Booknotes

What is practical or applied philosophy? If we are to judge this by impact, few works by a philosopher can have had as far-reaching an impact as Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* of 1963. Indeed the very phrase 'the banality of evil', which Arendt coined when she failed to see what Eichmann was really like, has come to dominate discussion of state-sanctioned atrocity, invariably trotted out every time we are confronted with yet another genocide or systematic political mass murder. Philosophers, being rational people, often seem to find it hard to recognise evil for what it is.

That Arendt failed to see what Eichmann was really like – that, to put it bluntly, she was taken in by his carefully crafted self-presentation as an ordinary mediocre bureaucrat, a mere cog in a machine which he simply helped to keep running – has been made abundantly clear by Bettina Stagneth in *Eichmann Before Jerusalem* (London; Bodley Head, 2014). Like Arendt, Stagneth is a philosopher, and also concerned to understand what Eichmann was really like, and to see what conclusions can be drawn about the nature of what he did.

Admittedly with the benefit of more information than Arendt, Stagneth shows that Eichmann was no simple cog in a machine, but one who rejoiced in the killing of 6 million Jews (regretting only that there were not more people like him to ensure that it would have been 10.3 million). As 'Adviser on Jewish Affairs' Eichmann had travelled all over the Reich and its satellites doing rather more than 'advising'; among other things he was hugely instrumental in ensuring the killing of half a million Jews in Hungary in 1944, when it was abundantly clear that the war was already lost. After the war, and without the need for any orders from above, Eichmann was insistent on placing his hopes (for the final extermination of the Jews), to rest with the 'generations to come'. All this makes Arendt's claim that 'everybody could see that this man was not a "monster"', but something closer to a 'clown' rather hard to take.

Arendt makes a lot of Eichmann's appeals at his trial to Kant's categorical imperative to justify what he was presenting as his blind and necessary obedience to the law laid down for him from above. Rather more relevant, though, might be these words, which appear in *The Other Spoke*, a self-aggrandising tract Eichmann wrote in Argentina in 1956; 'the more I listened to the natural world, whether microcosm or macrocosm' the more he discovered a total

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war for survival; 'the eternal fate of all organic beings, for which there is no consolation'. He also proclaimed that 'the drive towards self-preservation is stronger than any so-called morality'. These sentiments were backed up by claims that the Jews were and always had been the eternal enemy, in part because of their cosmopolitan rootlessness, but also, more specifically, because, in Eichmann's insane world-view, they had declared war on Germany (!).

On top of Eichamnn's neo-Darwinian ramblings, which in spirit owe not a little to the Melian Dialogue in Thucydides, there is also this, from Heidegger in 1933: 'We have freed ourselves from the idealization of a groundless and powerless thought. We are seeing the end of a philosophy which is subservient to it'. 'Ethnic science' is needed to establish 'the mental world of a people', which turns out to yield 'the power of preserving the strength that lies in its blood and soil', 'the power that excites the deepest feeling and shakes the furthest reaches of his existence.' Eichmann knew of Heidegger, getting his brother to write on his behalf to 'this great thinker' while he was awaiting execution in Jerusalem.

We do not know whether Heidegger replied to his admirer. But what Stagneth makes apparent is one way in which both Arendt and Heidegger can be seen as having philosophical 'impact'. Heidegger contributed significantly to the diabolical context in which genocidal evil flourished, and Arendt, Heidegger's pupil and lover, unintentionally perhaps, contributed to a mentality which we philosophers are all too often too fastidious to recognise evil for what it is, even when it stares us in the face. It should not need saying, but there is nothing banal about a Jew being pushed into a gas chamber or a hostage being beheaded in the desert. Nor is there anything banal about systems which lead to such things or the people who man the systems; the systems are evil through and through, contaminating all who are involved, infecting them with the evil if they were not already evil. Stagneth's book is not a work of philosophy in the strict sense, but it is one which raises troubling questions for philosophers about the way their reflections may have real consequences.

On a more academic level another work of philosophy which has had an influence way beyond philosophy is John Henry Newman's *Idea of a University*. In contrast to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Newman's *Idea* is a book one should have no qualms about calling 'philosophy', even if it is neglected in official philosophic circles. It is, of course, the most stirring articulation and philosophical defence of the notion of a university as a place of learning for its own sake, and one whose principal aim is the passing on of this learning among the young. But it is neglected not just in philosophical

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circles; it is also neglected in the university itself, occasional genuflections in its direction notwithstanding.

This neglect may not be altogether fortuitous, for, were they to read it, most university bigwigs would not like what they saw. In particular they would not like the insistence that universities are not and should not be research institutes. Nor would many of them care for the suggestion that universities should not aim at wealth-creation or social reconstruction. And, if they got that far, they would probably be astonished to learn that in Newman's view, a university which operated on the basis of exams being sat by students who did not live in the institution would be far inferior to one in which earnest young people simply lived together in an academic environment for three years, but without professors or examinations, and then departed into the wider world.

Newman wanted a university to give to its undergraduates a sense of the different areas of worthwhile knowledge, and how those areas related to each other; and he believed that studies devoted to this overall general aim are worth pursuing for their own sakes, as an important aspect of human flourishing. Broadly Newman's position here is Aristotelian, and opposed to the Bacon-Locke view that science and learning more generally were valuable to the extent and only to the extent that they improved life materially. So Newman would seem to be allied with the view of Matthew Arnold that what universities should be about was the study of the 'best that has been thought and known' – as worthwhile in itself, and also (if we follow Arnold) as a means of producing a better type of person and society. Indeed, if we read him carelessly, we might think that Newman's talk of 'gentlemen' in relation to universities is wholly Arnoldian in spirit. Thus far Newman might be commended by many of a philosophical bent.

But this, according to Paul Shrimpton (in *The 'Making of Men'; The Idea and Reality in Newman's University in Oxford and Dublin*, Leominster: Gracewing, 2014) is only half the story. Seeing Newman as simply an eloquent defender of liberal learning for its own sake may, according to Shrimpton, arise from reading the *Idea* in isolation from Newman's other writings on education and his actual practice in universities in both Oxford and Dublin. For while, like Arnold, Newman does think that the intellect and sensibility are worth cultivating for their own sakes, he does not believe that this on its own will suffice; certainly it will not produce gentlemen or even men of good calibre (as Arnold hoped). Indeed, careful readers of the *Idea* will notice that even there he warns against the dangers of snobbery and of what he calls 'viewiness' which may result from the study of the best that has been thought and known unless something

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else is present in the context of these studies. And it is this something else which underlies what we saw him saying about professors and examinations.

On this last point, Shrimpton shows very interestingly that in his work as a university academic both in Oxford and in Dublin, Newman fought against not just the Germanic research university conception, but also against the elevation of the professoriate at the expense of a close and intensive tutorial system, in which the undergraduates should have tutors to whom they were formally attached and with whom they lived together in college. Newman certainly did not believe that undergraduates were adults fully launched on the world, and even less that they should be left to their own devices in college (let alone in the town). Of course, much of what he thought was in the context of a formerly oppressed and suppressed group of young Catholics beginning gingerly to make their way in an intellectual world dominated by Protestants and unbelievers. Nor did Newman believe that, ideally, young Catholics should study in a non-Catholic environment. But even leaving the denominational aspect aside, what is striking in everything Newman believed about the university was his passionate commitment to the pastoral side. The college and its tutors were very much *in loco parentis*; indeed at that stage they were perhaps even more important than the parents whose homes the undergraduates were on the point of leaving.

Shrimpton's interesting account shows very clearly the limitations of the view that in his thinking on universities Newman was of the view that they were *just* about the cultivation of the intellect for its own sake. They were about that (though we must also remember that Newman was confident that secular knowledge, properly pursued, would not and could not contradict the Catholic faith), but they were also and equally about moral and personal development in a very direct way, which would involve careful and caring supervision of a sort which would be regarded as unthinkable by most university teachers and students in 2015. Unthinkable, but necessarily wrong? It is surely a reasonable (philosophical) question as to whether universities should take their pastoral role more seriously than they do, given the personal problems to-day's students seem all too often to face, without any institutional help or guidance. And even if that is not a reasonable question, Shrimpton's book (like Alasdair MacIntyre's *God, Philosophy, Universities*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009) raises the further question of how much of Newman's ideas about universities can or should survive outside the religious and pastoral context in which Newman so firmly embedded them.

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