Hannah Arendt on the 'logic' of total breakdown of the Golden Rule

In one of the most chilling chapters of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* she explains the "logic" of totalitarian domination.

The **first stage** is to kill the juridical person. This happens when people are stripped of their legal rights. This is what happened to Jews in Germany long before the final solution.

The **second stage** is the murder of the moral person. This occurs when even martyrdom becomes impossible. Totalitarian terror achieved its most terrible triumph when decisions of conscience became impossible. "When a man is faced with the alternative of betraying and thus murdering his friends or sending his wife and children, for whom he is in every sense responsible, to their death: when even suicide would mean the immediate murder of his own family – how is he to decide? The alternative is no longer between good and evil, but between murder and murder. Who could solve the moral dilemma of the Greek mother who was allowed by the Nazis to choose which of her three children should be killed?" But this is not yet the worst.

There is a **third stage** of this "logic" of total domination. After the killing of the juridical person and the murder of the moral person, the one thing that prevents human beings from becoming living corpses is their spontaneity and individual differentiation. "After the murder of the moral person and the annihilation of the juridical person, the destruction of individuality is almost always successful. . . .For to destroy individuality is to destroy spontaneity, man's power to begin something new out of his own resources, something that cannot be explained on the basis of reactions to environment and events" The ultimate aim of totalitarianism is to make human beings as human beings superfluous. "What totalitarian ideologies aim at is not the transformation of the outside world or the revolutionising transmutation of society, but the transformation of human nature itself." The systematic attempt to eliminate any vestige of human spontaneity and individuality – to make human beings as human beings superfluous is what she called absolute or radical evil.

The **most disturbing sentence** in The Origins of Totalitarianism is her warning: "Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to alleviate political, social and economic misery in a manner worthy of man." These "strong temptations" have not been resisted in the massacres, genocides, rapes, tortures, and systematic lying by governments during the past seventy-five years.

Richard J. Bernstein is Vera List Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research. His most recent book is [Why Read Hannah Arendt Now.](#)
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