

A black and white portrait of Hannah Arendt, showing her face and dark, curly hair. The portrait is partially obscured by a red rectangular block on the right side of the cover.

# The Political Consequences of Thinking

*Gender and  
Judaism in  
the Work of  
Hannah Arendt*

*Jennifer Ring*

THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES  
OF THINKING

SUNY Series in  
Political Theory: Contemporary Issues  
Philip Green, editor



THE POLITICAL  
CONSEQUENCES  
OF THINKING

Gender and Judaism in the Work of  
Hannah Arendt



*Jennifer Ring*

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS

Published by  
State University of New York Press, Albany

© 1998 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission. No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means including electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, address State University of New York Press,  
State University Plaza, Albany, N.Y. 12246

Production by Marilyn P. Semerad  
Marketing by Hannah J. Hazen

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Ring, Jennifer, 1948–

The political consequences of thinking : gender and Judaism in the work of Hannah Arendt / Jennifer Ring.

p. cm. — (SUNY series in political theory. Contemporary issues)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-7914-3483-4 (alk. paper). — ISBN 0-7914-3484-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Arendt, Hannah. Eichmann in Jerusalem.
2. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)—Influence.
3. World War, 1939–1945—Jews—Rescue—Palestine.
4. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945)—Public opinion.
5. Public opinion—Israel.
6. Israel—Politics and government.
7. Jews—New York (State)—New York—Politics and government.
8. Arendt, Hannah. Jews as pariah. I. Title. II. Series.

D804.3.R54 1997

940.53'18—dc21

96-47278

CIP

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*For Norman, JoJo, and Lilly  
with all my love*



# CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgments</b>	xi
<b>Chapter 1</b> Introduction	1
Hannah Arendt, Judaism, and Gender	1
Identity Politics and Multiculturalism	4
Assimilation and Gender	6
Race and Gender	9
The Context of Feminist Theory	13
Structure and Organization of the Book	18
<b>Chapter 2</b> The Politics of the <i>Eichmann</i> Controversy	21
Arendt and <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i>	21
The Controversy	26
<b>Chapter 3</b> Israel and the Holocaust	43
The Dawning of Reality	46
The Structure of Discomfort	50
Attempts at Rescue	57
Israeli Attitudes Toward the Holocaust Victims	71
Postwar Negotiations with Germany	75
The “Kastner Trial”	80
The Trial of Adolf Eichmann	84
<b>Chapter 4</b> The New York Intellectuals and <i>Eichmann in Jerusalem</i>	91
The New York Intellectuals and Judaism	91
The New York Intellectuals and the Holocaust	98
Postwar Politics and the New Yorkers	101
The New York Intellectuals and Hannah Arendt	103

<b>Chapter 5</b>	Race, Gender and Judaism:	
	The <i>Eichmann</i> Controversy as Case Study	109
	Nazis and Sexuality	112
	Racism, Sexism, and Jewish Masculinity	119
	Assimilation as Gendered:	
	The <i>Partisan Review</i> Crowd Revisited	131
	Jewish Women	139
	The <i>Eichmann</i> Controversy, Gender, and Judaism	150
<b>Chapter 6</b>	Transition	157
	Thinking about <i>Eichmann</i>	157
	The Political Consequences of Thinking	164
	Arendt as Jewish Gadfly	166
<b>Chapter 7</b>	Biblical and Rabbinic Approaches to Thinking	173
	Thinking Like a Jew	173
	The Bible	177
	Talmud	179
	Midrash	185
	The Middle Ages	186
	Mysticism	187
	Jewish Historical Consciousness	188
<b>Chapter 8</b>	Greek and Hebrew: The Structure of Thinking	195
	The Structure of Hebrew Thought	
	Compared to Greek	196
	Rabbinic Thought	201
	Scaffolding	205
<b>Chapter 9</b>	Toward Understanding Arendt as a Jewish Thinker	213
	A Jewish Soul in a German Scholar	213
	The Political Trouble with Philosophy	220
	Warm-Up Exercise: An Impressionistic Reading of “Truth and Politics”	225

<b>Chapter 10</b>	The Pariah and Parvenu in <i>Thinking</i>	231
	Seeing and Hearing	231
	Classical and Jewish Orthodoxy	238
	Socrates as Pariah	242
	The Wordly Results of Thinking	247
<b>Chapter 11</b>	Jewish Themes in Political Action and History	255
	Judaism and the Space for Political Action	255
	Judaism and Arendt's Concept of History	263
	Community in Dark Times	270
<b>Chapter 12</b>	Conclusion	275
	Judaism	275
	Gender	284
<b>Appendix</b>	Reviews of Raul Hilberg's <i>The Destruction of the European Jews</i>	289
<b>Notes</b>		297
<b>Selected Bibliography</b>		337
<b>Index</b>		349



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My deepest gratitude is reserved for my husband, Norman Jacobson, and our daughters, Johanna and Lillian. Their love and support sustains me always, most recently through a few difficult years. I am awed by their adaptability, lust for adventure, and cheerfulness, which allowed me to believe in this project and myself, even when little else was certain.

Tsipora Peskin reminded me that when a Jew writes for one person she writes for the world, and shared with me her personal insights about Israel during the post-Holocaust years.

Clay Morgan of SUNY Press and Series Editor Philip Green greeted this project with energy and enthusiasm after reading an early excerpt. Their support and editorial advice, along with the gratifying responses of the reviewers who read the manuscript for SUNY Press, ensured its timely completion.

I am also grateful for the support of my small family of friends who continue to read my work and to set an example of scholarly excellence and integrity: Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, Arlene Saxonhouse, Eugene Victor Wolfenstein, Michael Rogin, Hanna Pitkin, Mary Dietz, Joan Burton, Rabbi Judy Shanks, and my mother, Frances Ring. Thanks also to Peggy Spaugh for help with the final manuscript preparation, and to Pat Hull at U.C. Berkeley for stepping in at the last minute to extricate the manuscript from a computer that threatened to eat it. Her patience and tenacity ensured the book's safe arrival at press as well as the preservation of my sanity.

I wrote this book out of the deepest respect for the memory of Hannah Arendt, accompanied by my sense of her energy. I hope it is true to her spirit.

I also acknowledge the following editors/publishers for allowing me to reproduce materials:

Excerpts from *THE LIFE OF THE MIND* by Hannah Arendt, copyright © 1978 by Harcourt Brace & Company, reprinted by permission of the publisher.

Excerpts from *THE BLUE AND YELLOW STARS OF DAVID* by Dina Porat, Cambridge, Mass., reprinted by permission of the publisher: Harvard University Press, copyright © 1990 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

Excerpts from George L. Mosse, *NATIONALISM AND SEXUALITY: MIDDLE-CLASS MORALITY AND SEXUAL NORMS IN MODERN EUROPE*, copyright © 1985 by George L. Mosse. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press) reprinted by permission of The University of Wisconsin Press.

Excerpts from Paul Breines, *TOUGH JEWS: POLITICAL FANTASIES AND THE MORAL DILEMMA OF AMERICAN JEWRY*, 1990. New York: Basic Books reprinted by permission of Harper Collins Publishers.

Excerpts from Margaret Canovan, *HANNAH ARENDT: A RE-INTERPRETATION OF HER POLITICAL THOUGHT* reprinted with the permission of Cambridge University Press.

Excerpts from *HEBREW THOUGHT COMPARED WITH GREEK* by Thorleif Boman, copyright © 1960 SCM Press used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press.

Excerpts from *BACK TO THE SOURCES* reprinted with the permission of Simon & Schuster from *BACK TO THE SOURCES* by Barry Holtz, copyright © 1984 by Barry W. Holtz.

Excerpts from Amos Funkenstein, *PERCEPTIONS OF JEWISH HISTORY*, copyright © 1993, Berkeley: University of California Press reprinted by permission of The Regents of the University of California.

Excerpts from Yehuda Bauer, *JEWES FOR SALE? NAZI-JEWISH NEGOTIATIONS, 1933-1945*, copyright © 1994, New Haven: Yale University Press reprinted by permission of Yale University Press.

Excerpts from Hannah Arendt, *THE HUMAN CONDITION*, 1958. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press reprinted by permission of The University of Chicago Press.

Excerpts from *THE SEVENTH MILLION*, by Tom Segev. Translation, copyright © 1993 by Haim Watzman. Reprinted by permission of Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, Inc.

H.R.Trevor-Roper's review of *THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN JEWS* by Raul Hilberg is reprinted from *COMMENTARY*, April, 1962, by permission; all rights reserved.

Excerpts from *BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE* by Hannah Arendt. Copyright 1954, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1960, 1961 by Hannah Arendt. Used by permission of Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Books USA, Inc.

Oscar Handlin, for permission to reprint excerpts from his review of Raul Hilberg's book *THE DESTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN JEWS*, from *American Journal of Sociology* 68, 1 (July 1962).





## CHAPTER 1



# Introduction

### HANNAH ARENDT, JUDAISM, AND GENDER

This is another book about Hannah Arendt. The perspective that justifies its writing is deceptively simple, but I have nowhere read it before. My thesis is that Hannah Arendt was a Jewish woman, two facts about her identity which affected the content of her scholarship and the way her work has been received. That Jewishness and gender may have colored both her intellectual work and its reception has been neither acknowledged nor accepted. This is not to say that there has not been scholarly work done concerning both Arendt's gender and religion.<sup>1</sup> The point of this book is to consider the impact of her Jewish identity specifically on her *intellectual* work, and her gender on her work's *reception*.

My underlying agenda is to make it intellectually respectable to be a Jewish woman. This may not sound revolutionary: there have been many Jewish women intellectuals. Jews are, at least according to stereotype, a scholarly people, and so it is not surprising that Jewish women would be among the prominent intellectuals. But as I argue in chapter 5, this impression is false. While there have been a few prominent Jewish women scholars—for the most part writers and political activists—their numbers have been infinitesimal in comparison with the

preponderance of Jewish male scholars. In addition, the prominence, which is to say, respectability, of the women results from the fact that their work can be divorced from Jewish scholarship per se. The old assimilationist adage, “A Man on the Street; A Jew at Home” applies also to public Jewish women. Until very recently, perhaps just a generation or two of Jewish feminists, Jewish women have earned public respect because their work was *not* intellectually Jewish. It has been either political—socialist or Zionist, and adhering to a male-defined party line—or literary and artistic, but not explicitly Jewish.

To claim that Jewish women scholars are respected *despite* their Jewishness, or that Hannah Arendt’s life has been dichotomized into Jewish activist and German scholar may appear extravagant. Nobody, including Hannah Arendt, has denied that she was Jewish, or that her Judaism had a profound influence on her life. With regard to gender, feminists have studied and written about its impact on her life and work. My point of departure is subtle, but fundamental: I believe Arendt’s “Jewishness” affected the content and structure of her scholarship, and that her “femaleness” affected the way her work was received, especially with regard to her most controversial work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Arendt’s “Jewishness” is usually discussed only in relation to her specifically Jewish political writings, which were composed early in her career, during the time of her flight from the Holocaust and arrival in New York. Her Jewishness has also been discussed in relation to the first book-length manuscript she wrote after her doctoral dissertation, *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewish Woman*. It certainly makes sense to discuss Arendt’s Jewishness in relation to her most explicitly Jewish writings. But it also serves the purpose of segregating her most respected scholarship from her Jewishness, as though her cultural identity should have no influence whatsoever upon her most influential work. I will not spend much time in this volume on either her Jewish political writings, or on *Rahel Varnhagen*.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, I confess to an unfashionable disinterest in *Rahel Varnhagen*—I have read it several times, and simply find it less compelling than Arendt’s other work. I am in pretty

good company in this opinion. Karl Jaspers, while encouraging Arendt to publish the volume, found it a “loveless” treatment of Varnhagen. “This work still seems to me to be your own working through of the basic question of Jewish existence, and in it you use Rahel’s reality as a guide to help you achieve clarity and liberation for yourself. . . . Rahel seems to have wakened neither your interest nor your love. . . . No *picture of Rahel* herself emerges but only, so to speak, a picture of events that chose this individual as their vehicle. . . . Your view of Rahel is, I feel, loveless.”<sup>3</sup> Arendt used Jaspers’ criticism as justification for her insistence that she did not want to publish the book: “Regardless of what I will have to say here in response to your letter, our agreement remains in force: I won’t publish the book.”<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that the work an author does *not* want to publish might not prove an elucidating avenue toward understanding her work; only to state at the outset, that I leave analysis of *Varnhagen* to others more interested in probing it.

The themes addressed in both *Rahel Varnhagen* and Arendt’s Jewish political writings *are* important to my work here, but I will not approach them directly. Instead, I focus upon the writing presumed to be free of Jewish influence. Arendt’s central Jewish concepts, for which I will look in the least obvious sources, are the pariah and parvenu, the outsider and the assimilationist. I will seek their presence in what is usually regarded as Arendt’s most “ethnic-free” work: *The Human Condition* and *Thinking*, the first volume of *The Life of the Mind*. The logic is that while it is not difficult to find Jewish themes in Arendt’s most explicitly Jewish writings, if there is also evidence of the influence of Judaism on even her most “universal” or “objective” works in political theory, we stand to learn something about the role Judaism played throughout her work, and can better understand her as an integrated person. She was a Jewish woman scholar, rather than an activist Jew early in her life, a classical scholar interested in political action early in her scholarly career and in thinking only later on, and a woman only when she baked pastries or offered culinary advice to Gertrud Jaspers.<sup>5</sup> By extension, we

stand to learn something about the influence of race and ethnicity on scholarship.

## IDENTITY POLITICS AND MULTICULTURALISM

From this standpoint, then, the book is a case study in identity politics and cultural pluralism. What influence, if any, does cultural identity have upon creative work? The question is central to our time, and freighted with significance. Hannah Arendt and a host of serious scholars deny the impact of her Jewish identity upon her intellectual work. By nearly unanimous agreement, the major influences on Arendt's *scholarship* are taken to be Kant, Heidegger, Jaspers, Socrates, Aristotle, and perhaps Augustine. By nearly equally unanimous agreement, the central influence on her *political* convictions are regarded as the rise of totalitarianism in Europe, the Holocaust, and the political refuge Arendt found in the United States. Anti-Semitism is linked to totalitarianism, and her Jewish interest in preventing its recurrence is acknowledged to have had an impact on her political outlook, at least to the extent of shaping her sometimes idealistic faith in democracy, her belief in the importance of statehood and national identity, and her disdain for arrivistes and social climbing parvenus. To suggest, however, that there may exist some "Jewish" influence upon her scholarship is taken as smacking of racist essentialism.

Such resistance to considering the influence of Judaism on Arendt's scholarly life itself strikes me as a form of anti-Semitism. The assumption that one's life experiences as an African American, a Spanish American, an Asian American, or Native American may influence the way one reads, thinks, responds politically, and writes, is the foundation of the multicultural project in American academic life: a perspective I regard as completely legitimate. While I do not believe the claims of multiculturalism should be used as an excuse to ignore the important works of the Western tradition, neither do I believe that those "classics" comprise the exclusive essence of an education, nor that an education that overlooks race, ethnicity, and gender can be complete. But cultural blindness

on the part of both Western European cultural chauvinists *and* advocates of a multicultural approach have overlooked Judaism as a part of identity politics and the multicultural dialogue. Defenders of the “Western tradition” regard Judaism as parochial, while defenders of multicultural progressivism regard it as conservative and “white.” It has been left to Jewish feminists to argue that neither side has it right: Judaism is neither “white” nor “male,” neither conservative nor “ethnically correct,” implying inherently progressive politics. Part of my project here is to explore the influence of Judaism upon creative work, as one might explore the influence of any other cultural identity upon one’s scholarly or artistic perspective.

Raising the question of the influence of Jewish identity upon Arendt’s (or any Jewish scholar’s) work raises a host of questions pertaining to multiculturalism itself. I will focus on two major issues: (1) the trade-off between parochialism and racial exclusivity, on the one hand, and assimilation on the other; and (2) the intersection of racism and sexism as components of the mechanism of oppression.

How does membership in an ethnic, religious, racial, cultural, or gender group affect one’s creativity or scholarly product? Some forms of creativity are expressive, make no pretense at “objectivity,” and thus the influence of race or ethnicity is not regarded as “undermining” of excellence. Still, there is a “Western tradition” in art and music that privileges certain forms of expression as “the canon,” as defining greatness. Kant’s aesthetic and moral philosophy assumes a noumenal essence of beauty and goodness with no acknowledgment that our ability to “recognize” excellence may very well be culturally determined. On the other hand, what is the relationship between “folk art,” for example, and “fine art”? Does the terminology itself reflect cultural bias? Or are there valid standards of evaluation that may be undermined by a glib deference to cultural relativism?

The issue that concerns me is in a way even more complex, since it has to do not with creative or artistic expression but with the nature of philosophical or ethical “truth.” Here the name of the game is “universalism” or “objectivity.” To be

interested in truth, or in thinking, but not in objectivity is regarded as a contradiction in terms. The assumption is that “Jewish truth” cannot differ from “Christian truth.” Truth and thinking transcend particularity. It might be argued that Arendt’s project in *The Life of the Mind* was to articulate a method for thinking that would not defer to a monolithic and static conception of “Truth.” Was that project culturally determined? Is the conception of thinking she sought to articulate, with its dialogical method and insistence on lack of closure, more compatible with a “Jewish” conception of “truth” than, for example, a Christian European conception? Is there a way to discuss the cultural determinants of her project without reducing both Judaism and Christianity to stereotypes and oversimplifications? Jews adhere to a monotheistic, profoundly acorporeal image of God, while Christianity adheres to a Trinitarian view of God and believes in Jesus as the incarnation of God: both corporeal and visible. Does that affect either the Jewish or Christian conception of truth? These are just the most obvious differences that surface when one thinks of comparing Christian and Jewish philosophy. Obviously, Christianity and Judaism are more complex than can be reduced to even the simplest formulae such as these. But does that complexity make it impossible to address the role of religious background upon a philosopher’s approach to truth?

On top of this complexity is the question of whether religion, conceived more broadly as cultural heritage, has an effect upon intellectuals who are not particularly religious. Arendt was unquestionably Jewish; indeed, being Jewish in a time and place of anti-Semitic genocide determined the course of her life and work. But she was by nobody’s account a religious person. So what does it mean to identify her as “Jewish” in relation to her scholarly work?

## ASSIMILATION AND GENDER

Hannah Arendt wrote powerfully on the dangers of assimilation, of her disrespect for parvenus, for those Jews who sought to escape their Jewishness, who thought they could be “A Man

in the Street and a Jew at Home.” She regarded them as social climbers, arrivistes, “inauthentic”—and by no means benign. Their betrayal of themselves through escape from Judaism fed anti-Semitism. However, when it came to her intellectual life, I shall argue, Arendt herself sought to assimilate to the respectability of the classical tradition: standards of truth and excellence defined by Greek, Roman, Christian, and Western European (particularly German) influences. Thus while she proudly laid claim to her classical scholarly background, she did not perceive that claim as assimilationist. She wrote to Gershom Scholem in 1963, in response to his criticism of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in which he accused her of being “from the German Left,” “I am not one of the ‘intellectuals who came from the German Left. . . .’ I came late to an understanding of Marx’s importance because I was interested neither in history nor in politics when I was young. If I can be said to ‘have come from anywhere,’ it is from the tradition of German philosophy.” In the same letter Arendt also identified herself as a Jew, “as a matter of course”: “Well, in this sense I do not ‘love’ the Jews, nor do I ‘believe’ in them; I merely belong to them as a matter of course, beyond dispute or argument.”<sup>6</sup> The two nonintegrated aspects of her identity are experienced unproblematically. She saw herself as a German philosopher and a Jew, but in separate aspects of her life.

If Arendt herself saw no problem in keeping the main parts of her identity separate, on what grounds, then, can I suggest that she was a Jewish woman parvenu in a Christian male intellectual world? Does identifying a Jewish strain in Arendt’s scholarship when she identified herself only as a European-educated scholar betray arrogance and detachment on my part? Am I suggesting that she suffered from “false consciousness,” performing a crude sort of psychological reductionism, pretending to be able to probe Hannah Arendt’s unconscious? I do not intend to stand in judgment of Hannah Arendt’s relationship to her Judaism, but to use her to explore the temptations of assimilation, and the limitations of exclusionism, in myself, as another Jewish woman scholar, and by implication in all of us who consider ourselves outsiders.

Whether I succeed in striking the proper tone—respectful, neither arrogant nor overly deferential—is of course left to the judgment of the reader.

These questions are complicated by the fact that assimilation itself is a term in need of definition. It is unlikely that assimilation is a one-way street, with “dominant society” defining the terms to which newcomers or outsiders must conform. Chances are there is some mutuality of influence. The cultural standards to which Jews sought to conform in Europe and the United States were not monolithic and static but, like everything else, responsive to historical and economic influences, including the arrival of newcomers into their midst. When we discuss assimilation as embodying the dangers of loss of culture, when orthodox Jews, for example, fear that any mingling with the goyim will result in contamination and loss of Judaism, we assume that assimilation demands relinquishment of a culture conceived in static terms, a molding of the community of outsiders to the dominant culture, also perceived in static terms. Surely this is an extreme and somewhat distorted picture.

Still, a more moderate fear of loss of identity through assimilation continues to characterize every ethnic group seeking to enter an existing society. On the one hand, there is the desire to fit, to participate in the advantages and privileges available from society. Beyond the instrumental advantages, there exist inherent benefits to experiencing more of the world: parochialism is by definition limiting. It may offer security, but can also be experienced as confining, suffocating. On the other hand, no group is so filled with self-loathing that it welcomes its own dissolution into another group. One “assimilates” at the risk of losing authenticity and self-knowledge. The completely assimilated person may possess less of him or herself than the unassimilated outsider.

Adding to the complications of assimilation is a fact that has been largely neglected by scholars: assimilation is gendered. The pathways toward assimilation for men and women are different. Men are often expected to be assimilated first and more fully. The definition of assimilation often presumes that the group to be assimilated are men. The primary model of Jew-

ish assimilation in Western Europe and the United States is male; women were given the task of preserving, to the extent possible, Judaism in the home. This is discussed in chapter 5.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to Hannah Arendt, I shall argue that she retained her disdain for social assimilationism, but was oblivious to the dangers of scholarly assimilation. But there is a complicating factor: her vulnerability to the Greek and Christian standards of Western European scholarship was, I believe, shaped by her gender. Jewish male intellectuals may also be susceptible to the belief that Jewish scholarship is parochial in a manner antithetical to the pursuit of “classical” truth or “objectivity.” However, scholarship is such a dearly held cultural priority for Jewish men that becoming a secular European or American scholar, rather than a more traditional Talmudic scholar, was one of the acceptable paths of Jewish male assimilation. No such path was open to Jewish women.

A Jewish woman scholar was, to begin with, never a scholar of Judaism. For a modern woman to choose a scholarly life was itself a break with Jewish tradition, and so it is possible to see that Arendt was never aware of the “choice” of being either a Jewish or an assimilated scholar. If she were to be a scholar, she *had* to be a European “universalist” scholar, which makes it more comprehensible that she would have neglected Jewish sources in her intellectual work. Still, I will raise the questions, in chapters 9, 10, and 11, of the tenacious, if sometimes unconscious, influence of her Jewish heritage upon the content of her work. I will attribute to Arendt’s “Jewish soul” questions raised as she sought to articulate a worldly way of thinking available to all people, not just experts. And I will argue that Arendt the German-educated scholar could not respond adequately to the questions raised by her Jewish soul. The discord between her Jewish self and her German scholarly persona accounts for a lack of resolution in her final intellectual project.

## RACE AND GENDER

Also addressed in this volume: the relationship between race, or ethnicity, and gender in the modern world. The first part of the book is a discussion of the response to Arendt’s most

controversial work, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. I argue that the rage directed at her report in *The New Yorker* and its subsequent publication as a book was excessive, reflecting something deeper than rationally based objections to her observations and conclusions. The vitriolic nature of the response from prominent Jews in the United States and Israel was affected by the fact that Arendt was a Jewish woman, the only Jewish woman with a public following to speak out against the entirely male leadership of the European and Israeli Jewish communities during the Holocaust. Holocaust survivors, Israeli Zionists, and American Jewish intellectuals had very little in common, and few points of agreement on anything having to do with the Holocaust. In effect, they were all prepared to accuse the other groups of cowardice, incompetence, and failure to respond adequately and appropriately to the Nazi menace. But they reached an uncharacteristic consensus on what they considered the inappropriateness of Arendt's response, which in part accused the Jewish leadership of cowardice, incompetence, and failure to respond adequately and appropriately to the Nazi menace.

The book opens with a detailed account of the response to Arendt's *Eichmann*, and works its way to a systematic analysis of gender as a determining dimension, in chapter 5. In brief, my argument is that Jewish men in America, Europe, and Israel had different but related reasons to feel "unmanned," in a specifically sexual way, by the Holocaust. But the Holocaust was the culmination of at least a century of anti-Semitic racism, in which Jews were accused of being sexually debased, with Jewish men labeled "feminine" and Jewish women "masculine." George Mosse's superb study of the relationship between nationalism, racism, sexism, and homophobia is discussed in some detail in this context.<sup>8</sup> Implicit in Mosse's analysis is the interdependence of racism and sexism. Racism is an extension of nationalism, with sexism a central component of the mechanism of racial prejudice. It was no accident that Jews were associated with "abnormal" sexuality, albeit in a hailstorm of contradictions: Jewish men were effeminate, had homosexual proclivities, and were also las-

civious, lusting after gentile women. By labeling them “Other” sexually, the Nazis sought to provoke enough fear to “justify” their plan to annihilate the Jews.

Nazi genocide may have been the extreme example of the convergence of racism, sexism, and homophobia. However, sexist imagery is a part of every form of racism. The pertinent correlate for contemporary Americans is the history of anti-black racism in the United States. Prevailing racist stereotypes of African American men also present them as sexual predators, libidinous, violent, out of control. Simultaneously, opponents of racism claim black men have been “emasculated” by a history of slavery and racist oppression. While racists and progressives argue over the nature of black male sexual identity, black women disappear from the dialogue, the focus of nobody’s concern about either racist or sexist oppression. Black feminists have argued that a more accurate reading of African American history is that black women have been “masculinized,” turned into work animals and idealized as towers of strength, regarded as sexual, which is to say sexually available to any man with the inclination, but not feminine—a trait reserved for white women in American society. Bell hooks argues that African men, while enslaved by Americans, were encouraged to dominate their own women, and fell into the trap of imitating white patriarchal customs, a form of “identification with the oppressor” that continues the cycle of racial and sexual oppression in America today.<sup>9</sup>

The black feminist argument holds for all racially oppressed groups, including Jews. A European Christian model of masculinity has been sold to men throughout at least the Western world, perhaps all of the world that has been colonized or fallen under control of European imperialism. The sexual “ideal” of aggressive, combative, domineering masculinity has served to keep both racial and sexual hierarchies in place. One form this oppression takes is that women of racial or cultural minorities who publicly object to domination from the men of their own group run the risk of being accused of “race betrayal” by their communities. Hannah Arendt did not speak out publicly on issues that could in any way be defined

as “feminist.” But she did publicly criticize Jewish “patriarchs,” the Jewish male leaders of the mid-twentieth century. That these men were the intended victims not only of Nazi genocide, but of worldwide consensus on their lack of masculinity—a stereotype that may have arisen as recently as with the rise of nationalism, or may go back as far as the rabbinic age—made her criticism unbearable to much of the Jewish community after the Holocaust. The Jewish response, and especially the response of the Jewish leadership in America and Israel to Arendt’s outspokenness, was suitably crazed.

I risk arousing similar objections to my argument in this book, that Jewish women have a problem not only with anti-Semites, but with certain Jewish patriarchal attitudes. In chapter 5 I discuss the “problem” of the contemporary generation of Jewish male scholars who are attuned to feminist issues with insight, conviction, and sophistication. The problem is, with so many helpful Jewish men in the community, on what grounds can I criticize their resistance, as well as the resistance of many of their feminist friends and colleagues, to seeing the links between anti-Semitism and *Jewish* silencing of Jewish women who break ranks with prevailing scholarly norms? Anti-Semitism not only victimizes Jews with its sexual slander: the accusation that Jewish men are (horrors!) feminine. Anti-Semitic sexism, and by extension any racist sexism, works because Jewish men act in collusion with it when they silence and dominate Jewish women in the name of not embarrassing the Jews. They tacitly accept the anti-Semitic image that Jewish men are effeminate if they “allow” their women a public and critical voice.

Hannah Arendt spoke out publicly and critically about Jewish leadership during the Holocaust and was accused of betraying the Jewish people. Anita Hill was publicly critical of a prominent black man and was accused of betraying the African American community. But that is another issue. Men who regard themselves as Jewish feminists should look at their own needs when they participate in setting the Jewish feminist agenda: presentation of themselves as unimaginably understanding men effectively silences female criticism yet again, this time by co-opting it. These men might take a turn at just listening.

So, of course, might the Jewish men who are not feminists, and who believe that any criticism, especially public, from a Jewish woman is unforgivable. So, too, should non-Jewish members of cultural minorities who, in upholding male domination, inadvertently strengthen its correlate, racial dominance, by silencing the women of their own communities.<sup>10</sup>

### THE CONTEXT OF FEMINIST THEORY

A methodological note is important here, and so is locating this work in the context of Feminist Theory. I have written elsewhere, and more extensively, on the subject of epistemology and feminist theory, and will not digress on that subject at any length here.<sup>11</sup> Still, two things should be noted: (1) many of the aspects of my argument in this volume are not amenable to the conventional standards of positivist, empirical proof, and (2) there exists extensive literature discussing the hidden gender biases in so-called objective, empirical scientific studies.

The argument about race betrayal is a good example of the inappropriateness of conventional empirical evidence. Women who provoke the charge of “race betrayal,” such as Anita Hill when she came forward with accusations of sexual misconduct against Justice Clarence Thomas, or Hannah Arendt, when she came forward with criticism of the European Jewish leadership during the Holocaust, are unlikely to be directly accused of making the *men* of the race look bad. Nobody is about to say, “The dignity of Jewish (or African American or Hispanic or Asian American) men is more important than, and indeed incompatible with, publicly expressed female criticism of any sort!” We are beyond the point of saying directly, “Be Silent, Woman!” along with Sophocles, or Aristotle quoting Sophocles in his *Politics*: “A modest silence is a woman’s crown.” I believe something similar to that sentiment is still pervasive, but it will no longer be stated directly, anymore than racist sentiments, especially among the intelligentsia, are expressed as explicitly as they were thirty or forty years ago. More likely, instead of saying, “The dignity of Jewish

(or African American, or Hispanic or Asian American) *men* must be protected,” the statement is phrased, “The dignity of the Jewish *people* is at stake here!” never acknowledging that the particular ethnic group is being defined exclusively by its men. As black feminists know, when the question arises, as it has from time to time throughout history, of whose needs should take precedence “Blacks or Women?” Black women disappear from the discourse. The 1869 Congressional decision to give black men the vote was referred to as “The Negroes’ Hour” (although Angela Davis, in *Women, Race and Class*, believes it should more accurately have been referred to as “The Hour of the Republican Party”), thoroughly overlooking the exclusion of black, as well as white and other, women from the enfranchisement.

One aspect of the difficulty of “proving” that gender influences a controversy, is that public display of female anger is taboo. The taboo itself is hidden, perhaps because even acknowledging women’s anger, unless it is in the service of sexual devotion to a man, is so frightening that we cannot face it long enough to perceive the prohibition against it.<sup>12</sup> When women’s anger *is* acknowledged, it is tamed by the modifier “irrational.” She is not righteously angry, as a strong, intelligent man might be: she is crazy. As bell hooks notes, “Madness, not just physical abuse, was the punishment for too much talk if you were female.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus I will not be able to point to an instance of one of Hannah Arendt’s critics during the *Eichmann* controversy stating directly: “Underlying my objection to what Arendt wrote is that I can’t abide women’s critical anger directed at respected public men.” The response of Arendt’s critics, both during the 1960s and today, has more often been: “Gender had absolutely nothing to do with what was offensive about *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. The criticism stemmed from the fact that she betrayed the Jewish community, and it made no difference whatsoever that she was a woman making the argument.”

There is abundant feminist literature on the difficulty of “seeing,” or finding evidence for gender bias in the world, as well as on the engenderment of public discourse. In *Talking*

*Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, for example, bell hooks discusses the pervasive, and cross-cultural penchant for silencing women. She refers to young girls' habit of keeping diaries as symptomatic of "the fear of exposure, the fear that one's deepest emotions and innermost thoughts will be dismissed as mere nonsense . . . holding and hiding speech." With regard more specifically to adult women's public voices, hooks notes "For many women, it is not a simple task to talk about men or to consider writing about men. Within patriarchal society, silence has been for women a gesture of submission and complicity, especially silence about men. Women have faithfully kept male secrets, have passionately refused to speak on the subject of men."<sup>14</sup>

Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1982) is a widely respected discussion of the unacknowledged engenderedness of scholarly discourse.<sup>15</sup> Gilligan analyzes hidden male biases in the well-respected studies on moral reasoning of Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg. Kohlberg and his associates developed a scale of ranked hierarchies of complexity of moral thinking. Gilligan demonstrates that the scale assumes a male perspective, ranking the girls who participated in the studies at a "lower" level of reasoning than the boys, yet not perceiving that the test results reflected a gender bias that remained unexplored and unaccounted for. The overall "higher" scores achieved by the boys were assumed to have been objectively merited. Male moral reasoning, at least as exemplified by our culture, involves the capacity to "individuate," to create distance between the self and the moral problem, and the capacity to think abstractly, in terms of impersonal rights. An alternative, which Gilligan argues is more characteristic of girls and women, and which was considered by Kohlberg to be less sophisticated than the boys' abstract reasoning, is the ability to become involved, to reason in terms of responsibility to another person rather than abstract rights. Since in our culture the ability to reason abstractly, to differentiate oneself from others, is defined as adulthood itself, the males studied by Kohlberg appeared more advanced, not only in terms of their ability to think through a moral dilemma, but also in terms of basic

“maturity.” The girls of the test, and women in general, were perceived as more childlike, unable to differentiate between themselves and another human being.

An unbiased perspective would have taken into account not “natural” differences in males and females, but sufficiently different cultural experiences to account for alternative models of adulthood, *not* ranked hierarchically. Whatever the flaws of Gilligan’s study, it was a pathbreaking work in articulating the invisibility of male bias uncritically accepted as “objective” and showered in scholarly respectability.

On a more abstract level, Catharine MacKinnon, in a number of works, discusses gender politics and male bias at the very core of the concept of objectivity. “The male epistemological stance, which corresponds to the world it creates, is objectivity: the ostensibly uninvolved stance, the view from a distance and from no particular perspective apparently transparent to its reality. It does not comprehend its own perspectivity, does not recognize what it sees as subjective like itself. . . . What is objectively known corresponds to the world and can be verified by pointing to it (as science does) because the world itself is controlled from the same point of view”<sup>16</sup> The penchant to regard objectivity as the icon of truth is itself gendered, and not recognized as such. Many aspects of women’s experience cannot be identified by pointing to them.

MacKinnon is well supported by feminist philosophers of science and knowledge. Prevailing public sentiment may regard the “truths” of “hard” science—physics, for example—as simply unarguable. But there remain issues, addressed by Sandra Harding, Evelyn Fox Keller, Anne Fausto-Sterling, and others, about how the questions that have come to define physics became paradigmatic in the first place. Who sets the agenda for the priorities in scientific inquiry? Why is the physical world defined as more “real” than the less tangible worlds of culture and expression? How is it that the methodologies of the physical and biological sciences are more highly respected than the methodologies of the humanities and the arts? That is, the entitlement and privileging of a given epistemology (empiricism, positivism) is *itself* culturally determined, and gendered

by virtue of the gender of the majority of its practitioners. Harding remarks, "I have been suggesting reasons for reevaluating the assumption that physics should be the paradigm of scientific knowledge seeking. If physics ought not to have this status, then feminists need not 'prove' that Newton's laws of mechanics, or Einstein's relativity theory are value laden in order to make the case that the science we have is suffused with . . . gender."<sup>17</sup>

Feminist theorists have also identified hitherto unrecognized male biases in even the most progressive or radical social theories. Consider Nancy Hartsock's critique of traditional Marxist theory in her essay "The Feminist Standpoint"<sup>18</sup> The "standpoint position" as defined by Hartsock is not simply an "interested" position, but also an engaged one. This is obviously antithetical to the "scientific" neutrality or objectivity preferred by conventional scientists of all stripes, but also a departure from the "engagement" of Marx's "scientific socialism," his historical materialist stance. For while dialectical materialism does acknowledge the limits of positivist objectivism, it is also characterized by the conceit that it embodies the "one true" stance toward history. In contrast, Hartsock suggests, "A specifically feminist historical materialism might . . . enable us to expand the Marxian account to include all human activity rather than focussing on activity more characteristic of males in capitalism" (158). The difference between this and the stance that presumes its own objectivity is that "The concept of a standpoint structures epistemology in a particular way. Rather than a simple dualism, it posits a duality of levels of reality" (160).

Thus I am hardly the first theorist to argue for the engenderedness of a public controversy that has not before been seen as gendered. I suggest not that gender is the *only* lens through which to view the *Eichmann* controversy and its reception, but that it is a plausible and powerful interpretation, giving us insight into how gender works, and making sense of an otherwise somewhat mysterious hostility toward Arendt. In this sense, I would argue, along with the psychologists, that the total denial of the role played by gender in the controversy is suspect, and may point to an important dimension of

resistance to seeing gender as pervasively at work as it is in the world. In my discussion of the *Eichmann* controversy, and Arendt's scholarship written in its aftermath, I do not "apply" feminist theory in an overt way. Rather, my working assumptions are feminist in that I believe that many things, including public discourse, are gendered while not acknowledged to be, and I look for that dimension in the details that underlay manifest social data.

### STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Having insisted that Hannah Arendt was one woman, a Jewish scholar, educated in the German classical tradition but encountering life experiences that imposed both her Jewishness and her gender upon her scholarly life, I now confess that the book I have written is divided into two parts, one dealing with the Jewish politics of the controversy over *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and the other dealing with Arendt's intellectual project that grew out of the controversy. While I do not intend this division to signal my acquiescence to dividing Arendt into a Jewish political writer and a European philosophical scholar, I intend the discussion as a careful examination of what happened to turn the response to *Eichmann* into the trauma that it was for Arendt, and how the unexpected force of criticism resulted in her efforts to expand upon her claim that the absence of thinking is sufficient to create political catastrophes. The themes that unite the political controversy and the scholarly project are Judaism and gender.

The first part of the book, on the *Eichmann* controversy, considers both Jewish and gender politics. Jewish politics are considered from the standpoint of the Israeli response to *Eichmann*, as well as the response of the New York Jewish intellectuals who led the American attack on Arendt. The *Eichmann* trial was a loaded political issue in Israel, the focal point of a decades-long battle between Labor Zionists and Conservative Zionists in the Yishuv, over the proper relationship between Israel and Germany before, during, and after the Holocaust. Tied in with this was the complicated history of attitudes to-

ward Diaspora Jews. David Ben Gurion and the Mapai party had a particular stake in claiming responsibility for capturing and prosecuting Eichmann, since they had borne the brunt of conservative criticism that their pragmatic political stance had amounted to collaboration with the Nazis. They also had a particular stake in Hannah Arendt not reminding the world of the Israeli political battles that had preceded Eichmann's capture. They sought to prosecute Eichmann in the name of World Jewry, not the Labor Zionist party.

The New York Intellectuals, assimilationists who had reason to be embarrassed by their avoidance of their Jewish identities throughout their lives, including during the Holocaust, and who had recently undergone a remarkable political odyssey from socialism to conservatism, also had a stake in not being reminded of their less than satisfactory response to European Jews during the Holocaust. There thus existed related but not identical reasons for prominent Jews in Israel and America to have been upset by Arendt's report. What brought the two sides together was the gender dimension, the relationship between anti-Semitic racism and sexism, discussed in detail in chapter 5.

The second part of the book is the discussion of Jewish themes in Arendt's "non-Jewish" writings: the essays dealing with the nature of truth and community from *Between Past and Future* and *Men in Dark Times*, and *Thinking*, in which she systematically attempts to find in the history of philosophy, and articulate for worldly use, an approach to thinking that would be applicable to worldly concerns, firmer than "opinion," less monolithic than "Truth," open-ended and dialogical, and available to all people, not just "professional thinkers" and philosophers. My argument is that the sort of thinking she sought closely resembles a rabbinic style, although she was unaware of that fact. Arendt was thus more of a Jewish thinker than she knew or acknowledged, and less than she needed to be to successfully accomplish her purpose in *The Life of the Mind*.

In order to make my case convincingly, I need to present a coherent description of "Jewish thinking," which I offer in chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 deals with the history of Jewish

thought from Biblical and Talmudic times, to modern conceptions of the meaning of history to Jews; chapter 8 is a structural and epistemological analysis of Jewish thinking, incorporating a comparison of Greek and Hebrew thought, from the standpoint of Thorlief Boman's classic monograph, and Max Kadushin's traditional Jewish discussion of the structure of rabbinic thought, as well as a discussion of contemporary scholarship on the characteristics of rabbinic thinking. In the final three chapters, I attempt to apply the accumulated discussion of the nature of Jewish thinking to Arendt's quest in *Thinking*, culminating in her presentation of Socrates, and finally to the concept of political action and public space in *The Human Condition* and *Between Past and Future*.

The effort thus, is to determine how the female and Jewish aspects of Hannah Arendt's existence exerted influence upon her work and its reception, without reducing her in any way to a prefabricated, cookie-cutter image of a "Jewish Woman." Along the way, we should learn something about the impact of identity politics on intellectual life with its presumption to be above it all.



## CHAPTER 2



# The Politics of the *Eichmann* Controversy

### ARENDT AND *EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM*

That *Eichmann in Jerusalem* represents a critical turning point in Arendt's life and work is widely acknowledged. The controversy greeting its publication is infamous, and was profoundly disturbing to Arendt. Her biographer believes it scarred and shortened her life, as she felt misunderstood, betrayed, and abandoned by old friends and colleagues. In terms of Arendt's own appraisal, as well as her commentators, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* was a work that presented her with the project that lasted until the end of her life. As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl reports: "The controversy precipitated by Hannah Arendt's series in the *New Yorker* raged for nearly three years, and it continues to simmer even now when the book made from the articles is in its twentieth reprinting. Almost every study of the Holocaust published since 1963 has explicitly or implicitly acknowledged the controversy and the fierce emotions that flowed through it." Young-Bruehl also attributes the book with prompting Arendt "to write her political morals. . . . What she aimed at was a political Critique of Judgment."<sup>1</sup> It has been obvious from Arendt's notes, in nearly everything she wrote after *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, that Eichmann impressed upon her the importance of articulating a worldly way of thinking in order to prevent

the recurrence of thoughtless evil. From "Truth and Politics": "This essay was caused by the so-called controversy after the publication of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*."<sup>2</sup> From "Thinking and Moral Considerations": "To talk about thinking seems to me so presumptuous that I feel I owe you a justification. Some years ago, reporting on the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, I spoke of 'the banality of evil' and meant with this no theory or doctrine, but something quite factual, the phenomenon of evil deeds, committed on a gigantic scale, which would not be traced to any particularity of wickedness, pathology, or ideological conviction in the doer, whose only personal distinction was perhaps extraordinary shallowness."<sup>3</sup> From *The Life of the Mind*: "Actually, my preoccupation with mental activities has two rather different origins. The immediate impulse came from my attending the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem . . . the only notable characteristic . . . in his [Eichmann's] behavior . . . was not stupidity but *thoughtlessness*. . . . Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining . . . be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually 'condition' them against it?"<sup>4</sup>

Two dimensions of Arendt's *Eichmann* argument have upset or offended a primarily Jewish audience of her contemporaries.<sup>5</sup> First, was her argument that Eichmann was no monster, harbored no extreme anti-Semitic views, but was nonetheless capable of sending hundreds of thousands of Jews to their deaths. What appalled her was how such evil could be visited upon the world in the absence of explicit evil intent. Not the willful desire to murder, but the thoughtless, almost passive desire to please his superiors, to perform well on the job, is what accounted for the destruction of innocent life. In arguing that evil can be committed thoughtlessly, Arendt threatened and offended many intelligent people who regard themselves as thinking beings and good people. Arendt implied that all might be vulnerable to failure to think. This assertion is unpleasant enough, but her association of the absence of thinking with the capacity for mass murder was too profoundly upsetting for many people to bear.

Claiming that Eichmann was not so exceptional, but in fact dangerously "ordinary" was much more disturbing than

acquiescing in his exceptionality. Those of us who would like to believe that we are not exceptionally bad might have a more difficult time accepting that we don't always think, if abstaining from thinking is enough to create catastrophes. Indeed, the people who think most are the ones most likely to be upset by such a theory. It is the good people who could not believe that Eichmann might not have been unusually bad, and it was precisely those good people in whom Hannah Arendt placed her hope for the future. Arendt notes that the Jerusalem judges did not believe Eichmann when he said he did not hate Jews, because "they were too good, and perhaps also too conscious of the very foundations of their profession, to admit that an average 'normal' person, neither feeble-minded nor indoctrinated nor cynical, could be perfectly incapable of telling right from wrong" (*Eichmann* 26).

A second dimension of her argument that aroused anger was Arendt's contention that the Jewish leadership's desire to keep their community together led them to negotiate with the Nazis and may actually have contributed to the slaughter of Jews. By so doing, the Jewish leadership tacitly accepted the insane Nazi fiction about the Jews instead of rejecting all premises of Nazi ideology. The Jewish leadership, in her terms, should have preceded from a state of mind that denied that there even *was* a "Jewish Problem." The Jews had a *Nazi* problem, and needed to save themselves as expediently as possible. She claimed that the Jewish leaders were drawn into accepting Nazi premises and responding to them as though they were rational. Many Jews took offense at statements such as:

In the matter of cooperation, there was no distinction between the highly assimilated Jewish communities of Central and Western Europe and the Yiddish-speaking masses of the East. In Amsterdam as in Warsaw, in Berlin as in Budapest, Jewish officials could be trusted to compile the lists of persons and of their property, to secure money from the deportees to defray the expenses of their deportation and extermination, to keep track of vacated apartments, to supply police forces to help seize Jews and apartments, and to get them on trains, until, as a last gesture, they handed over the assets of the Jewish community in good order for final confiscation.<sup>6</sup>