

neue Formen der Begegnung zwischen Wissenschaftlern und interessierten Bürgerinnen und Bürgern zu fördern und Neugier zu wecken. Mit der Wahl des Veranstaltungsortes soll sowohl die zentrale Bedeutung Hannah Arendts dokumentiert als auch das Rathaus als öffentlicher Ort geöffnet werden.

Zu den „Hannah-Arendt-Tagen“ lädt die Stadt Hannover 1999 für den 16. und 17. Oktober ein. Zur Auftaktveranstaltung wird Prof. Dr. Seyla Benhabib, Harvard Universität, USA, einen Vortrag zum Thema „The Right to Have Rights“ („Das Recht Rechte zu besitzen“) halten. Der zweite Veranstaltungsteil wird dem Motto „Politische Beteiligung und die Zukunft der Parteien“ gewidmet sein. Auch in diesem Jahr sollen wieder Stimmen aus der Politik und aus der Bevölkerung zu diesem Thema zu Wort kommen.

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## An Unpublished Letter from Hannah Arendt to Karl Jaspers

### Introduction

In May, 1997, Ursula Ludz wrote to ask me about a letter of Hannah Arendt's to Karl Jaspers, dated December 29, 1963, which I had cited in my biography *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (1982). This letter, she told me, does not exist in the Marbach Literature Archives, where the Arendt-Jaspers letters are housed. Further, in the published Arendt-Jaspers Correspondence the letter is declared "not in the literary remains" by a note (to letter #347) from that volume's editors. Startled by Ursula Ludz's query, I compared the Correspondence, which I had never read through in book form, and my biography. It was clear from my text that I had indeed read the letter that the Correspondence editors had not found among the Marbach originals; this was not a matter of my having mistranscribed a date. It seemed that somehow, between 1979, when I was in Marbach reading the letters, and several years later, when the Correspondence editors started preparing their 1985 German edition, that the letter had disappeared. Back in 1979, the letters had been kept in thick unbound files, and any number of kinds of mishaps could have befallen the missing one as scholars used the files and staff members moved them back and forth to the reading area. Even in a superbly

run Archive like Marbach, the vagaries of historiography are not absent.

Xeroxing had not been permitted at the Archive in 1979, so I knew I had no copy of the missing letter, but my citation suggested that I might have made handwritten notes about it. From the fileboxes where I keep all of the materials I used to write *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, I pulled out the file containing the Arendt-Jaspers notes and the ones containing notes and articles relating to the controversy over Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, which was in full force at the end of 1963. In my correspondence notes, which are chronological, I had written a direction to myself next to the date December 12, 1963: "See excerpts in Composition notebook." I did not find this Composition notebook, but I did discover two of its pages in one of the Eichmann files. There I found, under the heading "HA-KJ 12.29.63, NYC", most of the missing letter.

As I read through the excerpts, which were obviously copied at different times and show different levels of handwriting fatigue, I understood why I had taken the time to copy so much of this letter, why I had not – as was my usual practice – summarized the letter in telegraphic English and copied in German only phrases or sentences that I thought might need to be quoted directly in the biography. This letter, as much as any other that

Arendt wrote to anyone about the Eichmann controversy, conveys the attitude toward her opponents and toward the controversy itself that she attained as she struggled to master her initial shock at the intensity of the reactions her book stirred. It also contains some of Arendt's first reflections on the way in which Rolf Hochhuth's play *Der Stellvertreter* (*The Deputy*) had become embroiled in a related controversy. Further, the December 29, 1963 letter reveals the formation of the now famous phrase "the banality of evil" and then indicates clearly that even in 1963, not just in the last years of her life, Kant's *Critique of Judgment* was the philosophical source Arendt looked to for thinking about Eichmann's evil and his lack of judgment. My excerpts from the December 29, 1963 letter, which Ursula Ludz has now checked for accuracy in German, are printed below, along with the summaries I made in English of the parts of the letter that I did not copy. It does not appear that there were sections of the letter that were not either copied or summarized; so its overall "table of contents" is clear. Below, I will set the text in its context in the Correspondence, present my excerpts, and add a few notes on its various topics.

### The Letter in context

**By the end of 1963**, Hannah Arendt had endured almost a year of "the Eichmann Controversy", which had erupted when her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was serialized in the February and March issues of *The New Yorker*. Arendt and Jaspers had corresponded about the American and Israeli fronts of this controversy and then discussed it during her visit with him in Basel in June, but the controversy came into the center of their exchanges only after Arendt returned to America from the long-awaited summer European tour she had taken with her husband, Heinrich Blücher. Stacks of mail awaited her at her New York apartment, and Blücher was, she reported to Jaspers, in a rage at the kinds of accusations against Arendt contained in the mail and in the media. Jaspers, meanwhile, was particularly concerned with the up-coming German edition of the book and with reactions to the remarks Arendt had made in it about the German resistance to Hitler during the War.

But both Arendt and Jaspers were jolted out of their concern with the controversy by the assassination on November 22nd of President John Kennedy. Arendt and Blücher were immediately deeply anxious about the fact that the murder was wrapped in confusion, and the public left completely in the dark by the various investigations. Blücher had commented that the shot that killed Kennedy had struck "the center of things", that is, the center "that held everything, both in domestic and in foreign policy, together". The murder seemed to them "like an event in a police state". They had their characteristic European emigré expectation of catastrophe, compounded by their very personal fears for Blücher's health, which had become uncertain that fall, after the bouyant summer tour. Arendt knew her husband to be in a state of great frustration and some depression from his lack of energy and because he could not punch in the nose her critics (letter #343). But it is important to note that from the first moments after the assassination, she and Blücher were focused on the way in which the horrible event was reported and received by the press and the public; they instinctively moved to being concerned for how the event was being judged, how the American people were being denied the truth about what had happened.

At the same time, Arendt was putting a brave face on the Eichmann controversy, trying to stay above it, not be undermined by it: "The Eichmann affair continues on its merry way", she had reported (letter #343) to Jaspers on November 24th, in the same letter she had filled with worry over the meaning of the assassination. In her next letter (#344), on December 1st, she continued to explore the repercussions of the assassination, and to report on the Eichmann affair, noting that the controversy brewing up over Hochhuth's play was very similar to the one that had engulfed her book: "The same old tactics (which always seem ready to hand). Some nonsense you never said gets attributed to you; then people wouldn't discuss anything but the nonsense so they can dodge the real issues." On January 29, 1964 (letter #347), Jaspers responded both to this December 1st letter and especially to the missing one of December 29th with

appreciation of Arendt's "sovereign tone" over the controversy. And after that, both correspondents shifted into a mode of getting the whole affair in perspective, a mode of assessment and judgment, with Arendt writing an article on Hochhuth's play and the parallel controversy, and Jaspers planning a little book (which he never finished) called "Über die Unabhängigkeit des Denkens". The missing December 29th letter, then, marked a transition into a time of reflection on the controversy – a forecast of the reflections that Arendt would later make in an article entitled "Thinking and Moral Considerations" (1971) and in her posthumously published *The Life of the Mind*.

*The Letter as excerpted in my notebook*

(1) Sends New Year's greetings from NYC, where home for 2 weeks.

(2) Notes his letter about Golo Mann upheaval [refers to December 13 letter, # 345]:

... *Ich dachte als erstes: Mein Gott, was hab ich bloss angerichtet! Ein Gedanke, der mir sonst noch nicht gekommen ist. Ich kenne ihn kaum, eigentlich nur durch Dich. Du darfst es ihm nicht so verdenken! Er hat sicher mit mir und meinen Sachen nie etwas anfangen können. Ihm ist bestimmt nie der Gedanke auch nur gekommen, dass er eine Solidarität verletzt. Lieber Verehrtester – ich bin doch wirklich für die allermeisten das "Mädchen aus der Fremde". Ich kann das durch Liebenswürdigkeit überspielen, aber daß ich nicht dazu gehöre, merken die Klügeren ja doch. Und daher die Geschichte mit der Menschenverachtung: daran ist doch etwas Wahres, nämlich dass ich die sog. Intellektuellen wirklich verachte. Und das merken sie halt daran, dass ich so deutlich das verachte, wovor sie doch alle den "gehörigen Respekt" haben, nicht nur den Erfolg und die Titel, sondern vor allem diese ganze gesellschaftliche Hierarchie, in der sie leben. Von Baeck nicht mit der gehörigen Salbung sprechen, Buber angreifen, Ben-Gurion kritisieren – ja, wo kommen wir da hin? Und vergiss nicht: Wen habe ich alles ignoriert! Das ist doch noch schlimmer.*

*Bleibt die Frage nach dem Geist! Er weht, wo er will, und nicht dort, wo man meint, ihn gepachtet zu haben. Und sogar da weht er mitunter! Aber um gerecht zu sein: Meine "naive" Art, die Wahrheit zu sagen, muss auf Viele, vor allem sogenannte "Konservative", wie schlimmste Anarchie wirken. Sie sind wohl wirklich verletzt, und was sie am meisten verletzt, ist meine*

*Annotation*

ad (1) Arendt has returned to New York from the University of Chicago, where she had been teaching during the Fall semester.

ad (2) Golo Mann, whom Jaspers had counted a friend, wrote a critical, contentious piece called "Hannah Arendt und der Eichmann-Prozess" for *Die Neue Rundschau* (74/4; 1963, pp. 626-33). In his letter to Hannah Arendt of December 13 (#345), Jaspers had lamented this article and reported that learning about it from a friend had sent him into a gloomy reflection on how the solidarity that should exist between intellectuals can be torn. He had expressed his confidence that his own bond with Hannah Arendt would never be torn as he felt his bond with Golo Mann had been. And it is this meditation of Jaspers that Arendt was reacting to on December 29th. She obviously did not want him to break off with Golo Mann over Mann's article, which, she tells Jaspers, she has not yet read. Her letter makes crystal clear her contempt for intellectuals and their concerns over status and reputation, their deference to authorities, their conformity to the *Geist* prevailing at any moment. But she nonetheless did not want Jaspers to isolate himself or to hold Golo Mann to standards beyond what could be expected in a climate of fearfulness about independent judgment, a time of lack of common sense (in the Kantian meaning). For herself, she accepted that she would be found alien, especially for her *Unbekümmertheit*, a word that indicates a kind of lightheartedness and ability to see the humor or the comedy in things – even in Eichmann's behavior – but also a certain imperturbability that she knew could seem cold or aloof.

*Unbekümmertheit. Ausserdem: Auch sehr gute und im Grunde anständige Leute haben in unserer Zeit die allergrösste Angst davor zu urteilen. Und sobald irgend etwas halbwegs anerkannt ist oder eine bestimmte Stimmung erzeugt ist, werden sie alle nicht nur unsicher, sondern sofort davon angesteckt. Dieser Mangel an Urteilskraft kann mit sehr hoher und starker Intelligenz Hand in Hand gehen, während umgekehrt gar nicht sehr intelligente Menschen gerade grosse Urteilskraft besitzen können. Die Frage, scheint mir, ist gar nicht nur: Was ist der Geist?, sondern auch: Was ist es eigentlich mit dieser kuriosesten aller Vernunftbegabungen, der Urteilskraft? (Für mich rückt Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft, vor allem der erste Teil, mehr und mehr in die Mitte seines gesamten Werks.) Aus den Erfahrungen meines Lebens kann ich nur sagen, dass wirklicher Verlass nur auf Menschen war, die diese sehr seltene Vernunftbegabung haben. Denk an die Psychoanalyse und wie heute im Grunde kein Mensch mehr wagt, den offenbaren Unsinn auszusprechen. Denk an das katastrophale Schwinden des gesunden Menschenverstands – und sei ihm nicht mehr böse! Ich weiss nicht, was er geschrieben hat: Die Rundschau hat es nicht für nötig gehalten, mir ein Heft zu schicken. (Das kommt hier nur bei der Skandalpresse vor!)*

*Aber darüber müsste man reden. Und ich weiss, wenn wir miteinander reden könnten und "uns in die Haare geraten", wäre alles plötzlich anders. Natürlich steht hinter Eichmann "das Böse", aber es erscheint doch nur in diesen und anderen Taten und Menschen. Und da ist die Lächerlichkeit und Niveaulosigkeit (falsches Wort, mir fällt im Moment kein besseres ein) doch entscheidend wichtig. Ich habe in meinem Leben einige, nicht sehr viele, Menschen gekannt, die sozusagen viel "schlechter" waren als Eichmann – im Prozess z.B. Servatius – und die doch vermutlich unfähig gewesen wären oder nicht willens, ein solches Unheil mit anzurichten. Wenn man die Komik nicht sieht ("Ja, mein lieber Storfer, was haben wir denn da für ein Pech gehabt!"), hat man einen wesentlichen Aspekt nicht verstanden. Von Heinrich stammt der Untertitel nicht; er hat einmal vor Jahren gesagt: Das Böse ist ein Oberflächenphänomen – und das fiel mir in Jerusalem wieder ein; daraus kam schliesslich der Titel. Denk an die Komik seiner Worte unter dem Galgen: Tod war für ihn mit*

Arendt gives in the next sentences the genealogy of her book's subtitle "A Report on the Banality of Evil". Blücher had remarked years before on the superficiality of evil (as opposed to its radicality, she implies), and his idea had recurred to her while she was at Eichmann's trial, but she claims credit for the subtitle, and presumably for the word *Banalität*. She discussed the subtitle in her Postscript to the revised edition of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: "Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. He was not stupid. It was sheer thoughtlessness – something by no means identical with stupidity – that predisposed him to become one of the greatest criminals of that period. And if this is 'banal' and even funny, if with the best will in the world one cannot extract any diabolical or demonic profundity from Eichmann, that is still far from calling it commonplace. It surely cannot be so common that a man facing death, and, moreover, standing beneath the gallows, should be able to think of nothing but what he had heard at funerals all his life, and that these 'lofty words' should completely becloud the reality of his own death. That such remoteness from reality and such thoughtlessness can wreck more havoc than all the evil instincts taken together which, perhaps, are inherent in man – that was, in fact, the lesson one could learn in Jerusalem. But it was a lesson, neither an explanation of the phenomenon nor a theory about it" (p. 288; cf. German edition [Piper, 1986], p. 16). Knowing from Golo Mann's article and others like it that her remarks in the book on the German resistance were going to generate another facet of the controversy, Arendt wrote some pages on the German resistance and sent them to Jaspers with a February 19, 1964 letter (#348). The editors of the Correspondence note (to letter #348) that these pages are "not among the literary remains". But it is probably these pages that appeared in the German edition (1964) and in all revised English editions of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that bear a June, 1964 prefatory note by Arendt which indicates that her book now contains a Postscript and a passage concerning "the German anti-Hitler conspiracy of July 20, 1944".

Begräbnis verbunden und als er nach den letzten Worten suchte, fiel ihm nur ein, was er in unzähligen Beerdigungsreden gehört hatte – "wir werden ihn nie vergessen". Worauf er prompt die Sache umdrehte, vergass, dass dies ja seine eigene Beerdigung war und sein Tod, und mit grossem Pathos sagte: "Ich werde sie (Österreich, Argentinien und Deutschland ausgerechnet) nie vergessen!" Wobei Du Dir vor Augen halten musst, dass er mehrmals ausdrücklich erklärt hatte, dass er an einen persönlichen Gott und ein Fortleben nach dem Tode nicht glaube. Eigentlich dumm war er aber auch nicht.

(3) She notes that what she wrote Scholem "ist natürlich ganz unzulänglich". Her book is a report, and no more. She says she thinks she noted before that the Jews in New York are participating in the campaign against Hochhuth. Asks J. what he thinks of Montini:

*Ich habe den Eindruck, dass alles, was Roncalli wirklich und in vollem, einfachen Ernst versuchte, nun in einer billigen Reklameaufmachung weitergeführt wird. Montini ist ein typischer "Intellektueller", scheint mir. Vielleicht sollte man sagen, dass dies mit Geist überhaupt nichts zu tun hat. Er hat mit [zu?] Pacelli gehalten und dann, als er sah, dass die Stimmung umschwingt, sich zu Roncalli geschlagen. Diese Leute sind für Stimmungen empfänglich wie geschwächte Körper für Infektionen. Und sie erholen sich auch von ihren Stimmungen so, wie man sich von einer Krankheit erholt.*

(4) Notes their Sylvester party this year to be 20 people only.

(5) A P.S. about the Kennedy assassination, a recent article in *The New Republic* giving details that cast doubt on the official version of what happened.

*Die Sache sieht böse aus. Und wird vermutlich nicht aufgeklärt werden.*

ad (3) Arendt is referring to an exchange of letters with Gershom Scholem, first published in Israel in August, 1963, then in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* in October, and in English in *Encounter*, January, 1964. Scholem's letter was reprinted in *Die Kontroverse: Hannah Arendt, Eichmann und die Juden* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1964), where Golo Mann's article can also be found.

In this paragraph, she is speaking of Montini (Paul VI), who became Pope in 1963, of Pacelli (Pius XII), who was Pope during World War II, and Roncalli (John XXIII), Pope from 1958 to 1963, about whose *Journal of the Soul* she later (1965) wrote an article entitled "The Christian Pope", which was collected in *Men in Dark Times* and *Menschen in finsternen Zeiten*. Soon after he became Pope, Montini issued a critical statement about Hochhuth's play. He accused Hochhuth of maligning Pius XII and of misunderstanding the wartime conditions that made it impossible for Pius XII to condemn the Nazi massacres of the Jews – and Catholics – in the East. Hochhuth replied in July, 1963 through an anthology of pieces about his play *Der Streit um Hochhuths "Stellvertreter"* published by *Basilus Presse* in Basel. Both of these articles can also be found in an English anthology, *The Storm over the Deputy*, edited by Eric Bentley (Grove Press, 1964), where Hannah Arendt's article on *The Deputy* and an excerpt from an article Jaspers wrote are also collected. The German version of Arendt's article on Hochhuth's play, was published in *Neue deutsche Hefte* (no. 101; 1964, pp. 111-123).

In her essay on Roncalli, "The Christian Pope", Arendt tells a story she had heard when she and Heinrich Blücher were visiting Rome in June, 1963, while Roncalli lay dying: "... in the months preceding his death, he was given Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* to read and then was asked what one could do against it. Whereupon he allegedly replied: 'Do against it? What can you do against the truth?'" Arendt is implying that Montini, after his initial protest against Hochhuth's play, eventually adapted his public relations to Roncalli's spirit, if not ever to the letter of this assessment.

ad (4) Arendt and Blücher gave a New Year's party each year, but because of Blücher's poor health and the complexities that the Eichmann controversy had caused among their New York acquaintances, they cut the guest list down to old friends.

ad (5) The article referred to in this postscriptum is in the December 7, 1963 issue of *The New Republic*. ┘