

***THE BANALITY OF EVIL:
CONTROVERSY AND COMPLEXITY OF A
CONCEPT***



***Margarida Amaral
Universidade Católica Portuguesa
Sociedade Científica***

The controversy raised by the concept of "banality of evil".

As portrayed in the film *Hannah Arendt* by Margarethe von Trotta, the author came to the concept of "banality of evil" after offering herself, as a reporter of the *New Yorker*, to cover Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem. The *New Yorker's* editor, William Shawn, then allowed Hannah Arendt, the author of the acclaimed book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, to go to Jerusalem and attend this trial. Hannah Arendt's decision would certainly be related to the fact that Eichmann was responsible for sending the Jewish women still interned in the Gurs camp, among which Hannah Arendt had been, to concentration camps. Attending this man's trial would mean, for Hannah Arendt, to face her past and to recover from the malaise associated with intense and terrible memories.¹

Considering Eichmann's statements to the police and in the court itself, Hannah Arendt came upon a man who, contrarily to what she assumed, was not a monster or a demon, but a vulgar man who did not think. Faithful, as she always seemed to be, to her thoughts, Hannah Arendt stated in the articles written for the *New Yorker*, and later in the book inspired by them (*Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the*

¹ Hannah Arendt recognized the personal dimension inherent in the importance of attending Eichmann's trial. In this regard, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl stated: "In writing to the Rockefeller Foundation, she explained her plans: "You will understand I think why I should cover this trial; I missed the Nuremberg Trials, I never saw these people in the flesh, and this is probably my only chance". Her letter to Vassar was uncharacteristically personal: "To attend this trial is somehow, I feel, an obligation I owe my past". For Arendt, the opportunity to go to Jerusalem and see Eichmann "in the flesh" turned out to be more than the fulfillment of an obligation; it was, she said in retrospect, a *cura posterior*". (Young-Bruehl 1982, p. 329).

Banality of Evil), that Eichmann, after all, was not a "monster", but a "clown". (Arendt 1994, p. 54) This idea, coupled with another one related to the "cooperation" of some Jews with the totalitarian movement, became unbearable for some friends of the author and for many others who, across the world, wrote accusatory letters.² After all, as far as Eichmann was concerned, it was easier to frame him in a demonic universe and, therefore, delimited from that of human beings. As Hannah Arendt mentioned, referring to the judges at Eichmann's trial:

"They knew, of course, that it would have been very comforting indeed to believe that Eichmann was a monster (...). The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal". (Arendt 1994, p. 276)

In fact, these statements and similar ones were read as a defense of Eichmann, because the author removed him from a universe of monsters and placed him among men.

The event of the publication of the articles and the book gave rise to an impressive number of letters addressed to Hannah Arendt, accusing her of coldness or directing personal attacks on her. There are still some others, though much less numerous, praising her clairvoyance with regard to the totalitarian phenomenon.³

Margarethe von Trotta's film illustrates very well this aspect, as well as the whole dramatic scenario that involved the author considering the negative reactions to her writings. In addition, it should be noted that Hannah Arendt is portrayed in

² Hannah Arendt used the word "cooperation" to avoid the term "collaboration". The author justified this difference by stating, in a letter to Mr. de Freudiger, dated September 8, 1963: "Your objection to my usage of the word "cooperation" is, I feel, not entirely fair. I use it in order to avoid the word "collaborate", which indeed did not apply to Jews". ("Adolf Eichmann File 1938-1968", *Correspondence – Survivors of the Holocaust* A.-F. 1961-1966, Image 44, in Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

³ All this documentation is available at "Adolf Eichmann File 1938-1968", Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., through the link: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendhtml/mharendtFolderP03.html>

the film as she might have been: a determined woman with intellectual abilities far above the common issues that usually occupy ordinary men.

There are, however, some aspects of the concept of "banality of evil" that could arise in the film, without involving the spectator in theoretical complexities to which perhaps only reading allows true access.

One of these aspects is the origin of this concept. In a letter from Karl Jaspers addressed to Hannah Arendt, dated December 13, 1963, Jaspers wrote that Heinrich Blücher, the author's second husband, was the inspiration for the concept: "Alcopley told me that Heinrich suggested the phrase "the banality of evil" and is cursing himself for it now because you've had to take the heat for what he thought of". (Kohler, Saner 1993, p. 542) Blücher frequently appears in the film without, however, any mention to the fact that he could have suggested this idea, though not specifically on the Eichmann case.

Another aspect is the absence of Karl Jaspers, along with Martin Heidegger's cyclical presence in the plot. It is true that Heidegger had, as it is well known, an undisputed influence on the life and work of Hannah Arendt. Moreover, it is understandable that the romanticized dimension of the relationship between them is conducive to attracting the attention of spectators. However, Heidegger's importance in the period of Hannah Arendt's life depicted in the film, and in which she formulated the concept of "banality of evil", cannot be compared with that of his former teacher and always friend Karl Jaspers. Jaspers was not a Jew, but he was married to a Jewess and therefore was extremely sensitive to the suffering of this people. In addition, Jaspers discussed with Hannah Arendt the Eichmann case (as it can be witnessed through the letters exchanged between them) and even said about the concept of "banality of evil", in the letter mentioned above, that: "(...) it's a wonderful inspiration and right on the mark as the book's subtitle". (Kohler, Saner 1993, p. 542).

Finally, it is also worth mentioning that Hannah Arendt's relationship with her friend and colleague Hans Jonas, despite having been shaken by Hannah Arendt's statements, has not collapsed, as the film seems to suggest. The two thinkers had such a deep friendship that at Hannah Arendt's funeral, on December 8, 1975, Hans Jonas recalled with extreme tenderness the young Hannah he had met at the Martin Heidegger's seminary in Marburg.

"How I remember this singular newcomer! Shy and withdrawn, with strikingly beautiful features and lonely eyes, she stood out immediately as exceptional, as unique in an as yet indefinable way. Brightness of intellect was no rare article there. But here was an intensity, an inner direction, an instinct for quality, a groping for essence, a probing for depth, which cast a magic about her. One sensed an absolute determination to be herself, with the toughness to carry it through in the face of great vulnerability". (Young-Bruehl 1982, p. 468)

In these words, we don't discover the tone of a hurt fed by the discord in relation to the Eichmann case, but only the absolute admiration of a long-time friend by an original, authentic and profound thinker.

Notwithstanding the absence of these aspects and the complexity associated with the concept of "banality of evil", the film illustrates very well, as has already been mentioned, the controversy surrounding this concept.

The complexity of the concept of "banality of evil"

The concept of "banality of evil" is perhaps the most complex of Hannah Arendt's work. This complexity is related to the few clarifications that Hannah Arendt provided about her change of mind on the subject of totalitarian evil, from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to the articles on Eichmann and to the work entitled *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*, inspired by them. In the first work, Hannah Arendt characterized totalitarian evil as radical. In the second work, the author abandoned the concept of "radical evil" and referred to the "banality of evil". I intend to show that these concepts should not be thought of separately.

Although the references to radical evil are not systematic in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt framed it as both absolute and limitless. While absolute, radical evil is associated with the motivational or anthropological dimension of totalitarian evil: this evil is absolute because the motivation that leads to it escapes our understanding.

"(...) if it is true that in the final stages of totalitarianism an absolute evil appears (absolute because it can no longer be deduced from humanly comprehensible motives), it is also true that without it we might never have known the truly radical nature of Evil". (Arendt 1976, pp. viii-ix)

These motives are humanly incomprehensible because they surpass those who are known and cause evil actions: selfishness, greed, envy... Behind this evil, as described in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, there seems to have been beings capable of an absolute evil that, in a motivational sense, can be called "radical".

But radical evil is, in this work, also associated with its limitless dimension. At this level, Hannah Arendt no longer seems to refer to the motivational dimension of totalitarian evil, but to its essence. In this sense, totalitarian evil is radical because it destroys down to the roots the existence of man in the world. Unlike a homicide, in which a person's life is destroyed, totalitarian evil destroys not only life, but existence itself, resorting to forms of isolation and annihilation that leave no trace of any kind. Hannah Arendt referred to this distinction by emphasizing the superfluous character of the victims in the eyes of the executioners.

"Therefore, we actually have nothing to fall back on in order to understand a phenomenon that nevertheless confronts us with its overpowering reality and breaks down all standards we know. There is only one thing that seems to be discernible: we may say that radical evil has emerged in connection with a system in which all men have become equally superfluous". (Arendt 1976, p. 459)

We can also understand this radicality by the fact that this evil has destroyed down to the roots the conditions that are given to men to live in the world. In *The*

Human Condition we find the enumeration of these conditions: "(...) life itself, natality and mortality, worldliness, plurality (...)". (Arendt 1989, p. 11)

Now, it is undeniable that the totalitarian movement destroyed life beyond, as has already been said, existence itself.

As for natality, Arendt presented it as the capacity that men possess to initiate something new in the world already given, that is, to change the course that events would follow, in a way that we could not predict. The totalitarian threat consisted precisely on the attempt to destroy this possibility of initiating a novelty. Everything proceeded in a programmed way, making the initiative of a consequent revolt absolutely impossible.

As far as mortality is concerned, it is a condition that enables us to wish to survive the limits of our own life, and to achieve, through what we do and say, immortality.

"The task and potential greatness of mortals lie in their ability to produce things – works and deeds and words – which would deserve to be and, at least to a degree, are at home in everlastingness, so that through them mortals could find their place in a cosmos where everything is immortal except themselves. By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave nonperishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a "divine" nature". (Arendt 1989, p. 19)

In this way, the mortality of men, the notion that we are mortal, is the condition for this desire for immortality. In the years of totalitarian domination, no action and no word were allowed to the persecuted, and, to this extent, even their mortality was not preserved. On the contrary, the imminence of death made this mortality, understood as the condition of a more authentic life, absolutely superfluous.

As far as worldliness, this condition concerns the presence of a world that survives the time given to men to live in it. This condition is fundamental to work, the activity of the *vita activa* destined to the construction of a durable world, thus contributing to a worldly permanence that leads us to the feeling of belonging to a common place, which, as such, constitutes itself as the public realm.

"(...) the term *public* signifies the world itself, in so far as it is common to all of us and distinguished from our privately owned place in it. This world, however, is not identical with the earth or with nature (...). It is related, rather, to the human artifact, the fabrication of human hands, as well as to affairs, which go on among those who inhabit the man-made world together. (...) The public realm, as the common world, gather us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak". (Arendt 1989, p. 52)

In the years of totalitarian domination, not only the work, for example in the concentration camps, was meaningless inasmuch as there would be machines much more capable of making it quicker and more profitable, but also the very sense of belonging to a world was shaken for those who were persecuted and inserted in an ideology whose meaning reversed all the ethical and political order known until then.

Finally, as far as plurality is concerned, this condition assumes an indisputable intimacy with worldliness: the fact that we belong to the same world, which is public and, therefore, we recognize as common, makes possible the encounter between men, which is essential to action – the highest activity of *vita activa* – and to politics in general.

"Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition – not only the *condition sine qua non*, but the *condition per quam* – of all political life". (Arendt 1989, p. 7)

This encounter between men, fundamental to political life, was actually prevented during the years of totalitarian domination. In a universe where basic needs are pressing and orders are random, it is difficult to conceive any political activity.

It becomes clear that the concept of "radical evil" implied the notion that all these conditions were questioned in the years of totalitarian domination. It is also undeniable that Hannah Arendt changed her mind about totalitarian evil, to the extent that she ceased to name it as radical and declared in a letter to Gershom Scholem, on 20 July 1963:

"You are quite right: I changed my mind and do no longer speak of "radical evil". It is a long time since we last met, or we would perhaps have spoken about the subject before. (...) It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never «radical», that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension". (Arendt 1978, pp. 250-251)

The question that now prevails is the following one: has Hannah Arendt changed her mind about the full breadth of the concept or about any particular aspect of it? The answer to this question implies that we first recognize that the abandonment of the concept of "radical evil" erroneously suggests its complete negation and, furthermore, that this abandonment, by not corresponding to its complete denial, fostered a misunderstanding which, inexplicably, Hannah Arendt did not clarify.⁴

We cannot say that Hannah Arendt has changed her mind about the essential dimension of radical evil. There is no indication in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* of this change. We have serious reasons to believe that totalitarian evil continued to be thought as limitless in the sense that, in its essence, it destroys the existence of man

⁴ In response to a criticism in this respect, the author only said: "You regret that I was not more explicit in linking the Eichmann book to my book on totalitarianism, I don't think that this was my job. The Eichmann book is really what it says, it is a report". "Adolf Eichmann File 1938-1968", Correspondence – Miscellaneous – English Language – D.-F. 1963-1965, Image 66, in Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

in the world, that is, the conditions that are offered to man to inhabit there. Likewise, we also have serious reasons to believe that totalitarian evil continued to be thought of as constituting crimes, which have attempted to turn men into superfluous beings. These reasons can be found in the fact that Hannah Arendt did not even consider the possibility of forgiveness for that defendant. Considering Eichmann's assertions that he had simply followed orders, Hannah Arendt wrote the following:

"For politics is not like the nursery; in politics obedience and support are the same. And just as you supported and carried out a policy of not wanting to share the earth with the Jewish people and the people of a number of other nations – as though you and your superiors had any right to determine who should and who should not inhabit the world – we find that no one, that is, no member of the human race, can be expected to want to share the earth with you. This is the reason, and the only reason, you must hang". (Arendt 1994, p. 279)

The fact that totalitarian crimes were unforgivable had already been enunciated in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (Arendt 1976, p. 459) This aspect is of particular importance insofar as it relates not only to the essential dimension of this evil, but also to its motivational dimension. If in an essential sense, in front of Eichmann, Hannah Arendt concluded that the evil perpetrated by these executioners remains unpardonable, this is certainly because the author persisted in thinking that this evil goes beyond limits, profoundly affecting the existence of men in the world. But, in addition, totalitarian evil is unforgivable because it is not possible to forgive those who reveal themselves incapable of acting differently. In the above-mentioned letter to Scholem, Hannah Arendt clarified this point when she stated: "the act of mercy does not forgive murder but pardons the murderer insofar as he, as a person, may be more than anything he ever did". And adds: "This was not true of Eichmann". (Arendt 1978, p. 250)

In the context of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the unforgivable dimension of this evil must be related to the fact that we cannot expect this type of criminal to be able to change his conduct. After all, how could we even admit it if the crimes are

motivated by reasons beyond our comprehension? If the hypothesis of pardoning these executioners has not been put forward since the first work, this means that not everything has changed concerning Hannah Arendt's conception of the anthropological origin of totalitarian evil. Above all, Eichmann also committed unforgivable crimes, proved to be incapable of acting in a different way and I believe we can say that he was moved by equally incomprehensible motives. In this respect we must admit that, at least in decisive political situations, it is so incomprehensible that a man behaves like a demon or as a clown...

In this context, we must try to understand what has really changed in Hannah Arendt's mind, namely the reason why the author has abandoned the concept of "radical evil". It is proposed in this text that the change did not take place in terms of the essential dimension of the totalitarian evil (as limitless), nor did it take place with regard to the incomprehensible dimension of the motives that were in its origin (as absolute). What seems to have truly changed in Hannah Arendt's mind from *The Origins of Totalitarianism* to *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was the consideration that it is not only the demons that are moved by humanly incomprehensible motives but also, in specific situations, vulgar men.

But what exactly does this change mean? What distinguishes a demon from a vulgar man, when the result of their deeds is identical: a limitless and absolute evil? In this distinction lies, in my view, the reason why Hannah Arendt abandoned the concept of "radical evil", adopting that of "banality of evil".

I think that when proposing the idea that totalitarian evil is radical, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt wanted to affirm that, in addition to being infinite and absolute, that is, caused by humanly incomprehensible motives, it was practiced by demonic beings capable of *radicality*. This means that these beings were able to think and remember, since, according to Hannah Arendt, it is through these activities that we create roots in the world. In her words: "Thinking and remembering, we said, is the human way of striking roots, of taking one's place in

the world into which we all arrive as strangers". (Arendt 2003, p. 100) It is important to note that this ability to think is not a prerogative of a few, in so far as it concerns a capacity that all men can achieve. In Hannah Arendt's own words:

"Thinking in its non-cognitive, non-specialized sense as a natural need of human life, the actualization of the difference given in consciousness, is not a prerogative of the few but an ever-present faculty in everybody; by the same token, inability to think is not a failing of the many who lack brain power but an ever-present possibility for everybody (...). A life without thinking is quite possible; it then fails to develop its own essence – it is not merely meaningless; it is not fully alive. Unthinking men are like sleepwalkers". (Arendt 1981, I, p. 191)

Now, my interpretation is that these demons, implicit in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, would be able to be fully aware of the circumstances surrounding their deeds, as well as of the very evil they were committing. They would do evil, moreover, intentionally, and when they return to their deeds by remembrance, no guilt or regret would arise from this exercise. Thus, these demons would be radical because they are able to create roots, that is, to think and remember. Now, in front of Eichmann, Hannah Arendt met a vulgar man of surprising superficiality and who, in the sense of thinking mentioned above, behaved like a sleepwalker. Hannah Arendt's argument about Eichmann was based on his statements full of clichés and on the claim that he was only following orders, without understanding that this was not enough to justify what he had done.

"Nothing could have demonstrated this more convincingly than the grotesque silliness of his last words. He began by stating emphatically that he was a *Gottgläubiger*, to express in common Nazi fashion that he was no Christian and did not believe in life after death. He then proceeded: "After a short while, gentlemen, we shall all meet again. Such is the fate of all men. Long live Germany, long live Argentina, long live Austria. I shall not forget them". In the face of death, he had found the cliché used in funeral oratory. Under the gallows, his memory played him the last trick; he was "elated" and he forgot that this was his own funeral. It is as though in those last minutes he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness has taught us – the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil". (Arendt 1994, p. 252)

It seems that this man, over the years of totalitarian domination, did not understand the gravity of what he was doing nor, in retrospect, he thought about what he had done and it was for this reason that, like a demon, he also felt no guilt or regret. Thus, between a demon and a clown, the effect is the same – the absence of guilt and regret – but the reasons for this absence are distinct: a demon does not have feelings of this order because thinking and remembrance do not produce their most obvious effects; a clown does not have this kind of feelings because he is not even capable of that depth of those who think about what they are doing and remember what they had done.

This change of mind about the nature of the executioners themselves led Hannah Arendt to change the terminology of the totalitarian evil. If the motives of this evil failed to find their origins in a radical or demonic depth and were discovered in a superficiality or banality worthy of a clown, it would not have made sense to the author to preserve the concept of "radical evil".

It is important to emphasize, however, that this change is not absolutely clear, even because Hannah Arendt did not merely replace the concept of "radical evil" with that of "banal evil". On the contrary, the author never asserted that totalitarian evil is banal, which would show, in this case, a change of mind in terms of the essential dimension of the totalitarian evil. The truth is that this did not happen, even though Hannah Arendt was accused of trivializing totalitarian evil.⁵ Inexplicably, the author did not waste much time to justify that she did not say so. However, there is evidence that Hannah Arendt did not intend to trivialize the totalitarian evil or the sufferings of the victims. In the first case, in a dialogue with

⁵ This accusation took various forms, including that of George P. Elliott, in the article "Arendt on Eichmann": "(...) Arendt's subtitle is pretentious. "The banality of evil" implies that evil is banal, and all her essay demonstrates is that evil can be banal". ("Adolf Eichmann File 1938-1968", Correspondence – Miscellaneous – English Language – D.-F. 1963-1965, Image 35, in Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.) and that of Musmanno who, in a letter to William Shawn, dated July 22, 1963, asked: "Is the murder of six million human beings a triviality?" ("Adolf Eichmann File 1938-1968", Correspondence – Shawn, William and Michael A. Musmanno 1963, Image 4 in Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

Thilo Koch in 1964, she stated that "Nothing could be further from my mind than to trivialize the greatest catastrophe of our century". (Arendt 2007, p. 487) In the second case, in a letter to Samuel Grafton, dated September 20, 1963, the author declared: "Why readers who read "banality of evil" should jump to the conclusion that "their sufferings are banal" is beyond me". (Arendt 2007, p. 478)

Thus, our interpretation is that the author did not change her mind about the essential dimension of the totalitarian evil, but only with respect to the nature of the executioners capable of humanly incomprehensible motivations. The persistence of the idea that totalitarian evil is limitless is clearly expressed in the following statements by Hannah Arendt:

"These limits (stated by thought and remembrance) can change considerably and uncomfortably from person to person, from country to country, from century to century; but limitless, extreme evil is possible only where these self-grown roots, which automatically limit the possibilities, are entire absent. They are absent where men skid only over the surface of events, where they permit themselves to be carried away without ever penetrating into whatever depth they may be capable of". (Arendt 2003, p. 101)

This means that Hannah Arendt has discovered that the worst of evils is the one committed by banal men, unable to think and remember. Insisting on the idea that, instead of abandoning the concept of "radical evil", the author could have simply demarcated it from the *radicality* of the executioners, associating this concept with their banality, we might say that Hannah Arendt discovered that radical evil is the one that is motivated by banality. In this quality, this evil constitutes itself as a "contagious fungus" and here lies its danger.⁶ This is an evil committed by many banal men who, under a certain situation, allowed themselves to be entangled by

⁶ Insisting on the opposition between the concepts of "radical evil" and "banality of evil," Hannah Arendt stated: "Evil is not only not radical, has no roots, it is a surface phenomenon; for this reason it is so infectious. It can spread over the whole world like a fungus (...)". ("Adolf Eichmann File 1938-1968", Private Reply to Jewish Critics 1963, Image 11, in Hannah Arendt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

totalitarian ideology and have abandoned, without return, what, as men, could turn them into people – thinking and memory.

Conclusion

This article began with an analysis of the film "Hannah Arendt" by Margarethe von Trotta. The plot is devoted to the episode in the author's life in which she was confronted with Eichmann and to the reactions to her articles in the *New Yorker*. Notwithstanding some aspects, which, as I have tried to show, could be present in the film, it would be impossible, through its plot, to clarify, beyond the controversy, all the complexity of the concept itself. In this way, I understand that the greatness of this film is to show a woman who, in coherence with what she believed, did not fear the consequences of making her thoughts public. In addition, this film further incites the understanding of one of the most terrible movements of the twentieth century - totalitarianism.

It is necessary to understand that, in a temporal sense, we are not so far from these movements which, forever, will characterize the political global paradigm of the twentieth century and which, since they occurred in the world, will be, also forever, a threat. Understanding the essence of totalitarian evil as well as the motivation that led to it is fundamental to being alert to this threat. Beyond all the complexity surrounding Hannah Arendt's concept of "banality of evil", this is an evil which, I believe, may continue to be called "radical", even though it is motivated, or because it is so, by a fearful banality. Thus, the shallowness that we see today in education and politics, in post-culture in general, can, instead of appeasing men, be a wake-up call because, after Hannah Arendt, we have an obligation to be aware of what banality can do.

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BIONOTE

Margarida Gomes Amaral has a PhD in Philosophy, specifically in Contemporary Philosophy, with a thesis on Hannah Arendt (Lisbon University, 2011). She is a guest assistant professor at the Faculty of Human Sciences of the Catholic University of Portugal and a member of the Scientific Society of this University. She is also a full member of the research group "Praxis – practical philosophy" at the Centre of Philosophy, University of Lisbon.

ABSTRACT

This article intends to reflect on Hannah Arendt's concept of banality of evil. It starts with an analysis of the film *Hannah Arendt* by Margarethe von Trotta. This beginning is not a mere pretext. Because it is a relatively current cinematographic

work, it has a public disclosure far superior to the written work of Arendt. In this sense, it becomes important to confront the film, elucidating its aspects more or less concordant with the author's work.

The banality of evil is perhaps the most complex concept proposed by Arendt and has given rise to a controversy that the author could not have foreseen. Margarethe von Trotta's film is extremely loyal to this controversy, although, because it is a film and not a treatise on philosophy, it does not explore all the complexity associated with the concept. This complexity is related to the few clarifications that Arendt provided about her change of mind on the subject of totalitarian evil, which was accompanied by a conceptual modification - from "radical evil" to "banality of evil". I intend to show, without denying the differences between the concepts, that we can combine them in order to think the banality capable of leading to radical evil.

KEYWORDS: Hannah Arendt, Ethics, Politics, Evil.

RESUMO

Este artigo pretende reflectir acerca do conceito arendtiano de "banalidade do mal". Ele começa por uma análise do filme "Hannah Arendt" de Margarethe von Trotta. Este início não é um mero pretexto. Pelo facto de se tratar de uma obra cinematográfica relativamente recente, o filme tem uma divulgação pública muito superior aos livros de Arendt. Neste sentido, torna-se importante confrontar o filme, elucidando os seus aspectos mais ou menos concordantes com a obra da autora.

A banalidade do mal é talvez o mais complexo conceito proposto por Hannah Arendt, tendo, além disso, dado origem a uma polémica que a autora não teria podido prever. O filme de Margarethe von Trotta revela-se extremamente fiel a esta polémica, embora, por se tratar de um filme e não de um tratado de filosofia, não explore toda a complexidade associada ao conceito. Esta complexidade está relacionada com os poucos esclarecimentos que Hannah Arendt prestou acerca da

sua mudança de pensamento relativamente ao tema do mal totalitário, a qual foi acompanhada de uma alteração conceptual - do "mal radical" à "banalidade do mal". Pretendo mostrar, sem negar as diferenças entre os conceitos, que os podemos combinar de forma a pensar a banalidade capaz de conduzir ao mal radical.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Hannah Arendt, Ética, Política, Mal.