendt, Eichmann had a conscience when he was still new to the job and freely took some risks by disobeying his superior’s evil order. It was the first time and the last time Eichmann used his conscience. After that, “his conscience did not bother him; and he did not suffer from remorse” (Kohn, 2001). Eichmann himself confessed that he would have been bothered if he had not done what had been ordered him. For Arendt says: “He remembered 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” (Arendt, 2006, p. 25). Eichmann has never made up their mind to be or do either evil or good (Arendt, 1978, p. 180). Eichmann’s lack of thinking clearly relates to his lack of conscience.

Arendt believes that it is possible that someone’s conscience can be corrupted by society. Eichmann had lost his conscience since he had not realized what he had done, and he just followed what had been ordered for him. Peg Birmingham writes a very interesting passage about conscience in Eichmann. According to her, Eichmann’s voice of conscience was caught up in the voice of his superior. It made him ignore his own desire and try to fulfill his job perfectly:

Eichmann’s voice of conscience was not silenced—it was carried away, caught up in the voice of another; his voice had literally been “voiced over” with the voice of Himmler. Not only does Eichmann’s elated voice of conscience identify the law with the will of Hitler but also, and at the same time, his desires and fantasies become identified with Hitler’s. The elated voice of conscience told Eichmann to ignore his own desire and dutifully carry out the law of the land. (Birmingham, 2006, p. 109).

Citing the words of Dana Villa, Vetlesen writes that “Eichmann’s conscience did not function in the expected manner since it was based on a conflation of *morality* with *legality*. As a result, he was troubled only by the temptation to *do good*, that is, to disregard his *duty* under the laws of a criminal regime and ‘be soft’” (Vetlesen, 2001, p. 16; Cfr. D. Villa, 1999, p. 45). In conclusion, Villa says: “Eichmann’s case demonstrated how conscience ... is perverted: it no longer tells individuals what is right and what is wrong. But neither is it totally silenced, for it continues to tell people like Eichmann what their “duty” is” (D. Villa, 1999, p. 45).

Arendt believes that the activity of thinking affects our conscience. The thinker is the one who follows his conscience. Conscience can tell us what we should do or what we should not do. Conscience, according to Arendt, is the actualization of the thinking process. To live well, we must try to hear the voice of conscience inside our hearts. We can have it only when we start to (critically) examine our deeds and thoughts (Ojakangas, 2010). We must make a dialogue with ourselves to realize it. For she says, “No man can keep his conscience intact who cannot actualize the dialogue with himself” (Arendt, 2005, p. 25). Here, she points out the importance of thinking to realize “conscience” in ourselves. To actualize conscience, you must think to yourself.

Relevance: The Importance of Thinking to Prevent Banality of Evil

The perspective of Hannah Arendt can be applied in analyzing various cases of violence that occur today. As mentioned above, Hannah Arendt argues that Eichmann was not such a scary monster or devil; but he is just an ordinary person who is physically no different from other people in general. Yet, in fact, Eichmann had played a very active role in the annihilation of the Jews, even though he didn’t see any

hatred in Eichmann toward the Jews. What Eichmann did also happen now a day, in which many culprits are not aware of the crimes they have committed. For example, the war between Russia and Ukraine, in which so many civilians were killed. Some of the captured soldiers said that they did not know what was really going on, they were just carrying out orders from their superiors to attack their opponents. This is something banal according to Hannah Arendt. It was the absence of thinking that made them commit a very grave evil. Their inability to think or their thoughtlessness⁵ (Arendt & McCarthy, 1995, p. 296) was the necessary condition of the very evil thing that they have done.

Hannah Arendt argues that thoughtlessness refers to the absence of consideration. The absence of consideration happened in Eichmann. He could not consider things that ought to be considered. He was unable to consider the viewpoint of others, which made him do a very evil thing. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the absence of consideration makes rational creatures commit a very grave sin, like what happens in the fallen angels. This “absence of consideration” relates strongly to man’s conscience. To understand the meaning of thoughtlessness from Arendt’s perspective, we must look at Eichmann’s behavior during the trial. For Arendt, the expression “thoughtlessness” means “the inability to imagine the standpoint of someone else and the inability to realize what one is doing” (Kampowski, 2008, p. 82). Arendt noted that during the trial in Jerusalem, Eichmann always used an expression in the same words. Eichmann did not have the capability to speak. He was unable to give an alternative expression for a phrase unknown to the latter. He was unable to look at anything from the other fellow’s point of view (Arendt, 2006, p. 48). Eichmann warded himself off against reality as such. He has not had the ability to communicate with others effectively and the ability to realize what was happening.

Eichmann also had the inability to realize what he was doing or what is about to be done to him (Kampowski, 2008, p. 85). He didn’t realize that he had done very evil things. Again, he never had any intention to exterminate the Jews. He had not had evil motives as such, not at all. “It so happened”, as he said. Stephan Kampowski in his dissertation mentions that “This does not mean that he made a simple cognitive mistake, thinking himself to be organizing the shipment of wheat to starving people in Ethiopia, while in fact, he was organizing to transport of millions of people to death camps” (Kampowski, 2008, p. 83). In fact, Eichmann had known perfectly what his task was. The thoughtlessness in Eichmann also regards his inability to realize what was being done to him. Arendt points out that Eichmann failed to exercise his capacity of thinking, of having an internal dialogue with himself, which would have permitted self-awareness of the evil nature of his deeds (Yar, n.d.). Unfortunately, there are still many other Eichmann’s today.

Thoughtlessness is not the same as stupidity, since we can find thoughtlessness in highly intelligent people, as it happened in Eichmann. Eichmann had never really used his faculty of thinking. Arendt argues that Eichmann was neither stupid nor insane, “it was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period” (Arendt, 2006, p. 287-288). Basically, Eichmann knew quite well what it was all about sending the Jews to concentration camps, but in fact, he did it without reflecting and thinking about what he had done. Arendt was baffled at how Eichmann could not have realized that sending them to concentration camps was a totally evil thing.

Since Eichmann was not insane and (only) had the inability to think well, therefore he was culpable

⁵ Hannah Arendt uses the term "thoughtlessness" in an unusual way. It is not very clear what the definition of thoughtlessness is. Even Mary McCarthy, Arendt's friend, was confused by Arendt's terms "thoughtlessness" and "stupidity".

and he is not excused from guilt (Kampowski, 2008, p. 88; see Enegrén, 1984, p. 218). Eichmann had to be responsible for what he had done, legally and morally responsible. For Arendt, there would be no excuse for Eichmann to be “free” from the punishment. Even though other people had done what Eichmann did, Eichmann must be responsible for what he had done since he was born in the aspect of a human being who can think. Every human who was not insane has to be responsible for what he has done.

After attending Eichmann’s trial and has seen the inability of Eichmann to think well, some questions arose in Arendt’s mind regarding the relation of thinking to morality. Arendt believes that thinking has a relation to morality. Thinking as reflexive activity affects human beings in their actions. In the introduction of *The Life of the Mind*, Arendt posed an interesting question: “Could this activity be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually “conditioning” them against it?” (Arendt, 1978, p. 5). Moreover, she says, “If there is anything in thinking that can prevent men from doing evil, it must be some property inherent in the activity itself, regardless of its objects” (Arendt, 1978, p. 180).

Taking the idea of Socrates about “two-in-one”, Arendt argues that it is important for us to know ourselves. I must live with myself when I am thinking. I become aware of myself when I am thinking. When I am aware of myself, therefore I want to live in harmony with myself and that guards me against doing evil things. It follows that the activity of thinking can stop a man from doing grave evil since man cannot live in harmony with himself when he does evil things. In the words of Roger Berkowitz, “Only one who speaks with oneself will worry that in acting unethically he or she will have to live with a criminal” (Berkowitz, 2010, p. 5).

As we have seen, Eichmann’s inability to think allowed him to do very evil things. The banality of evil came from the inability of a person to think. If we do not use our ability to think, then we can fall into “thoughtlessness”, and open ourselves to fall into evil deeds, as Eichmann had done. This thoughtlessness can be cured and avoided by the habit of thinking, especially the kind of thinking that Socrates used to practice (dialogue). Thinking may *hinder* people from committing grave evil. By thinking well, we will get a good conscience that guides us in what things we should do and what things we should not do. In Bernstein’s words, “thinking may prevent us from tolerating or becoming indifferent to evil deeds” since we realize if we do evil things, that we will not live-in harmony with ourselves (Bernstein, 2000, p. 285).

Therefore, it is very important for every man in using his faculty of thinking, so that he can keep his conscience intact and prevent him from doing evil things. Only if I have a good conscience as the product of thinking I can realize that by doing evil things I cannot live in harmony with myself. Arendt deals with conscience in its connection with morality. Conscience affects human actions. Conscience, like the voice in our hearts, tells us what we should do or what we should not do. To live in harmony with ourselves, we must listen to the voice of conscience within our hearts. We must make a dialogue with ourselves to keep our conscience intact.

Conclusion

Hannah Arendt emphasizes the critical thinking process in every human being, especially when she attended Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem. She argues that thinking is an essential activity in every human being as a rational animal. Thinking is a human activity in which man uses his intellect to consider and decide something. Many grave evils happened around us because of man’s inability to think. Hannah

Arendt described it as the banality of evil. For her, the banality of evil came from the inability of a person to think. It did not come from the moral decision on which the culprits reflected carefully and sincerely. Arendt believes that the banality of evil relates strongly to man's faculty of thinking. The absence of thinking in human beings leads to the inability to distinguish good and bad morally, the ability to make a moral decision, and the ability to consider the implications of one's action. Thinking relates closely to the faculty of imagination. Many people commit grave evil because they fail to see everything from the standpoint of others and what they are doing. For Arendt, imagination is representative thinking that makes us possible to see things more clearly. This thoughtlessness can be cured and avoided by the practice of thinking, especially the thinking that Socrates used to practice (dialogue), and especially when we dialogue with ourselves. Therefore, according to her, we need to practice our faculty of thinking since thinking can prevent people from committing grave evil. Thinking can prevent us from doing evil because it produces conscience as its byproduct.

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