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Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Critical Dialogue.

Robert Kunath

Book review: Tuija Parvikko, *Arendt, Eichmann and the Politics of the Past*. Pro et Contra vol. 2. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2021. Free open access version online at: https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/52524

Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* is a remarkable book, not least because it continues to be the object of a controversy that still simmers almost sixty years after its original publication. That controversy has been discussed in many books and articles devoted to Arendt and her thought, and it even finds occasional mention in popular culture.[1] It therefore seems striking that the Eichmann controversy has rarely been the subject of a scholarly monograph. Indeed, so far as I am aware, Merle Boers' 2016 dissertation is the only work to rival Tuija Parvikko's extensive study, first published in 2008 and reprinted in 2021 with a new prologue on recent interpretations of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[2] Parvikko's book appears in the series Pro et Contra published by the Helsinki University Press, and the series editors' note in their foreword that the first edition of the book "reached only a handful of readers" outside of Finland (v). The new edition, also available gratis online, therefore makes much more accessible an important contribution to the scholarly literature on the Eichmann controversy and on Arendt's interpretation of the Holocaust in general.

The paucity of books devoted to the Eichmann controversy is likely attributable to several causes. First, as Parvikko notes, there is a high degree of repetition in the debates over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (xxvi), and scholars might well wish to avoid confronting what seems to be the eternal recurrence of the same arguments and distortions. Second, scholars developing an in-depth analysis of the Eichmann controversy need to be familiar not only with Arendt's writings on Jewish history, totalitarianism, and the Holocaust, and of course, the myriad contributions to the controversy, but also the scholarly literature on the Holocaust, since one cannot avoid confronting the question of the degree to which Arendt's interpretations are supported by contemporary Holocaust scholarship. Third, one of the chief points of interest of the Eichmann controversy may simultaneously deter scholars from analyzing it: the controversy is not safely in the past; it still erupts, and it continues to evoke strong feelings and bitter polemics. The original controversy that raged during the mid-1960s in the pages of newspapers and magazines now looks like a

1 The controversy is the subject of Margarethe von Trotta's film *Hannah Arendt*, and it is mentioned in the HBO series *Julia*, about the well-known American chef Julia Child. In the series, Julia appears at a book signing in 1963 for her book on French cooking and is astonished by the large crowd. "Are they here for *me*?" she says, and her friend replies "They're probably not here for the most recent Hannah Arendt."

2 Merel Boers, "A Controversy on Moral Judgment," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2016. There is also a recent brief volume by Werner Renz, *Ad Hannah Arendt: Eichmann in Jerusalem und die Kontroverse um den Bericht von der Banalität von Böse* (Hamburg: Europaische Verlagsanstalt, 2021).

slow-motion rehearsal for the instantaneous storms of outrage and misinformation that sweep across social media. Analyzing the controversy potentially makes one an object of controversy, and the issues of identity, guilt, and responsibility so prominent in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* arouse emotions no less intense today than in the 1960s.

Tuija Parvikko was undaunted, and she has produced what is to my knowledge the most comprehensive overview of the Eichmann controversy ever written. She emphasizes that her book is a political reading of *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the controversy over it (xxxiii), and she therefore devotes considerable attention to the background context that is necessary to make Arendt's political arguments intelligible (14). She begins with a discussion of Arendt's views of Zionism, arguing that "her critique of wartime Jewish and Zionist policies in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was very much based on these early reflections and critiques" (49). I believe that Parvikko is correct in that claim, though, as I will develop later, there are some particular aspects of Arendt's criticism, on which our interpretations diverge. Parvikko continues with an account of Eichmann's capture and the pre-trial debate over the legitimacy and purpose of Israel prosecuting Eichmann. I found this section particularly illuminating. Many accounts of the Eichmann controversy focus almost exclusively on the responses to the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. But Arendt was closely following the pre-trial debates, and drew upon a number of views expressed at that time. It is quite interesting to read Parvikko's account of Jacob Robinson's defense of Israel's right to try Eichmann (76-9) and to note some similarities to points made by Arendt in her discussion of the trial in the Epilogue to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Robinson of course went on to become one of Arendt's principal critics during the controversy, but she was aware of his arguments and included him in her brief bibliography. Parvikko's account of R. H. S. Crossman's portrayal of Eichmann's "featurelessness" is also quite striking, with Parvikko keenly noting Arendt's almost verbatim repetition of Crossman's description of Eichmann's lack of convictions and careerism (100-01; Crossman's article is not to be found in Arendt's bibliography, alas). Parvikko's account of the controversy similarly draws on an impressive range of sources, and though many will be familiar to readers who have researched the controversy, there will be informative surprises: for example, until reading Parvikko, I was unaware of the importance of the articles appearing in the German-language American Jewish newspaper *Aufbau* (138-48). Parvikko's concern for placing Arendt's book and the controversy over it in context, as well as her assiduous search for lesser-known sources, make her book indispensable for readers seeking to understand the Eichmann controversy. She is also a perceptive reader who offers a thought-provoking rhetorical analysis of Arendt's use of irony in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. No one who reads Parvikko's analysis (based on the thought of Kenneth Burke) of how Arendt's irony serves to advance her political argument will dismiss her ironic comments as merely a question of "tone."

While Tuija Parvikko's book as a whole is, without question, a valuable contribution to Arendt scholarship, I noticed a certain imbalance. Her aim of reading *Eichmann in Jerusalem* politically results in a dominant focus on Arendt's criticisms of Jewish leaders during the Holocaust and the attacks directed at Arendt by Jewish critics in the United States and Israel. Arendt's portrayal of the "cooperation" of the Judenräte with the Nazi

authorities unleashed some of the most enraged and unfounded attacks on her, and clearly often had a political motivation that merits substantial consideration by any scholar seeking to analyze the controversy. Still, Parvikko's indictment of the Jewish leaders and communities during the Holocaust, and of the motives of the Jewish critics during the controversy, often substantially exceeds anything that Arendt wrote. Parvikko mentions several times that the Eichmann controversy continues in part because *Eichmann in Jerusalem* serves as a "buffer text" (19, 229-30) in relation to which writers can introduce their own views of topics touched on by Arendt. Parvikko's account of how recent debates over the uniqueness of the Holocaust use Arendt as a "buffer text" is a persuasive example (262-3). However, she seems to have done something similar herself: though she is careful to present Arendt's views accurately, her judgment of Jewish behavior during the Holocaust and the controversy is significantly more severe than Arendt's and there are points in the book when readers might confuse her sometimes very sharp views for those of Arendt. In the aftermath of the controversy, Arendt wrote that she was dismayed that "there were more and more voices who not only attacked me for what I had never said but, on the contrary, began to defend me for it."[3] Critics falsely charged Arendt with reproaching Jews for failing to resist the Nazis, for being responsible for their own deaths, and for conducting a manifestly unfair trial of Adolf Eichmann. Arendt vigorously rebutted those charges. Yet, while Parvikko rightly condemns "intentional misreadings" (9) as the foundation for many attacks on Arendt, she also, to varying degrees, appears to endorse those criticisms of the Jewish response to the Holocaust.[4]

Tuija Parvikko's criticism is directed not only towards Eichmann's trial but also at Israel's breach of international law in kidnapping Eichmann, though she does note that Arendt "did not dispute Israel's right to kidnap and try Eichmann" (106). Here, it would be useful to mention the point that Arendt emphasized: there was no alternative if one wanted to bring Eichmann to justice since "Argentina had an impressive record for not extraditing Nazi criminals."[5] Parvikko's view of the trial is equally incomplete: she cites Arendt's discussion of the substantial deficiencies of the trial to argue that Arendt "considered the trial in Jerusalem a total failure in every important respect" (218). I would argue against this view. In pressing her case for an International Tribunal to prosecute and try crimes against humanity, Arendt did indeed criticize many aspects of the Eichmann trial. But its flaws were not unique to Israel: as Arendt observed (and Parvikko briefly concedes on p. 218), the failures of the Jerusalem trial "were neither in kind nor in degree greater than the failures of the Nuremberg Trials or the Successor trials in other European countries."[6] Arendt also thought that the Jerusalem trial's findings for a valid definition of the "crime against humanity" were "incomparably better

3 Hannah Arendt, "Personal Responsibility under Dictatorship," in Jerome Kohn (ed.), *Responsibility and Judgment* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 17.

4 Arendt emphasized the impossibility of resistance in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Revised edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 11-12 and in "Answers to Questions Submitted by Samuel Grafton," in Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman (eds), *The Jewish Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 481.

5 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Revised edition (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 264.

6 Arendt, *Eichmann*, 274.

than those at Nuremberg."[7] Parvikko states that the Israelis failed to define and conduct the trial in a way that would enable it to render justice (218), a view that Walter Laqueur attributed to Arendt in 1965.[8] Arendt's sharp response drew on what she had clearly written in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*: "[Laqueur] insists that I 'argue that justice was not done in Jerusalem,' while I actually argue that despite a number of carefully enumerated irregularities [...] justice was done insofar as the trial's 'main purpose—to prosecute and to defend, to judge and too punish Adolf Eichmann—was achieved.'"[9]

Parvikko's references to Jewish resistance to the Nazis, and Arendt's account of it, is similarly stern. She mentions Arendt having "doubts about the dedication of the Jewish resistance and rescue operations" (117), suggests that Arendt's view of the failure of the Jewish leadership was that it did not "[organize] its people into a resistance or a mass escape while there was still time" (200), and refers to Arendt's "harsh judgments of the Jewish leadership and lack of Jewish resistance [...]" (264). Parvikko is certainly correct to emphasize Arendt's critique of the Jewish leadership, and yet the claim that Arendt reproached Jews for a failure to resist is false, despite its frequent repetition over the course of the controversy.[10] Arendt unequivocally asserted the impossibility of Jewish resistance, writing in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* that unlimited Nazi brutality and terror made the question "Why did you not revolt?", addressed to witness after witness at the trial by the prosecutor, "cruel and silly." Parvikko reads the posing of that question at the trial as a public relations tactic designed to create an exaggerated image of the Nazis as an irresistible force, excusing Jewish compliance (121), but Arendt's sense is quite different: she saw the reiterated question as a deliberate highlighting of the contrast with Israeli heroism, and thus an abuse of the victims and survivors.[11] When journalist Samuel Grafton sent Arendt a list of questions about her views in 1963, he included one on resistance: "What do you consider that the Jews of Europe might have done, in the way of a stronger resistance?" Arendt's response was blunt: "The question of resistance: I nowhere raised this question [...]. The question was posed by [Prosecutor] Hausner [...]. There never was a moment when 'the community leaders' could have said, 'Cooperate no longer, but fight!' as you phrase it. Resistance, which existed but played a very small role, meant only: 'We don't want that kind of death, we want to die with honor.'"[12] Parvikko appears at times to endorse the view that opportunities to resist that could have markedly reduced the death toll of the Holocaust were missed, and the vast majority of the historians of the Holocaust share Arendt's view that successful resistance was impossible. Parvikko cites Raul Hilberg's pathbreaking work *The Destruction of the European Jews*, from which Arendt drew so freely, and may have been influenced by his emphasis on the lack of Jewish resistance to Nazi persecution. Yet Hilberg's account of the heroic Warsaw Ghetto uprising shows that resistance saved few, if any, Jewish lives. Though the

7 Arendt, Eichmann, 274-5.
8 Walter Z. Laqueur, "Footnotes to the Holocaust," reprinted in Ron H. Feldman ed.), *The Jew as Pariah* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 255.
9 Arendt, "The Formidable Dr. Robinson," in Kohn and Feldman (eds), *The Jewish Writings*, 496-7.
10 A relatively recent example is Deborah Lipstadt's book *The Eichmann Trial* (New York: Schocken, 2011), 173, in which she writes "she [Arendt] castigated Jews for not resisting...".
11 Arendt, *Eichmann*, 11-12.
12 Arendt, "Answers to Questions," *Jewish Writings*, 473, 480-1.

resistance organization in the ghetto did its utmost to acquire weapons, construct defensive positions, and fight to the end, the uprising was soon crushed, and the entire ghetto was liquidated. The struggle lasted a month, but that was due not just to the courage of the Jewish fighters, but also to the inexperience and minimal equipment of the scratch troops whom the Germans committed to the battle. German losses were a mere sixteen dead and eighty-five wounded.[13]

When Tuija Parvikko considers Arendt's indictment of the leaders of the Jewish Councils, she persuasively draws on Arendt's writings on Jewish history to locate the source of Arendt's critique. Parvikko discusses Bernard Lazare's writings, which strongly influenced Arendt, to portray nineteenth-century Jewish communities that were politically undeveloped: hierarchical, undemocratic, and backward (32-3). She also rightly cites Lazare's conception of the price of assimilation: "the denial of one's own religious, cultural, and social roots…" (32), which is very prominent in Arendt's writings on Jewish history from the 1930s to the early 1950s. Another noteworthy aspect would be Arendt's repeated assertion that wealthy Jews who had become provisionally acceptable in gentile society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a vested interest in maintaining "the poverty and backwardness of the [Jewish] masses," because it was the guarantee of their privileged social status.[14] Arendt did not shrink from portraying this as a "betrayal" of the Jewish people, and the charge appears in her writings as early as 1938-9 as well as in her section on "The Jews and Society" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.[15] Though she carefully refrained from using the word "betrayal" in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, the idea of it seems at the root of her most direct explanation for what she saw as the voluntary cooperation of the Jewish leaders with the Nazis: the Nazis granted "enormous powers" to the "locally recognized Jewish leaders," and she cites a declaration by the Budapest Jewish Council as evidence for how those leaders "enjoyed their new power."[16] Though Parvikko does not cite these passages, she levels a similar charge that "the Jewish leaders were more interested in maintaining their own power shares and fame than improving the living conditions of the members of the Jewish community" (134).

However, Arendt's portrayal of the Jewish Councils has in my view been refuted by extensive scholarly research into the Jewish experience of the Holocaust, especially the ghettos in occupied Poland and in the Nazi-occupied areas of the Soviet Union.[17] Arendt explained her charges against the Jewish Councils in her well-known exchange of letters with Gershom Scholem, in which she insisted that, though resistance was impossible, Jewish Council members could have given up their offices without penalty:

> I said there was no possibility of resistance, but there existed the possibility of *doing nothing* [Arendt's emphasis]. And in order to do nothing, one did not need to be a saint, one needed only to say: "I am just a simple Jew, and I have no desire

13 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, vol. 2. Revised edition (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1985), 509-13.

14 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Third edition (San Diego: Harcourt, 1968), 62.

15 See her previously unpublished essay "Antisemitism," in *Jewish Writings*, 46-121, and 9; *Origins* 66.

16 Arendt, *Eichmann*, 117-18.

17 See Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews, 1933-45* (New York: Bantam Books, 1976), especially Ch. 16, and Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-45: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007)

> to play any other role." [...] Moreover, we should not forget that we are dealing here with conditions which were terrible and desperate enough, but which were not the conditions of the concentration camps. These decisions were made in an atmosphere of terror but not under the immediate pressure and impact of terror. [...] These people had still a certain, limited freedom of decision and action, just as the SS murderers also possessed, as we now know, a limited choice of alternatives. They could say: "I wish to be relieved of my murderous duties," and nothing happened to them.[18]

Adam Czerniakow, the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto who killed himself as the first wave of deportations from Warsaw began in July 1942, would have been astonished by Arendt's depiction. His diary recounts grim attempts to secure enough resources to support the ghetto population, frequent Germans exactions and threats, including the threat to shoot one hundred Jews unless 100,000 zloty were paid as a fine, and the threat that his wife would be shot as a hostage if the deportations did not run smoothly. Czerniakow recounts how he sought to resign as a response to the German threats, but the SS replied that "they would not recommend such a step."[19] Arendt apparently found the Budapest Jewish Council decree that she cited in Hilberg's book, but Hilberg included only an excerpt. Jacob Robinson published the full text, and justifiably observed that it did not offer much evidence of the enjoyment of power. The beginning of the decree, not included in the excerpt that Arendt borrowed from Hilberg, included the following statements:

> The individual members of the Council and all persons failing to carry out to the full instructions received from the Council are answerable with their lives. Brothers! The organization of Hungarian Jews is under an obligation to execute official instructions: this means that the Central Council is not an authority, but simply an executive body carrying out orders from the authorities.[20]

Arendt's evidence for her portrayal of the Councils voluntarily "cooperating" with the Nazis was exceedingly thin. Given her keen perception of the brutal Nazi terror that made resistance impossible, one wonders why she failed to appreciate the degree of duress applied to the Jewish leaders. The answer would appear to be that she projected her model of nineteenth-century "privileged" Jews "betraying" their brethren onto the Jewish Councils.

Tuija Parvikko does something similar. She accepts Arendt's characterization of the Jewish Councils operating in Nazi-occupied territory, and then projects it onto Jewish communities in Palestine and the United States, both during the war and during the controversy. Arendt scarcely mentioned those Jewish communities in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, but Parvikko depicts them as just as benighted as the nineteenth-century Jewish communities criticized by Lazare. Indeed, they seem worse. Parvikko writes that one of Arendt's primary objectives in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was, "between the lines," to

18 Arendt, "A Letter to Gershom Scholem," in *Jewish Writings*, 469-69.

19 I cite the excerpts from Czerniakow's diary published in Lucy Dawidowicz (ed.), *A Holocaust Reader* (West Orange, N.J., Behrman House, 1976), 240-58. Arendt could not have known the Czerniakow diary since it did not appear in print until 1968.

20 Full text printed in Jacob Robinson, *And the Crooked Shall be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt's Narrative* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), 165.

carry out "a political reading of the Jewish political culture" (133). What she found, according to Parvikko, was "a traditional hierarchical power structure that did not want to open itself to modern democratic practices, the ruthless politics of individual interests, an astonishing amount of hypocrisy, vanity, and conformity" (134). The American Jewish community was moreover characterized by "traditional despotic power structures" (133). Ordinary members of the Jewish communities felt betrayed by their leaders "and did not want to admit that their lives were based on lies and dishonesty" (134). During the controversy, Arendt certainly had some harsh words (especially in her correspondence) about the role of the Jewish establishment, but many of these findings appear to be Parvikko's, not Arendt's.

That is particularly the case when it comes to considering whether it would have been possible for large numbers of Jews to have been rescued over the course of the Holocaust. After the war, Jews in America and Israel engaged in anguished self-recrimination that they had failed to do enough, and Parvikko indicts both Jewish communities. Her main reproach is that both in Palestine and in the United States, Jewish leaders could have pursued rescue attempts with far greater dedication and effectiveness, and her implication appears to be that effective rescue operations were well within their power. Instead, according to her, Jewish leaders chose to focus on saving "prominent" Jews, while making no effort to rescue as many Jews as possible (50, 115, 132-3, 194). The only example that she cites is Arendt's account of Rudolf Kastner's selection process for the 1,684 Jews Eichmann released to him over the course of the "blood for goods" negotiations in Hungary in 1944.[21] But Arendt levelled no such global indictment of Jewish leaders for callously condemning to death Jews who could easily have been saved, and Parvikko herself concedes that Arendt did not believe effective rescue operations could have taken place during the war (253). Arendt did not directly address the issue in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, but in her response to questions posed by the journal *Jewish World* she stated that, though Jewish leadership in Palestine and the Diaspora might have done more, nothing would have helped to save Jews but the formation of a Jewish Army and co-belligerency.[22] Tom Segev and Peter Novick, authors cited by Parvikko, both acknowledge that Jewish organizations in Palestine and the United States might have done more to support the case for rescue, but they conclude that under wartime conditions, little could have been accomplished. As Segev writes, "The story of the yishuv leaders during the Holocaust was essentially one of helplessness. They rescued a few thousand Jews from Europe. They could, perhaps, have saved more, but they could not save millions."[23]

While it is fully legitimate for Tuija Parvikko to disagree with Arendt and develop her own interpretation, more extensive evidence would be needed to support her views on the issue of rescue. It is particularly misleading that at no time does she mention that the Jewish communities in the United States and Palestine were not free to enact their own immigration policies. There were indeed very selective immigration policies in Palestine

21 Arendt, *Eichmann*, 116-18.

22 Arendt, "The Destruction of Six Million: A Jewish World Symposium," in *Jewish Writings*, 494.

23 Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 82. Yishuv was the term for the Jewish community in Palestine.

and the United States, but they most certainly were not set by the Jewish leaders. In Palestine, immigration was controlled by Great Britain, which administered Palestine under the League of Nations Mandate of 1922. Parvikko clearly is aware of that, since her first chapter includes a footnote on the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate that notes it was in effect until 1948 (38). However, she does not mention that in May, 1939, Britain promulgated the "White Paper," which limited Jewish immigration to Palestine to 75,000 over five years, after which further Jewish immigration would require the acquiescence of the Arab population. Britain's goal was to conciliate the growing Arab population as war loomed, and when war broke out Britain prohibited people from Germany or German-occupied territory from entering Palestine. Jewish organizations in Palestine responded by attempting to facilitate illegal immigration, but the British threatened to retaliate by not issuing certificates for legal immigration. They in fact did so, and, as Avivah Halamish notes in her essay on immigration into Palestine, for fifteen of the first thirty-nine months of the war, during much of which the Nazis were still attempting to expel Jews, Britain allowed no legal Jewish immigration to Palestine.[24] In this sense, it appears unfair for Parvikko to blame the Jewish leaders in Palestine for highly restrictive immigration policies that they did not promulgate and which they sought to evade.

Tuija Parvikko's portrayal of Jewish immigration to the United States is similarly misleading. There too, she blames the American Jewish leaders and their "traditional despotic power structures" (133) for the immigration policies that admitted only "prominent" Jews, while abandoning ordinary Jews. Yet the claim that the American Jewish community was in any way despotic seems hard to sustain. According to historians like Peter Novick and Henry Feingold, the great weakness of the American Jewish community at the time of World War II was not its despotism but rather its fragmentation. Peter Novick goes so far as to say that it is misleading to speak of any singular entity in regard to American Jews, who were riven by differences of class, denomination, and national ancestry.[25] Following the war, memories of that fragmentation haunted American Jews, resulting in what Novick refers to as "the commonly accepted view within American Jewry…that American Jews were unforgivably delinquent in not continually and energetically pressing for rescue."[26] As Feingold observes, "endless guilt" arises naturally "when people assume responsibility they do not have the power to discharge."[27]

In addition to the fragmentation, the aforementioned complexity of the immigration policies, does apply here too. American Jews did not have the power to rescue Jews threatened by Nazi mass murder above all because immigration policies were determined

24 See Avivah Halamish, "Palestine as a Destination for Jewish Immigrants and Refugees from Nazi Germany," in Frank Caestecker and Bob Moore (eds), *Refugees from Nazi Germany and the Liberal European States*, pp. 122-150 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

25 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 31. Feingold offers a similar portrayal of a fragmented American Jewish community; see Henry Feingold, *A Time for Searching: Entering the Mainstream, 1920-1945*. The Jewish People in America, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), Ch. 8, esp. 238-9, 249, 263-5.

26 Novick, 39.

27 Feingold, 265.

by the US government and administered by the US State Department. The Immigration Act passed by Congress in 1924 set strict immigration quotas by country of origin that plainly reflected racist intent. As the Great Depression took hold, the US government strictly enforced the regulation denying entry to any person deemed likely to become a "public charge."[28] President Roosevelt responded to the persecution of German Jews by opening the full immigration quotas for Europe in 1938, but, as David Wyman notes, the combined quotas for all of the affected countries were under 40,000 per year. In mid-1940, though, the State Department cut the quotas to 50% and in May 1941 they were reduced by an additional 25%. These cuts reflected nativist and anti-Semitic sentiments that were prevalent within the State Department, and in American society in general. Parvikko refers to a policy favoring "prominent Jews," but that was not a policy determined by American Jewish organizations: after the US entry into the war in December 1941, State Department regulations stipulated that only enemy aliens who could prove that their admission would bring "positive benefit" to the United States were to be admitted.[29] Over the course of the war, the Visa Division of the State Department, under the now notorious Undersecretary of State Breckenridge Long, sought consistently to discourage immigration, with the result that only 21,000 mostly Jewish refugees were admitted between 1942 and 1945, "only ten percent of the number who could have been legally admitted under the immigration quotas during that period."[30] Wyman notes that the archival record shows that the basic policy of the American (and British) governments "was not rescue but the avoidance of rescue."[31] Prospects only improved when Roosevelt created the War Refugee Board, whose rescue efforts were funded by American Jewish organizations. Despite being created only in 1944, Wyman credits the War Refugee Board with helping to save 200,000 Jews.[32]

The unwillingness of the Allied nations, above all the United States and Great Britain, to provide refuge for Jews attempting to flee the Holocaust was well-known, indeed notorious, long before Parvikko wrote her book in 2008, and she does briefly acknowledge that there might have been limits on what Jewish organizations could have accomplished. But that recognition takes the form of a single footnote to a sentence stating that the "reverse side" of Arendt's critique of the Jewish leadership in Europe "was the claim according to which the most important American Jewish organizations had not done everything in their power to organize the mass escape of the Jews from Europe" (132). The footnote to that sentence states that "Later some scholars have argued that these organizations could not have accomplished much more than they did even if they had tried to, because the idea of rescue did not get much support among gentiles and because of this lack there were not many shelters available" (132, footnote 16). In my view, the author should have explored this literature more thoroughly.

Perhaps part of the explanation for why she did not engage with that literature is her affinity with Arendt. As Arendt was, Parvikko is a critic of contemporary Israeli and

28 Novick, 49.
29 David Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 124-26.
30 Wyman, xiv.
31 Wyman, 189.
32 Wyman, xiv.

Zionist policies (45-6, 87). She has embraced Arendt's view that the controversy was shaped by a deliberate attempt by the Jewish establishment to cover up the "dirty laundry" of the Jewish Agency's possible ties to the Jewish Councils (130, quoting Arendt's letter to Karl Jaspers).[33] Uniting the Jewish Councils and the post-war Jewish organizations in a shared culpability endows Parvikko's accounts of Arendt's arguments in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and her analysis of the dynamic of the subsequent controversy with an elegant symmetry. It is a symmetry not unlike Arendt's projection of her model of nineteenth-century assimilated Jews betraying their fellow Jews in return for privileged status onto the Nazi-era Jewish Councils. But symmetry is no guarantee of truth, and, just as I think that Arendt's accusation that the Jewish Councils cooperated voluntarily with the Nazis was based on a misunderstanding of the historical reality, so too I think Parvikko's account of the culpability of Palestinian and American Jewish organizations in the Holocaust is mistaken. It constitutes a significant defect, which is unfortunate since Parvikko offers the most comprehensive account of the Eichmann controversy yet to appear, and her analysis is often illuminating. While Tuija Parvikko's book is, in my opinion, not where one would start one's reading on the Eichmann controversy and the history of the Holocaust, I would recommend it to any scholar familiar with those subjects.

33 The Jewish Agency, subordinated to the British authorities, was the administrative body for the Jewish community in Palestine from 1929 until 1948. It had some limited autonomy and was involved in attempts to rescue Jews.

Tuija Parvikko

A Reply to Robert Kunath

As I was starting to write a response to Roberth Kunath's review essay on the new edition of my book *Arendt, Eichmann and the Politics of the Past*, the theme of evil suddenly re-emerged at the centre of public debate in the West. While the Russian aggression against Ukraine had been losing space and attention in the headlines and among general public, Palestine suddenly reappeared at the centre of media publicity and public debates. This was because on 7 October, Hamas unexpectedly attacked Israel by launching thousands of missiles to Israel, crossing the Israeli border, killing more than 200 young people who were having a rave party close to the border of Gaza and destroying a nearby Kibbutz. The verdict of the West was unanimous: Hamas has committed not only war crimes but also crimes against humankind and Israel has a legitimate right not only to defend its national borders but also to destroy the organization of Hamas, which has been defined as a terrorist organization.

One might argue that the cruel and inhuman attack of Hamas is one proof more that Hannah Arendt was hopelessly wrong when she argued that modern evil is never radical but only extreme inhabiting on the surface of phenomena and that what strikes the most in it is that sometimes it appears in simply banal individuals like Adolf Eichmann. Kunath might well agree with this argument as far as most critics of Arendt's conception of evil in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* focus precisely on the concept of modern evil.

Nevertheless, Kunath's attack on my (and partly also Arendt's) book focuses on another main topic surrounding the never-ending controversy over *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, namely the question of Jewish resistance and the role of Jewish leaders and establishment in wartime attempts to defend and save European Jewish population from being destroyed. He argues that both Arendt and I hopelessly overestimate chances for efficient resistance against the Nazi terror as well as blame Jewish leaders unfoundedly of everywhere expanded collaboration with the Nazis. This is, of course, not the case. Neither Arendt not I argue that there would have been significant chances for open and efficient chances for resistance after the machine of destruction had been put to work. I try to show, instead, that the Jewish community leaders, who did cooperate with the Nazis, often withdrew community members a possibility to make independently their own personal decisions and choices in desperate situations by withholding important information, e.g. information about destinations of departing trains.

However, this is not yet the real point of his critique. First, listing carefully the particulars of his argument, he presents his final indictment of my approach at the end of his review: in his view my book is an account of culpability of Palestinian and American Jewish organizations in the Holocaust. In other words, Kunath suggests that I blame Jewish leaders and organizations for causing the destruction of European Jewry. This is, of course, not the case. I try to analyze, instead, Arendt's political reading and critique of

pre-war, wartime and post-war Jewish politics. This analysis obviously includes also the action of Jewish organizations.

It seems to me that such a conclusion stems, on the one hand, from Kunath's incapacity to understand Arendt's conception of personal responsibility under dictatorship, and on the other hand, from his incapacity to grasp what 'reading politically' really means.

What I am going to do in the following is to discuss in more detail one of the most frequent miss-readings of Arendt's book deriving from the omission of her conception of personal responsibility, which owes very much to Bernard Lazare, a nineteenth-century French Jew and one of the founders of European Zionist movement, whose writings Arendt studied carefully in 1930s in Paris. Even if Kunath refers to Lazare and his critic of hierarchical structures of Jewish communities twice, he does so only to back his argument according to which Arendt's knowledge and conception of the present-day structures of these communities was totally obsolete. However, in my view, a proper knowledge and understanding of Arendt's conception of personal responsibility is indispensable in order to understand her critique of the role and action of Jewish organizations and leaders before, during and after the World War II.

The basic argument of Bernard Lazare, adopted by Arendt in her *Jewish Writings* and *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, is that it is a duty of every politically conscious Jew to defend oneself as a Jew. Consequently, even if an oppressed and persecuted person cannot be responsible for other people's deeds and misdeeds, every individual is responsible for her own actions and choices. And even more importantly, there is always more than one choice or alternative for action in every single situation.

It is easy to admit that this is how it is in normal political circumstances, under which we cannot go behind the backs of other people or hide ourselves behind collective guilt of a nation or some other large entity. Under normal political circumstances even non-action may be understood to be a choice: usually it may be understood as a form of silent support for governing elite. However, it is also easy to argue that under dictatorship or any other extreme political situation conventional rules of responsibility do not hold. Kunath seems to think that this is the case of Jewish organizations and community leaders during the Nazi rule in Europe: in his understanding they hardly could have done more in awful situations in which there was hardly any room for alternative choices and actions. Kunath seems to be unable to think politically and admit unavoidable contingency of every political situation – extreme situations included. He seems to be unable to understand or admit Arendt's real point concerning the decisions and choices of European Jewish leadership. This is her thesis that there always was the choice of doing nothing and the choice of politically and humanly dignified death. Alas, most of the Jewish leaders chose to collaborate, in one form or another, hoping perhaps to save at least a few members of their community – in addition to their own skin.

Arendt was, of course, completely aware of the fact that all the Jewish leaders were not similar and that all the strategies of action chosen by them in extremely difficult circumstances were not equal to each other. As I show in my book (pp. 192-199) Arendt deals with the strategies chosen by Jewish community leaders by means of three

representative examples. These are Adam Czerniakow, the leader of Warsaw ghetto who chose dignified dead by committing suicide; Chaim Rumkowski, the leader of the Jewish ghetto of Łódź, who Arendt describes as having been a ruthlessly selfish person who tried to achieve personal advantages by collaborating with the Nazis, and finally, there was Leo Baeck, the leader of the ghetto of Theresienstadt, who simply was too good a person to be a good politician. As he did not want to depress his people he decided to withhold from them the information as to where the deportation trains were parting. The purpose of Arendt's typology is not to distinguish between good and evil leaders, but instead, to show that none of them acted in situations without alternative choices of action. In Weberian terms, while the *Spielraum* of Jewish leaders was extremely narrow, always more than one alternative mode of action was available, the choice of non-action included. It may be that I could have argued and shown more carefully that, ironically, Arendt seemed to think that Jewish leaders were far too eager to act at any price. More often than not, they did not use the choice of not doing anything, which would at least have made the work of the SS harder and more laborious without necessarily causing more sufferings for the victims. In sum, unlike most of the Holocaust Studies, which appear to treat the Jews as helpless and innocent victims of evil atrocities of the Nazis, Arendt approaches both European, American and Israeli Jews as active subjects of their own actions in contrast to passive objects of the actions of other people.

It seems to me that Kunath does not really understand what political theory and 'reading politically' mean as he argues that in the final analysis, I read Arendt for my own partisan purposes in order to criticize the Western Jewish establishment, the State of Israel and the entire European political culture. In his view, I commit this by exceeding anything that Arendt wrote in the case of the critique of the wartime Jewish leadership in particular. It seems to me that Kunath is either unaware or not fond of Max Weber's conception of perspectivism, which is one of the guiding principles of my analysis. The basic idea of Weberian perpectivism is that in order to cast some new light on the object of study, one has to choose a certain perspective from which to approach it, given that in one single study it is virtually impossible to look at a phenomenon from every possible perspective. Consequently, I chose as my theoretical perspective political reading and analysis of different actors and their deeds both in the Eichmann controversy and Arendt's book. In addition, Kunath seems to be unaware of the task of political theory, which is precisely *interpretation* of a phenomenon from a certain perspective. This means that political reading does not remain trapped into literal analysis of texts under scrutiny, but instead, reads them politically by providing a interpretation. This is what I tried to do in my book.

It seems that Kunath does not understand or accept my invitation to read *Eichmann in Jerusalem* politically as an evaluation of political action and judgment of not only European Jewish leadership but also European political elite and culture at large. I tried to do this in a very Arendtian spirit as I consider *Eichmann in Jerusalem* as being a contribution in a long chain of writings dealing not only with structural analysis of totalitarianism but also with political action and judgment in extreme situations. In all of these contributions from early *Jewish Writings* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to

The Life of the Mind, one of the guiding principles and constant characteristics of Arendt's thinking was her critique of the European political culture characterized by dangerous political fallacies and wishful thinking. Political fallacies made the European political leadership believe to rely firmly on mass support while in reality people were turning their support to Hitler. Wishful thinking led the European political leadership underestimate the political challenge launched by Hitler as well the size of destruction brought by the Nazi terror. The European Jewish leadership did not remain untouched by these general political moods in Europe.

In sum, the critique of European political culture – the Jewish political culture included – constitutes a meta-level of Arendt's thinking and analysis throughout her literary production. This is why it does not always appear on the surface of the text. This is also probably the reason why it does not dawn to those who prefer to read Arendt's texts literally instead of understanding their profoundly political character and purpose.

As I am finishing this reply Israel is about to start its ground-war attack to Gaza. Arendt's dearest dream of a binational Palestine equally cohabited by all the inhabitants of the area seems to be forever lost. And yet, the present-day crisis in the Middle East urgently invites us to take seriously her invitation to think human plurality as the most important political principle and foundation for future cohabitation both in Palestine and worldwide. I still believe that taking seriously her invitation would help us to understand that no one should be in the position of being able to choose with whom to cohabit the earth. I would suggest with Judith Butler[34] that it is not only that we may not choose with whom to cohabit, but also that we must actively preserve the unchosen character of inclusive and plural cohabitation. We not only live with those we never chose and to whom we may feel no social or political sense of belonging, but we are also obliged to preserve their lives and the plurality of which they form a part.

The ethical and political obligation to preserve the lives of those with whom we never chose to cohabit does not concern only Hamas but also the State of Israel.

34 Judith Butler: Parting Ways. Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism. New York: Columbia University Press 2012.

Robert Kunath

A Response to Tuija Parvikko

I appreciate Tuija Parvikko's thoughtful reply to my review, which clarifies where we agree and disagree. I regret that she reads my review as an attack; as I hope the review made clear, and as I reiterate here, I believe that her book is a notable addition to the scholarly literature on Arendt in general and the controversy over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in particular. Even readers quite familiar with the controversy will find new and illuminating insights in it. Parvikko also believes that I ascribe partisan motives to her views, and that is not the case: she is no more "partisan" than any dedicated scholar who formulates and develops a strong argument. I entirely agree with her that adopting a particular perspective necessarily excludes competing views and that her "political reading" aims to offer a distinctive interpretation. Indeed, as a historian, my business is formulating and evaluating interpretations, so I of course regard her project as entirely legitimate.

But all interpretations inevitably have strong and weak points. Parvikko's exceptionally thorough and thoughtful analysis of the dynamics of the Eichmann controversy is a great strength of her book. But I find her agreement with, and extension of, Arendt's criticisms of the failures of the Jewish Councils and of the wartime American and Palestinian Jewish communities open to question. I in no way believe that those topics are illegitimate areas of historical and political judgment. As a historian I can scarcely adopt Gershom Scholem's view that he cannot judge what he was not there to experience, and I endorse Arendt's reply that "we shall only come to terms with this past if we begin to judge and be frank about it."[35] But the judgments must be as accurate as possible. In her famous televised conversation with Günter Gauss, Arendt referred to the importance of historians as "guardians of factual truths," and I do my best to live up to that charge.[36]

Tuija Parvikko does as well. There is an eloquent passage in her book in which she describes the nature of "political judgment." She recognizes the critical distance necessary "in order to judge a phenomenon clearly and accurately" (216) and explains that political judgment cannot be theoretical precisely because "it is always based on and shaped by the contingent conditions of concrete situations" (217). She has taken considerable pains to work through the nature and dynamic of the Eichmann controversy in her pursuit of forming an accurate judgment. But, in my view, she has not expended similar effort on the historical literature on the Jewish Councils during the Holocaust or on the wartime activities of the American and Palestinian Jewish communities. Parvikko and other readers might reasonably respond that doing that is a major project unto itself, and I would agree. But not doing so renders the accuracy of her sharp political judgments of the

35 "An Exchange of Letters between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt," in Ron H. Feldman (ed.) *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York: Grove Press, 1978), 248 (Scholem's comment is on p. 243).

36 "Was bleibt? Es bleibt die Muttersprache" in Günter Gauss, *Zur Person* (Munich: Feder, 1964), 29.

Jewish Councils and the activities of the American and Palestinian Jewish communities questionable.

Tuija Parvikko mentions the concept of *Spielraum*, and concedes that it was extremely narrow for the Jewish leaders. As Arendt noted, resistance was only the choice for a different kind of death; she raises, and Parvikko endorses, the alternative of "doing nothing," i.e. refusing to accept any leadership role. This is a point well worth considering, but establishing it requires an analysis of how it would have worked within the concrete conditions of the Jewish ghettos in Nazi-occupied Europe and whether it indeed promised the vastly reduced death toll that Arendt cited (well below the four and a half to six million victims). Arendt suggested that Jewish leaders had the freedom to resign without consequences, and she therefore regards them as willing functionaries; it was on that basis that she spoke of "cooperation," a term which Parvikko accepts and which she extends to "collaboration." In my view, historical scholarship over the last forty years has shown that the Jewish leaders faced far greater coercion than Arendt believed. Refusal to follow Nazi orders would, I think, have been correctly understood by the Germans as a form of resistance, and would have drawn a violent and grossly disproportionate response. As Saul Friedländer observed, armed Jewish resistance did not save lives but rather "accelerated the rhythm of extermination,"[37] and I believe the same would have been true of refusing orders. My view of course is also open to question. Only a careful consideration of the "contingent conditions of the concrete situations" that Parvikko specifies as necessary to render accurate political judgment can offer a clearer sense of whether "doing nothing" in fact constituted a realistic and effective option for the Jewish leaders. But she does not undertake that consideration.

The same is true for her portrayal of the failures of the American and Palestinian Jewish communities to aid more effectively Jews threatened by the Nazis. As I noted in my review, she does not refer at all to the immigration policies enforced by the governments of the United States and Great Britain, and those policies, which often deliberately obstructed rescue efforts, constituted by far the greatest constraints on the *Spielraum* of those communities. Any political judgment of those Jewish communities that does not include the government policies that obstructed their rescue efforts cannot be reasonably accurate.

Tuija Parvikko refers to political judgment as "a proud and arrogant activity" that in reference to historical events is "never fair" (216, 217) because hindsight allows us to know more than the contemporaries did. She obviously has Hannah Arendt in mind, who was so often reproached for what her critics perceived as arrogance. None of Arendt's admirers – of whom I am one – would want to sacrifice the fruits of her courageous judgments, even when we believe some of them to be mistaken. But those of us who are historians often approach judgment with more humility. Hindsight indeed grants us the advantage of knowing what happened, but it also deprives us of the opportunity to understand more clearly how those who experienced the history understood their situations and made their choices. Our answers are necessarily provisional, based on incomplete evidence open to multiple interpretations, and we therefore acknowledge

37 Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 556-7.

faults and welcome a plenitude of views. As long as we work honestly with the evidence and try to understand historical actors not simply as hindsight would have us see them, but as real persons facing complex choices, we can both be fair to the past and do our best to advance historical understanding in the present. Parvikko has made a notable contribution to the understanding of the controversy over *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, and I hope that further research will enable her either to support more effectively the interpretations that I have questioned or to modify them as the evidence requires.