

”Thoughtlessness“:

Its Rare Meaning Enters *The Times*

Mary McCarthy in a letter to Hannah Arendt, June 9, 1971:

“Thoughtlessness.” It doesn’t mean what you want it to mean in English, not any more, the sense you are trying to impose on it is given in the big OED as “Now Rare.” And it seems to me a mistake to force a key word in an essay [e.g., “Thinking and Moral Considerations,” 1971] to mean what it doesn’t normally, even when the reader understands what you are trying to say with it. Not to mention the cases when the reader will fail to understand and read it as heedlessness, neglect, forgetfulness, etc.

Benedict Carey, in: *The New York Times*, as published by *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 14, 2005, in his article “Science Tries to Classify Savage Acts:”

In Nazi prisoner camps, as during purges in Kosovo and Cambodia, historians found that clerks, teachers, bureaucrats and other normally peaceable citizens committed some of the gruesome violence, apparently swept along in the kind of collective thoughtlessness that the philosopher Hannah Arendt described as the banality of evil.

U.L.