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Svetlana Klimova

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AND THE EVIL IN THE
TEACHINGS OF LEO TOLSTOY
AND HANNAH ARENDT**

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*Svetlana Klimova*¹

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE GOOD AND THE EVIL IN THE TEACHINGS OF LEO TOLSTOY AND HANNAH ARENDT²

The main subject of this article is devoted to analyses a problem of Good and Evil in the teaching of Leo Tolstoy and Hannah Arendt. Each in his epoch and by a similar way, got to the back of contradictions between “reasonableness”, “morality” and a human behavior in the state and society though they approached them from the opposing points of view. The approach of Tolstoy was Christian-ethical while that of Arendt was philosophic-political. Their congeniality is attributed to the fact that the ethics of Tolstoy and the policy of Arendt are built on a common theoretical ground, i.e. the philosophical anthropology of Kant. In the “man-state” opposition, Tolstoy revealed the ethical prerequisites to creation of the totalitarian ideology, and Arendt showed up the historical, political and inhuman essence of the totalitarianism phenomenon as such.

Key words: Good, Evil, radical and banality evil, a philosophical anthropology of Kant, consciousness, the mass society and the mass man, “Eichmann as man” and “Eichmann as Nazi official,” independent thinking.

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¹ National Research University Higher School of Economic (Moscow, Russia); Department of Philosophy. A professor in the School of Philosophy. E-mail: sklimova@hse.ru

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Introduction

The age of Enlightenment set forth the idea of man's reason all-might thus making it, but not man, *modus in rebus*. However, the triumph was short. The Kantian moral subject became "moral stumbling block" not only for the successors of the 19th century enlighteners but also for the tragic 20th century.

At first sight, the characters of this article Leo Tolstoy and Hannah Arendt³ exhibit more differences than affinity of views. Their ideas are in too different areas of consciousness, and their initial prerequisites intersect too little. Nevertheless, both of them, each in his epoch and by a similar way, got to the back of contradictions between "reasonableness", "morality" and a human behavior in the state and society though they approached them from the opposing points of view. The approach of Tolstoy was Christian-ethical while that of Arendt was philosophic-political. Their congeniality is attributed to the fact that the ethics of Tolstoy and the policy of Arendt are built on a common theoretical ground, i.e. the philosophical anthropology of Kant. In the "man-state" opposition, Tolstoy revealed the ethical prerequisites to creation of the totalitarian ideology, and Arendt showed up the historical, political and inhuman essence of the totalitarianism phenomenon as such.

It turns out that the struggle against the dictatorial state as "the root"⁴ of evil becomes an involuntary struggle for the "Kantian" man. One should overcome any evil, not external but internal, relying on the own reason, moral law and practical life of a public person (Arendt) or a Christian (Tolstoy).

The justification of our comparison is however not only in similarity of their educating optimism but also in revealing, common to the both, of not only the Kantian but also quite another, the atomic, man. Having considered the state as the institution of evil and the institution of violence against a person, they revealed also another thing, i.e. such state was serviced by "one-dimensional" man (Marcuse)⁵. Both of them disclosed the specifics of this impersonal man as an elementary unit of society. While Tolstoy was close to the discovery of the mass society

³ Arendt mentioned the name of Tolstoy just once in her essay on Hermann Broch (the collected book *Men in Dark Times*, Harcourt Brace Jovanich, 1968). It may have been attributed to the fact that in Europe as well as in Russia it was practically impossible to hear, since accession of the totalitarian regimes, the opposition voice of Tolstoy who opposed openly evil and violence embodied by the state. But it was never lost. His voice was well heard by Mahatma Gandhi who was held up as a model not once by Arendt in her reflections. See: Alexander Christoyannopoulos, "'Bethink Yourselves or You Will Perish': Leo Tolstoy's Voice a Centenary After His Death" // *Anarchist Studies*, 18 (2), 2010. PP. 11-18.

⁴ The term "radical (from Latin extreme form, higher degree) evil", common for Kant, Arendt and Tolstoy, means "root" in Russian. The radical evil is a pure human phenomenon for Kant, a social phenomenon for Tolstoy, and, for Arendt, elimination of the whole human factor in man what is equally typical for a victim and a hangman (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, A Harvest book, Harcourt, 1973. P. 595).

⁵ "A one-dimensional man" is undoubtedly a man of the mass society or the consumer society but his prerequisites are much universal. Therefore, the thoughts of both our authors belong not only to sociology but also to anthropology, of course, in the widest interpretation of the both notions.

and the mass man, Arendt observed this society at a more mature stage and reasoned about it as the established fact.

A dual situation arose. The discovery of a new type of society and atomic man did not hinder Tolstoy and Arendt from remaining the dedicated Kantians and ethical rigorists. The both proved to be within their own messages and conclusions because once started from abstract reasoning about “the state as evil” (Tolstoy) and the man as a personality of the Kantian type (Tolstoy and Arendt), they concluded that the state was always a very specific evil. Also, not always the man can become a moral legislator for himself and the neighborhood. We shall call this contradiction a collision of two ideas, i.e. “Eichmann as man” and “Eichmann as Nazi official”.

A special priority was given to ideology. Tolstoy proved demonstratively how ideology (church, culture, science, art) created the elements of the atomic type securing its bureaucratic functional essence. Arendt analyzed the gloomy outcome of the abstract ideas movement from the false messages to cynicism of the totalitarian regimes. She proved that the totalitarian society was created by those masses, and it met, in certain conditions, their profound needs. It is just this what differs the totalitarian regime from the empire described by Tolstoy.

Once again, the conclusions of Tolstoy and Arendt appeared to be opposing their messages. Being fully aware of the fact how far evil went in the 20th century, they nevertheless did not give up the search for the ways for self-contained good and overcoming social evil and believed in human nature, its consciousness and inclination to independent thinking. Tolstoy proved that the entity of “good”, which he called also “consciousness of life”, was such state of a human being which was constant and independent of time. However, Arendt called this entity “thinking” in the sense of Socrates, which also made man free.

Eventually, the both believed in feasibility of creating other, non-state, union of thinking people in a common spiritual and active life based on the Christ’s morals (Tolstoy) or on ideals of the ancient world and personal actions (Arendt). They opposed such unions with atomic isolated life of man in the state.

The nature of the evil in the teachings of Tolstoy and Arendt

For Tolstoy and Arendt, *evil* was neither a religious invention nor a metaphysical inception equal to good. Neither was it an integral part of the human nature.

They presented evil in the form of “radical” and “commonplace” (in terms of Arendt). The radical evil is embodied by the state while the commonplace evil is an attribute of man living in the primitive fashion of an inhabitant impersonalized by the state and its governing institutions.

Although Tolstoy and Arendt considered the state responsible for radicality of evil, they neither absolutized nor made the evil itself equal to good. Such point of view reflects the Christian approach to the basic moral values.

As a political philosopher, Arendt did not consider the state as an institution of evil suppressing man by force. She carried out a quite rational and neutral analysis of the objective preconditions for forming the institution of state power, the specifics and change of its historical forms. The state was considered as a legitimate form of relations between people.⁶ She examined in detail the periods of dictatorships and revolutions of the 19th and 20th centuries not denying their positive role and importance in the history and development of society and personality. From her viewpoint, it was not the state itself but only the totalitarian system as a product of the mass society which was the radical evil.

However, as a religious and apolitical thinker, Tolstoy was highly categorical in his criticism and nonacceptance of any state as the image of evil. He could not accept the idea itself of the state as such type of relations which existed at the expense of impairment of the natural human rights, above all, the right for free realization of own spiritual and moral life. Tolstoy denied all available types of the state such as democratic, authoritarian and tyrannical;⁷ he saw no positive potentials for the state system both in the past and in the future.

Evil taken as a whole and the state as evil are understood by Tolstoy as separation or dissociation of people. It leads to atomization, the cult of animal life, turning of society into an obedient homogeneous mass of separated elements fed with ideological lie (the vital instrument of evil). From his viewpoint, no state was *ever* and will be harmonic and comfortable for each man and, consequently, true and rightful. Any state seizes man into the sphere of violence basing on four classical means⁸, i.e. intimidation, bribery, hypnotization of population (ideology), and special groups of professionals realizing violence lawfully. Here his position is congenial to his later reasoning about Arendt's totalitarianism.

Any state tries to make man *an inertial element* of the whole. Any state is a product of violence and evil. Such interpretation made him the name of anarchist.⁹ In this case, the

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, A Harvest Book Harcourt, 1970.

⁷ Tolstoy remarks that "everyone knows that not in despotic countries only, but also in the countries nominally most free - England, America, France, and others, the laws are made not by the will of all, but by the will of those who have power, and therefore always and everywhere the laws are such as are profitable to those who have power: be they many, or few, or only one man." [34, 180] See: In the text all footnotes to Tolstoy's works are given in square brackets, i.e. the volume and page of the edition: Leo Tolstoy, *Collected Works*, in 90 volumes, Moscow, 1936-1958.

⁸ It is just these means that developed eventually the mass society and the mass man described by Tolstoy in his *The Kingdom of God Is Within You* [28].

⁹ Many researchers of Tolstoy compare his ideas with the anarchist protest of the European thinkers such as Paine, Godwin, Smith and with the Russian anarchism of Kropotkin and Bakunin. For example, Neo-Kantian Otto Buek defended the idea of "pure" anarchism of Tolstoy. Buek sees in the teaching of non-resistance to evil "only highly thought-out all- through anarchism and nothing more". See: Otto Buek, *Leo Tolstoi// Kampf*. Zeitschrift für Gesunden Menschenverstand, (Berlin, 1905). Neo-Kantian Boris Vysheslavtsev and Genrikh Lantz defined Tolstoy's anarchism as "ethical". See: Nina Dmitrieva, *Neo-*

Christian anarchism¹⁰ of Tolstoy together with anarchism of the revolutionaries was perceived as “undermining the throne” (Suvorin¹¹).

Arendt can assist in retorting the similar charge against Tolstoy. One should hear at least her viewpoint on such “irresponsibility” of judgments in the times of the Nazi. She wrote about the acts of civil non-obedience which became practically the only form of non-violent but evident resistance to the Fascist regimes.¹²

From Arendt’s point of view, the state is not evil. On the contrary, it came into being historically to prevent disintegration and fragmentation of private interests of separate people. Evil is embodied only by the totalitarian regime in its extreme form such as the Stalin and Fascist regimes. They “relate to a system in which all people become equally unnecessary”;¹³ search for enemies and forming of sophisticated false totalitarian ideology.

It seems that totalitarianism in its enormity is “absolutely unique and unprecedented” phenomenon (Gutner¹⁴). However, Tolstoy and Arendt indicated strongly, in many ways, the ideological, spiritual and mental sources and “regularities” presupposed to it. Tolstoy¹⁵ detected right well many symptoms or, in other words, “fateful” elements in the state structure itself which led inevitably to “the origin of totalitarianism”. It should be also appreciated that the Russian writer hardly could imagine thoroughly the immensity of acts of atrocity of the totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, their “logic” and “sources”.

Tolstoy’s viewpoint on the state as “Genghis Khan with telegraphs” (as noted by Herzen), “a turned-over cart” [90, 68] or “a band of robbers” who plunder civilians on a public road might have been considered naive and imaginative. It may be so if the world did not see directly the ruffian and robber regimes not only in the 20th but also in the 21st centuries.¹⁶ The

Kantianism and Leo Tolstoy: From the Scientific Philosophy to the Theory of Man in Russian and German Neo-Kantianism: Between the Cognitive Theory and Criticism of Culture / Ed. by Griftsova and Dmitrieva. – Moscow, Russian Political Encyclopedia, 2010. Elzbacher, author of the capital work *Anarchism* (in 1906 translated from German into Russian), also referred Tolstoy to major theorists of anarchism.

¹⁰ Kropotkin, Peter A. (2004) *Anarchy, Its Philosophy, Its Ideal*. Eksmo, Moscow (in Russian); Hopton, Terry (2000) *Tolstoy, God and Anarchism*, *Anarchist Studies* 8 (2000), PP. 27-52; Christoyannopoulos, Alexandre (2013), *Tolstoy’s Political Thought*, London: Routledge; Morris, Brian (2016) *Tolstoy and Anarchism*, (Spunk Library), available from <http://www.spunk.org/library/pubs/freedom/ravcn/sp001746.html>

¹¹ Alexey Suvorin, *The Diary. The Letter of 29 May 1901*. (Moscow: Knigowek, 2015). PP. 314-315.

¹² “And we have only for a moment to imagine what would happen to any of these forms of government if enough people would act “irresponsibly” and refuse support, even without active resistance and rebellion, to see how effective a weapon could be... there is no such thing as obedience in political and moral matters”// Arendt H. *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*//Arendt H. *Responsibility and Judgment*. Schocken Book, New York, 2003. PP.47-48

¹³Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 595.

¹⁴ Grigory Gutner, *Hannah Arendt on Totalitarianism* <https://sfi.ru/sfi-today/article/lozhnyj-otvet-na-realnye-voprosy/hanna-arendt-o-totalitarizme.html>

¹⁵ The standpoint of Tolstoy was Christian, humanistic and panhuman but not scientific or purely philosophical.

¹⁶ We may remember evaluations of fascism in the Soviet Union in the times of Stalin when one robber’s regime accused another, Hitlerite, regime of inhuman “treacherous” actions. This thought was well expressed by Ayn Rand: “Fascism and communism are not two antipodes but two gangs competing for one territory. [...] They are two types of a state based on a collectivity idea that man is its rightless slave” // Rand A. *Return of the Primitive. The Anti-Industrial Revolution*, Meridian Book Philosophy, 199. PP. 74–75. In the modern political rhetoric, for example, in Russian media, one may hear often definition of

laws of the totalitarian regimes were directed to the criminal thesis “kill” (Arendt), depopulation and genocide of peoples and, in doing so, did not cause the slightest irritation among most people and were not regarded as criminal. On the contrary, “law and order” prevailed everywhere: “for them, it was enough that everything happened according to the "will of the Fuhrer," which was the law of the land, and in accordance with the "words of the Fuhrer," which had the force of law “.¹⁷

Therefore, Tolstoy’s reasoning in the context of Arendt’s later criticism of totalitarianism sounds not so “naïve and silly” as well as his appeals to sabotage participation in the state activity, which were reflected in the principle of non-participation (teaching of non-violence). From his point of view, the participation in the state affairs led inevitably to *participation* in murders (army, police repressions, courts, state service), violence (prisons, penal servitude, psycho wards) and lie of the state coming from the spiritual apologists of evil such as church, science, culture and even art.

Arendt assists us in understanding the rightness of Tolstoy by proving that all tyrannical regimes are based on identification by philistines of the principle of thoughtless obedience to laws and moral consent with their essence. She showed that already since the times of Plato and Aristoteles obedience became a keystone of the state structure when some people commanded and others obeyed. Therefore, when hundreds of Tolstoy’s critics were ready to declare him mad, enemy of the motherland and a false prophet for his attacks against the ancient institutions, they did not even try to hear him. Meanwhile, he talked not about destruction of the fully formed relations or a forcible collapse of the existing state but he confirmed the natural right of man to have his own view (reflection) of “the saint laws” and the authority actions, to express a moral and existential disagreement to what is contrary to his conscience which, according to Arendt, “does not work in automatic action”. He reproduced Kant’s thought, which was close also to Arendt, that man chose “the good” anew every time in an act of free and autonomous thinking. Therefore, Tolstoy was too annoyed by the arguments of “sanity”, for example, that he was inactive or did not want to save his home, wife or country by proving the “insane” priority of his idea of non-resistance to evil by violence. Tolstoy repeated that in every specific situation one should deal “anew” with the problem of how to act but he considered to be at least immoral to forecast situations and enforce the ready-made decisions on “defense”, love of country or public duty to everybody.

some state leaders as badmen and bands of robbers. It allows media to unleash an unprecedented ideological baiting because ethics and close reasoning of statements do not apply to “robbers”.

¹⁷ Arendt H. *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*. P. 43.

Tolstoy attributed obedience of the masses to the authorities to *the law of inertia* strengthening the mechanism of bureaucratic actions and feeding up the mass conscience (public opinion). In his *The Kingdom of God Within You* he described the logic of a wave-like movement of circular laws from the authority to bureaucrats, from bureaucrats to executors and back [28, 252]. The state does its best to combine lawmakers and executors by one chain binding the whole society with obedience to the laws and the irresponsible and disciplined following of laws even if these laws are criminal and immoral.

Bureaucracy consolidates overall irresponsibility and moral indifference. Orders “at the top” are accepted as absolute truth but when passing them “down” “the intermediaries” inspire the ordinary executors with the following: your duty is to fulfill orders in the proper way and do not think of their content and moral characteristics. The state “knows” what is better for everybody because it (or he – emperor) is a law given by the God and people. Therefore, it “saves” you from meditation or moral responsibility and feelings for what is done or what is not done, for agreement or disagreement with the current event. Bureaucracy alone considers itself a driving belt of control or “switchman” regulating the vital processes in the state, and therefore it also lacks the sense of responsibility. Everybody just does his duty.

Tolstoy not only showed how the state generated circulation of irresponsibility and senseless serving to it but also understood very well that the whole system “was placed” on an ideological “cement” of morality which turned completely man into a drive gear and atom of the mass. Obedience to the law did not mean, according to Tolstoy, its automatic moral justification. This mission was undertaken by the Church which provided spiritual excusatory sanctions to any laws and any actions of the authorities thus blessing, in the name of God, the mechanism of the state violence and repressions. Therefore, the automatic pietism towards the law and an uncritical faith in the church combined in the atomic man into one unit of patriotic allegiance and moral inertia of life.

When Arendt emphasized the most important constituents of the origins of totalitarianism, she considered just a mass support of the regime on the part of population as a main feature and opportunity for its realization. However, neither revolution nor regimes could not give birth to the mass society “from scratch”. Without the mass man and the mass society, the totalitarian regimes could not neither hold their ground, nor prosper, nor develop. By the example of the mechanism for consolidating the mass conscience in the system, she showed how an inertial (thoughtless) execution of orders and ideological magic of the words “law”, “state”, “authority” produced aberration of mind of the common man. The commonplace and mentally sane man *even does not notice* that, when he keeps within the generally accepted standards and

lives as all others, he becomes gradually a part of “new order”, i.e. the laws which legitimate murders and extermination of people, and “new morality” or morality of the mass.

What Tolstoy called inertia Arendt considered as an automatic habit of man to support on the generally accepted standards and mores. It is just “mores” which change so easily the system of values; what was the standard (thou shalt not kill) yesterday is substituted creepingly by the opposite one¹⁸ today but man is sure that nothing changed in his principles of moral conscience and behavior. “They simply exchanged one system of values against another”.¹⁹ This law of “pendulum motion” of moral values from minus to plus in the condition of the preserved same world situation is a distinctive feature also of the Russian intellectual conscience.

Arendt indicated strongly that the legislation directed to extermination of people was criminal. But it is not always identified in the current time. The 20th century showed the whole value of Tolstoy’s protests who, well before the catastrophes took place, said repeatedly about criminality of the ideas of war, penal servitude and so on as such.²⁰ He believed that all institutions of power were engaged in violence using as a smear the idea of justice, general welfare or just referring to the God’s supreme will.

Totalitarianism analyzed by Arendt has become a sort of a case history of the institutional evil and availability of a kernel in the radical criticism of Tolstoy. She showed that participation in affairs of the inhuman regimes was an action not just connecting man with the state values but also making him an involuntary accomplice of the radical evil. However, his non-participation in “general campaign” makes him a criminal against laws of this state. The kingdom of the camp ideology connected by common chain the supreme and lowest levels of power, i.e. executives, officials and average performers. There is no lesser and larger evil in the regimes²¹. In the long run, any evil impersonalizes and kills an obedient individual.

Besides, she did not reduce evil only to the temporal state of the system, separate events, Holocaust or Soviet confinement camps. “When we think of evil, we may conjure images of the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide, not poverty, homelessness, or statelessness, which we may understand as inefficient and unfortunate outcomes of systems or, in some cases, bad (personal, governmental) decisions. But each of these fulfills the condition that Arendt set for construal of something as evil: ‘making human beings as human beings superfluous’”²².

¹⁸ Gorge Orwell has described this process in his novel: “But actually, he thought as he re-adjusted the Ministry of Plenty’s figures, it was not even forgery. It was merely the substitution of one piece of nonsense for other”, See: Gorge Orwell, 1984, St. Petersburg, “Modern Prose”, 2010. P. 53.

¹⁹ Arendt H. *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*. P. 44.

²⁰ Even the headings of his appeals confirm this idea: “Bethink yourselves or you will perish”, “I cannot be silent”, “Do not kill anybody”, “Is it as necessary as that?”, etc.

²¹ See: Matthew S. Weinert, *Hannah Arendt in a Global Age: Political Evil and International Theory* <http://www.du.edu/korbel/hrhw/volumes/2012/weinert-2012.pdf>

²² Ibid

In the context of her findings, Tolstoy's protest and criticism acquire a new aspect as well as his thesis of non-resistance to evil by violence. Tolstoy and Arendt advocated two ways of living, i.e. living in violence and in non-violence. Living in violence means compliance both with the external law and your animal nature, inertia as the only possible version of existence. What Arendt called acts of civil disobedience Tolstoy called *conscious non-participation* of man in evil-doings of the state. This is just what is meant by the well-known formula **“non-resistance to evil by force (violence)” is non-violence**. Non-violence is subordination to the internal law of the God's love and will, demonstration of freedom as realization of inherent spirituality²³ and autonomous choice (in this instance – the good), **non-violence of oneself**.

The formula “non-resistance to evil by force”, by which the state masks its lucrative and aggressive interests, consolidates the inertial thinking of the atomic man and brought finally to the birth and strengthening of the totalitarian regimes. Tolstoy foresaw terrible consequences of the religious fanaticism, nationalism and patriotism which proved to be the true sources of such horrible outcome as total anti-Semitism, genocide of Jews²⁴ and Holocaust. As a matter of fact, he warned about it explaining that to fight evil one should find and eliminate by all means “wicked men”: “in the first place we annulled, by so doing, the whole idea of the Christian teaching, according to which we are all equals and brothers, as sons of one father in heaven. Secondly, it is ill founded, because even if to use force against wicked men had been permitted by God, since it is impossible to find a perfect and unfailing distinction by which one could positively know the wicked from the good, so it would come to all individual men and societies of men mutually regarding each other as wicked men, as is the case now” (28, 27).

Arendt started her famous analysis of “sources” of totalitarianism just from demonstration of the grave consequences of its forecast. She showed that the search for the guilty persons or “wicked men” represented by Jews in Germany and the class enemies in the Soviet Union became a basic “argument” of unleashing the state violence in these countries. The

²³ The same formula reflects in specular refraction Jaspers' idea of metaphysical guilt: “There is such *solidarity* between people as such which makes everybody also responsible for any evil, [...] especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I do not do what I can to prevent them then I am also guilty. [...] I feel guilty so that no [...] reasoning is appropriate here”// Karl Jaspers, *The Question of Guilt*. Moscow, Progress, 1999. P. 19.

²⁴ Many contemporaries were concerned with the fact that Tolstoy did not pay special attention to the Jewish bashing and did not issue public protests. In this regard Tolstoy told Ilya Ginzburg: “I receive many letters and requests for support of Jews but my disgust with violence and oppression is well known, and if I dwell not much on the actions taken against separate nationality, it is only because I speak out constantly against any oppression.” This somewhat evasive reply proved to me that Tolstoy did not single out specially the Jewish question from all other questions being of his interest, and I stopped raising this point before him. See: Ilya Ginzburg, *Tolstoy and Jews*// Novy Voskhod, 1910, p. 34. In this context, Arendt's words sound as an important supplement to Tolstoy's “panhuman” thought: “I have never in my life ‘loved’ any people or collective – neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love ‘only’ my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons.” See: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: An Exchange of Letters Between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt*, Encounter 22, No. 1. January 1964. PP. 51-54; reprinted in Arendt Hannah, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (Ron. H. Feldman, ed.), New York: Grove Press, 1978. P.246.

question is not a historical or genetical relationship between nationalism of the 19th century and anti-Semitism of the 20th century. Arendt showed that they were, in essence, different processes. The question is the mechanism of generating “idea of enemies”, guessed by Tolstoy, as justification of the state violence as such. He showed how ideology and the imperial officialdom prepared the way for Stalinism with its search for “objects” for mass repressive measures.

Arendt combined all destructive processes of totalitarianism with the existence of the mass society and the atomic man as its basis.²⁵ Despite the fact that she considered the inception of the mass man to be heritage only of the 20th century, many prerequisites of its formation were found already in the 19th century including in Tolstoy’s analysis of public opinion, ideology and culture. The unspiritual atomic society suggested by Tolstoy²⁶ is undoubtedly a product of development of the imperial bureaucratic state and does not describe all layers of the Russian society. He separated such society from people (peasantry) by which he meant a union of people of the Rousseauist type. His perceptions were not identical therefore to understanding of the mass society in the conventional sense. Where there are people, the mass does not dominate. But it did not prevent them from forming in a bourgeois world of both Russia and Europe.

Tolstoy and Arendt differ widely in their opinions on the mass bureaucratic society. However, they are brought together by the idea of the atomic (egoistic) man as founder and victim of such society. Following the known image, we may say that the question is “phenomenon of Eichmann”.

But there is just where a contradiction reveals itself, which is typical of both Tolstoy and Arendt: having discovered the atomic man, they came to make demands on him which were rather common to the Kantian moral personality. They believed that man was capable to win any form of the impersonal evil including the state evil. An aspiration arose to save “Eichmann as man” from “Eichmann as bureaucrat” who embodied the radical evil of Nazism.

Man as “plain, common, abominable” or “banality of evil”.

According to Tolstoy and Arendt, the tangle of all problems is rooted in the nature of man and “mechanisms” of the birth of “banal evil” from “radical evil. The term “banal” suggests more likely commonness or “ordinary” of evil revealing in the term itself a tendency for its substantive “impairment” when it concerns an individual. The both thinkers conceived the relationship between evil of the state machine and evil in man as the cause and effects. The

²⁵ Arendt singled out four features of totalitarianism: transformation of classes into mass; substitution of a multiparty system for a uniform “movement”; control of police over the state institutions including army; foreign policy directed to world domination.

²⁶ Tolstoy’s far-sightedness was noted by Max Weber who found in his ethics of conviction the elements of debate with mass conscience and bureaucracy of that time. Max Weber, *Collected Works* / transl. from German (Moscow, Progress, 1990). P. 697.

source of evil is always outside man who is kind by nature, capable of thinking and bears in itself a potentially initial supply of morality and personal responsibility. Evil enters into man either because of the development of civilization, according to Tolstoy, or owing to radical transformations of the state, its turning into a monster in the course of forcible revolutions, terror or totalitarianism, according to Arendt.

The term “banal evil” is considered to be “finding” of Arendt. However, in Tolstoy’s works we also find terms very close in meaning, for example, in the description of the life of one of his characters, i.e. Ivan Ilyich Golovin, in the short novel “Death of Ivan Ilyich” (1886). “The past life history of Ivan Ilyich was simple and ordinary, and the most abominable” [26, 68]. Tolstoy’s Ivan Ilyich possessed all features of a philistine and was quite an ordinary particle of “respectable society”. “Banality of evil” in his case turned out to be a catastrophe of self-destruction. Tolstoy showed how man became a minor particle of the system, how lie (“screens” of decency and philistine standards of living) substituted his thinking and conscience (the ideas typical for Tolstoy). The “horrible” position lies in the fact that such generally accepted life has become “method” of spiritual self-murder or man’s death while alive. The external evil of love of things, decency, dissociation of people and heartlessness can kill (figuratively and even physically) a corporal man what just happened with Ivan Ilyich. However, he as any other man, is, in Tolstoy’s opinion, not only a bearer of masks of culture. He is no mere son, husband, father, judge, *comme il faut*, good scout. Tolstoy believed that egoistic evil principle generated by external living conditions was completely overcomable. From the outset, the good principle in man, which is equal to “conscience of life” or panhuman spiritual ego, allowed him to reveal, though in the very finale of a physical life, “it”, i.e. a real eternal life, a spiritual man in himself and others.

Tolstoy’s artistic reflection upon the image of the Russian civil servant allows looking more narrowly at the political reflection of Arendt, seeing in Ivan Ilyich the moral first stage of the completely real future Nazi bureaucrat Eichmann ²⁷ and millions alike executors living mechanically and comfortably inside of the impersonal cause-and-effect relations and syllogisms of the epoch.

Thus, banal evil is appearance of the mass man of the 20th century. Banality is the type definition, atomization of man, his non-separation from the total mass. At the same time, atomization is evil of separation of private interests allowing to present society as “Brownian motion” of egoistic atoms. By cultivating their animal nature people do not perceive their real

²⁷ See: Susan McReynolds, *L.N. Tolstoy and Hannah Arendt: Investigations of Evil*, X International Conference: Tolstoy and World Literature, (Yasnaya Polyana, 2016).

spirituality which combines all of them but they move along the given directions, are guided by general ideas and live “plain life” in like manner of stereotyped philistines.

Tolstoy described features of the atomic man in a state much more humanistic than totalitarian. He showed how through ideological hypnotization of population and, at the same time, through the power repressive mechanisms and philistine fear the Russian Empire formed the idea of its exclusiveness in the religious, ethnical and cultural sense. The primary target of the state ideology was directed to atomization and averaging of man and functioned along here as good as any cult of individualism but much more efficiently turning “atoms” into an obedient inertial mass.²⁸

The notion of “banal evil” as interpreted by Arendt should be most likely handled as “superficial” like what is lacking perception, depth of understanding and moral responsibility for the act done. Eichmann’s speech in the Israeli court, according to Arendt, revealed his philistine platitude and was a set of commonplace moral clichés and a quintessence of the false public opinion. The horrible and incommensurable evil, i.e. participation in extermination of millions of innocent people, was committed by an ordinary man without any “Faust” essence or a global evil will.

The phrase “banal evil” used by Arendt in this context concerning one of the most odious criminals of the Holocaust is not so simple and intelligible in the etymological sense as in the case of Tolstoy. It causes arguments up to this day.²⁹ In any event, we do not suffice only verbal intuition to accept Eichmann’s “commonness” of evil for in no better than “impairment of the good” or inability of displaying conversational and responsible thinking. On the contrary, according to Arendt, banality becomes only “appearance” of a horrible “faceless” person of the mass man of the 20th century and embodies a tragic oxymoron of people in totalitarian regimes.

However, if we agree to the fact that Tolstoy discovered just “atom of mass” in a heartless civil servant, then Susan McReynolds is absolutely right when she revealed “ancestor” of Eichmann in the character of Ivan Ilyich. If we go deep into the subject, we can note that the features of “banal evil” were recognized by Tolstoy in very different layers of society and described in artistic presentation both in the early and late periods of his creative work. He has showed that “Ivan Ilyich”, and therefore also Eichmann”, live potentially in everybody. For example, in the character of Nikolay Rostov from the novel “War and Peace” (1865-1869, 1873), who was neither campaigner, nor soldier or bureaucrat, lived the future “Eichmann”. He was

²⁸ It should be remembered that in Russia the imperial conscience was fed by the Asian ideology of personal devotion what was named “the Arakcheev regime”.

²⁹ See: Daniel Maier-Katkin, *The Reception of Hannah Arendt’s “Eichmann in Jerusalem” in the United States 1963-2011* – Berlin Arendt Networking Group Newsletter, Bd. 6, № 1/2, 2011.

ready to defend the motherland from “enemies” at any moment, to call his close friends enemies without a moment’s hesitation and to attack the enemy by mere word of Arakcheev.³⁰

There is also no less representative example with a common “executor” of the higher authority, i.e. the old soldier in Tolstoy’s short novel “Nikolay Palkin” (1895), who exactly as Eichmann saw nothing unnatural in his capacity of soldier. Being asked by the narrator of whether he was conscience-stricken by those numerous murders, violence and wars in which he participated, he like Eichmann did not understand the inquirer and reproduced a standard cliched idea of duty, military regulations, soldier’s fate and others:

“... when I tried from him some expression of remorse for these things, he was at first amazed and afterward alarmed.

“No”, said he, “that was all right, it was the judgment of the court. Was it my fault? It was by order of the court and according to law”.

He displayed the same serenity and lack to remorse regarding the horrors of war, in which he had taken part, and of which he had seen so much in Turkey and Poland. He told about children murdered, about prisoners dying of cold and starvation, about a young boy a Polyak run through by a bayonet and impaled on a tree. And when I ask him if his conscience did not torment him on account of these deeds, he utterly failed to understand me” [26, 556].

Despite his negative examples Tolstoy never doubted that each person could hear the voice of conscience, i.e. discover in himself another man and the God and live differently. It means that, in his opinion, “banality of evil” is entirely overcomable.

Arendt indicated strongly that in a totalitarian society an individual act of thinking proved to be senseless and impossible against the background of the final knowledge of “the best and true” for everybody which was totally accepted by the state. In other words, in any traditional authoritarian system before the 20th century freedom, though it was restricted, could not be destroyed to the end while it was practically impossible to get out of the totalitarian system preserving the human dignity.

Nevertheless, Arendt like Tolstoy remained true to the Kantian man. She described the Nazi official Eichmann as some exception, a man incapable of thinking and committing an act. It follows from this that the rest of “representatives of mass”, in some or other way, possessed this

³⁰ “You say that everything here is rotten and that an overthrow is coming: I don’t see it... But you say that the oath is a conditional matter, and I shall tell you the following. You are my best friend, as you know, but if you formed a secret society and began working against the government, - be it what it may, - I know, it is my duty to obey the government. And if Arakcheev ordered me to lead squadron against you and cut you down, I should not hesitate an instant, but should do it. And you may argue about that as you like” [12, 284].

capability though hardly used. Why ever in that case Eichmann proved to be “fool”, incapable of reflection? The fact remains generally valid that he was a representative sample of the Nazi functionary, a faithful subject fully merged with his social mask and abandoned his human dignity.

In Arendt’s opinion, it was important not *what* he committed but *why* at a critical moment he could not become a thinking and responsible person. “The phenomenon of Eichmann” is that even in the hour of crisis (court) he did not start thinking, i.e. to understand what was done, he did not become a man free of imposed roles but remained a functionary who till his death hour played the selected role of a faithful subject. Arendt drew a conclusion relevant to her logic: this man is stupid (unable to think). Such interpretation became the cause of her conflict with friends and enemies³¹.

However, she repeated over and over that incapability of thinking was not a clinical pathology and not at all removed the guilt for what was done. A bureaucrat (soldier, judge, custodial supervisor) remains a man and appears in court just as a personality. The same idea was repeated all the time by Tolstoy in his reflections on bureaucracy from the low level to the top level. The total irresponsibility of the system does not mean justification of acts of man who in the hour of trial (crisis) cannot hide either behind “safety guard” of the orthodox opinions or behind the mask of “atom”, no matter whether the question is an existentialistic crisis in the teeth of death (as with Tolstoy’s Ivan Ilyich) or a historical trial of the criminal.

In talking of intelligence and stupidity Arendt like Tolstoy distinguished “mechanical” intelligence, which is quite, consistent and filled with the cliché knowledge of the good and the evil, and pure thinking which is described since Socrates as dialogic, i.e. capable to differ the own ego from alter ego, whether it is the voice of demon or the God, or conscience, or to bear personal responsibility. It is just the capability which Eichmann lacked. He was deaf to his human ego, that primordial concept without which man does not exist. Instead, there flourished an individual (atom) about him which moved inertially along the given trajectories including rational and moral ones (mores). Such logic is understandable. But it is not clear who was “Eichmann” and who was the Kantian thinking man in the totalitarian regimes. The most difficult thing is to understand how Arendt tried to combine the evil of the system (cause) and the banal evil of the executor (effect).

³¹ We cite only several examples: Robinson, Jacob, *And the Crooked Shall Be Made Straight: The Eichmann Trial, The Jewish Catastrophe, and Hannah Arendt’s Narrative*, (New York: Macmillan, 1965); Zimbardo, Philip, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, (New York: Random House, 2007); Efraim Zuroff, *Postscript, Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of the Evil*, Russian translation by Sergei Kastalsky and Natalia Rudnitskaya. (Moscow, Europe Publishers, 2008, 424 p.)

It is obvious that not every man can possess autonomous thinking and be *a morally oriented person*. The case is not the Kantian minority of intellect but its total absence in personalities of the Eichmann type. Instead of absorbing in the thinking process they use carelessly “results”, i.e. the existing ideological and moral cliché, and lead a quiet life of philistines. These people, like, properly speaking, also Eichmann, were naturally capable of “technical application of reason” within limits of which they could distinguish “the good” from “the bad” and play “perfectly” their part but, in the day of reckoning, consider themselves an “innocent” victim of history. Moreover, a lot of “Eichmann” were then and are today absolutely confident of their rightness and “moral right to kill” sanctioned by laws.³² As noted by Daniel Maier-Katkin: “In international affairs, the collapse of Soviet totalitarianism and recent genocidal catastrophes in Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur have reinforced the idea that great evil may arise from the false beliefs and banal motives of ordinary people.”³³ We recall also an automatic habit of man, discovered by Arendt, to support on the generally accepted standards and customs, which by no means promotes reflection.

On the one hand, it is evident that the totalitarian regime destroyed any autonomy in people from the standpoint of both thinking and responsibility. On the other hand, Arendt repeated all the time that it was impossible to eliminate capability of thinking in man, whether he was bureaucrat or soldier, because “life of mind” was a part of his human nature which could not be rejected from him. Consequently, Eichmann is rather an exception than a typical atom of the mass. But it conflicts directly with her important conclusions on the sources of totalitarianism generated just by the “Eichmann” psychology of the mass which provided the regimes with the most favored status. This psychology is reposed exactly on irreflection and inertia, and voluntary obedience of everybody to the powers or to a single leader. And no court can change anything about them.

However, a paradox appears again but now it is typical for Arendt and Tolstoy. Both of them, having discovered “mass man”, persisted to believe in the Kantian autonomous personality. It is next to impossible to understand this persistence. Still, we shall try.

³² Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland Paperback*, (New York : HarperCollins, 1992); Berel Lang, *Act and Idea in the Nazi Genocide*, (Syracuse University Press, 2003); Christhard Hoffman, Werner Bergmann, Helmut Walser Smith, *Exclusionary Violence: Anti-Semitic Riots in Modern German History*, (University of Michigan Press, 2002); Martin Reisigl, Ruth Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetoric of Racism and Anti-Semitism*, (London and New York, Routledge, Taylor & Francis, Inc., 2001).

³³ Daniel Maier-Katkin, *The Reception of Hannah Arendt's "Eichmann in Jerusalem" in the United States 1963-2011* // Berlin Arendt Networking Group Newsletter, Bd. 6, № 1/2, 2011.

What is just a thinking personality or what shall we do?

To be a man, but not just be considered such, one needs massive efforts such as a break of a spiritual man through his physical and egoistic nature. Tolstoy believed that “conscience of life” or “life-belief” was the inward nature of any man. The conscience of life is a whole-hearted primordial “prereflexive” good feeling enabling any man to live without despair and in accord with oneself and others. It can be named “pure ego” which helps open in everybody such people as you are yourself. This ego opens only when it is directed to Another what means a practical life with Christ and his dispensations.

The trouble is that we live not feeling a real panhuman life and strive only for realization of our unique egoistic feature. Instead of our spiritual nature we offer to the world our “doll” peeping out from “screen” of the generally accepted and reasonable world. We demonstrate social positions (*comme il faut*, loyal subject, soldier, policeman, writer, judge) but not our essence. i.e. to be and remain a man. As such living conscience is spiritual for him, Tolstoy calls it *his belief* or life-belief.

In Arendt’s opinion, ability of holistic thinking is initially inherent in man, and it is understood by Arendt as “disposition to life in accord with oneself”. This position draws her immensely together with Tolstoy and both of them with Kant. It is just this holistic ego, but not a high intellect or the formal logic, social status or a blind obedience, which makes man autonomous, capable of living by an independent “life of reason”. Practice is such that many people do not want to hear their true voice. Instead of a living life of reason they prefer the fate of a cog in a machine, to strive to be as everybody, not to be distressed, i.e. not to comprehend what was done by them but be blind to carry out what is destined so that in one fine day to die “decently” or become a “sacral” victim of ideologies and regimes.

Thus, Arendt places the said problem into the sphere of *conscious (or instinctive)* refusal of personality from independent thinking, judgment and public action replaced in the totalitarian regimes with voluntary obedience to orders, collective mythology and public opinion³⁴. She noted: “The greatest evil perpetrated is the evil committed by nobodies, that is, by human beings who refuse to be persons. Within the conceptual framework of these considerations we could say that wrongdoers who refuse to think by themselves what they are doing and who also refuse in retrospect to think about it, that is, go back and remember what they did (which is *teshuvah* or repentance), have actually failed to constitute themselves into somebodies. By stubbornly

³⁴ “Without taking into account the almost universal breakdown, not of personal responsibility, but of personal judgment in the early stages of Nazi regime, it is impossible to understand what actually happened”: Hannah Arendt, *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*, P. 24.

remaining nobodies they prove themselves unfit for intercourse with others who, good, bad, or indifferent, are at the very least persons”³⁵.

So, Arendt has showed that everybody can think in a responsible manner but not everybody aspires to that. As opposed to Tolstoy, she believes that this ability is not aroused by examples from the life of Christ. It can be aroused only inside a political space when man commits an action, i.e. reveals his human substance basing not on thoughtless obedience and support of the power but, for example, committing nonviolent disobedience or joining the opposition from within, even if outwardly he has to obey orders of the powers.

On the contrary, the system tries to force man out of a political space making useless his right for public action, moral personal activity and thinking. All this is substituted for imitation of pseudo-activity such as formation of state “units”, total struggle against enemies from within and without who hinder from building the bright future, creation of ideologized philosophy, literature, art and even sciences. The inertial life, thoughtless adherence to laws and discipline force out man to a private space of egoistic interests and substitute thought for comfort and relative safety.³⁶

Arendt continued logically talking of “hypnotization” which was of Tolstoy’s concern. “In order to manage the conduct of its subjects, the totalitarian regime must train each of them equally well for both the victim role and the hangman role. This two-way training substituting some previous principle of action is realized by ideology”³⁷.

The most important thing about Arendt is that ideology changes a political space and makes a subject not a responsible personality but a mass headed by a deific leader.

When considering the political sphere as demonstration of free conduct and expression of will of man, i.e. morality, Arendt is clearly an opponent of Tolstoy, for whom any political activity is connected with serving the external factor, whether the state or his ego, and he does not recognize even liberal reforms, however indirectly they are allies.

According to Arendt, the evil *takes shape* in the hour of destruction of the public life of man, the unity of “discourse and actions” committed by people in the face of each other. In principle, man loses “freedom of choice” of values in his life and like-minded persons in the state. At that time, man acquires a mass character (like-mindedness and unanimity of people take place, even “tears from eyes” become “common”), and the death of reason comes. The only way out is “nonparticipating” in the evil: “I would rather suffer unjustly now and even accept death

³⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Some Questions of Moral Philosophy*, pp. 111-112.

³⁶ As known, in the totalitarian regimes safety was not guaranteed even for the most loyal subject but many of them consoled themselves with the fact that “they” did nothing wrong and therefore there was nothing to be afraid of.

³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. P. 608.

sentence if I am forced for participation than I act unjustly and doom myself to live with such villain into which I will turn".³⁸

This reasoning helps us, strange as it may appear, understand the nature of what seems quite the opposite, i.e. the apolitical protest of Tolstoy. He saw the source of evil in a public life. On the one hand, the thrust of his numerous publicistic works was directed to justification of *the idea of nonparticipation*. Indeed, a private person cannot hamper physically the government to plunder and deceive people, as Tolstoy believed, but he can understand evil of the state service as such and give it up. You should not plunder, kill, lie, take up weapons, be a soldier, write useless books, teach what you do not know yourself. Each private person *can* and *must* act according to the Kant's formulation of duty.³⁹

On the other hand, Tolstoy "could not be silent" (according to Arendt's logic). He was the most outstanding spiritual oppositionist in Russia on the eve of the revolution. He used the space of public speaking as a purely honest way of self-expression, the process of life not for himself. These acts of public speaking, i.e. publicism and religious-philosophical treatises, are Tolstoy's action and a vivid protest of a vivid personality against the regime. By his honest and merciless voice he incited in many people a response feeling of awaking in them of "conscience of life" and a thirst for self-modification.

Arendt showed that there were many people also in the time of fascism, "that the nonparticipants were those whose consciences did not function in this, as it were, automatic way".⁴⁰ They lived an autonomous way of life and preferred conscious "nonparticipation" and even death to the fate of Eichmann. "They decided that it would be better to do nothing, not because the world would then be changed for the better, but simply because only on this condition could they go on living with themselves at all. Hence, they also chose to die when they were forced to participate. To put it crudely, they refused to murder, not so much because they still held fast to the command "Thou shalt not kill," but because they were unwilling to live together with a murderer-themselves".⁴¹

Instead of conclusions

Being a great writer, Tolstoy assimilated his artistic word to the political word. Arendt wrote about politics assimilating her ideas to some provisions of the antique tragedy. She extended the Kantian definition of the esthetic, as disinterested and self-contained, attitude

³⁸ Hannah Arendt, *Collective Responsibility*. P. 215.

³⁹ The activities of Mahatma Gandhi in India were a fine example of victory of such logic.

⁴⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship*. P. 44.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 44.

toward reality to a political action. She illustrated her ideals by examples from the antique Greece finding the literal and best embodiments of her ideas about the political action.

Tolstoy found his ideal in a peasant commune. The availability of the peasant world and the people's ideology became for him a guarantor of penetration of the bureaucratic evil of the imperial state and possibility of other, non-state, integration and spiritual life of people according to "Christian dispensations".

Despite a wide difference between the peasant commune and the Greek policy, they have a spiritual resemblance: they were indeed relatively autonomous from what we call the state bureaucratic system and were its ideological antipodes. Of course, Arendt did not dream of restoration of the policy of the 20th century but she wrote about restoration of "the ancient right" of man for realization of all potentiality both as personality and citizen.

"I cannot be silent" as if Tolstoy said, "irrespective of the consequences" as if Arendt added. The question is the creation and strengthening of the public sphere as opposite to the official state world of loyal subjects. It is just a sphere where a prospect was and remains to display own ego, raise voice in support of statelessness, refugees and immigration and against tyranny and aggressive policy of the official authorities.

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Svetlana Klimova

National Research University Higher School of Economic (Moscow), Department of Philosophy.
A professor in the School of Philosophy. E-mail: sklimova@hse.ru

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