

Chapter 15

Insights into Recent Developments and Research

*Jews, Have you paid for the gas you used? This Chilling sentence has burdened me for decades . . . We can conclude that no place in the world is ours except for Eretz Yisrael.*⁵⁰³ – Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau

I

Randolph Braham and Andreas Kovacs, editors of *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, present revised and updated versions of twelve scholarly papers. In the opening study, Kovacs's article, "Hungarian Intentionalism: New Directions in the Historiography of the Hungarian Holocaust", provides an insightful overview of recent trends and debates concerning the Holocaust in Hungary. Kovacs notes that the current debate on the causes and historical explanations for the Hungarian Holocaust mirrors the earlier discourse between intentionalists and functionalists regarding Nazism. In that debate, the central issue revolved around whether the Holocaust had been a deliberate objective of Nazi antisemitic policies from the outset, or, as functionalists argued, the unintended result of impersonal institutional processes and internal conflicts, none of which were deliberately planned. Kovacs further discusses how, even when forced to divert resources from the Reich's military and political goals, the Nazis pursued their policies with relentless efficiency, as exemplified by the Holocaust in Hungary. He notes that functionalists argued only a small portion of German society – around 10% – was actively antisemitic, raising the question of how the Holocaust occurred despite this. They sought to understand how so many non-antisemitic individuals became executors, supporters, or passive observers of these policies. The debate extended beyond the Holocaust to broader historiographical issues, particularly after 1990, with scholars like Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen debating whether Germans were willing executioners or ordinary men.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰³ Lau, *Out of the Depths*, pp. 346–347. Rabbi Lau, a Holocaust survivor, was referring to an incident he encountered in 1982 in Australia when he was subjected to antisemitic verbal abuse.

⁵⁰⁴ Andreas Kovacs, "Hungarian Intentionalism: New Directions in the Historiography of the Hungarian Holocaust," in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, ed. Randolph Braham and Andreas Kovacs, Budapest: CEU Press, 2016, pp. 3–4. Kovacs further notes that the debate expanded to encompass more abstract historiographical approaches, particularly among functionalists, many of whom were influenced by leftist perspectives.

Kovacs further notes that: “In recent years, those scholars that were once identified as functionalists have drawn closer to intentionalism *in that* they no longer consider the antisemitic measures culminating in the Holocaust to have been exclusively the unintended outcomes of impersonal processes. Rather, they now explain them as the corollary of decisions taken by the central Nazi political leadership with the aim of promoting perceived or real interests”.⁵⁰⁵ German historian Götz Aly, for instance, characterized the Holocaust as “the most consequential mass murder and robbery of modern history” in his book *Hitler’s Volksstaat*, arguing that its goal was to plunder European Jewry to alleviate Germany’s wartime burdens and sustain support for Nazism. Aly acknowledges antisemitism but links decisions primarily to financial and material interests.⁵⁰⁶ His approach appears to contradict Saul Friedländer’s argument that Nazi antisemitism was an exceptional case that transcended pragmatic concerns, as well as Dirk Moses’s view of the Holocaust as native genocide.⁵⁰⁷

Kovacs then shifts the discussion to “Hungarian intentionalism,” noting that opposite trends have contributed to its increased strength. He refers to the reasons behind the Holocaust in Hungary and distinguishes between two types of intentionalists.⁵⁰⁸ One intentionalist view, represented by Randolph Braham, argues that without the German intervention in 1944, the Holocaust of Hungarian Jews would not have happened, making Germans the main perpetrators. However, Braham further argues that while the occupation of Hungary was primarily driven by

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid. Based on Kovacs’ analysis, there appear to be three primary interpretations regarding the motivations behind the Holocaust. The traditional functionalist view suggests that antisemitic measures were not the primary driving force; rather, the Holocaust emerged as an unintended outcome of the circumstances that developed. A revised approach that has, however, drawn closer to intentionalism links antisemitic measures to other key interests, such as financial gain, which then fueled the Nazis’ pursuit of the Holocaust. Finally, the intentionalist perspective holds that antisemitic policies themselves were the core motive driving the Nazis toward the Holocaust.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 6–7. Kovacs also claims that Historians who largely attributed the Holocaust to German antisemitism are now more open to acknowledging the role of impersonal institutional processes, without fearing that this approach leads to Nazi apologetics or excuses for perpetrators. Consequently, the German historians’ debate appears to be shifting away from issues of historical memory and responsibility, which once dominated the discussion.

⁵⁰⁷ See the discussion in Chapter 3 and footnotes 107–108, where this perspective is contrasted with other approaches. Dirk Moses offers a different view, interpreting it as a form of native genocide. According to Mahmood Mamdani’s theory on Rwanda, one could argue that the Nazis perceived themselves as “indigenous” while viewing the Jews as “colonizers”.

⁵⁰⁸ Kovacs, “Hungarian Intentionalism: New Directions in the Historiography of the Hungarian Holocaust,” pp. 7–10. Note: General intentionalism is a broader concept often discussed, whereas “Hungarian intentionalism” refers specifically to that case. I may emphasize general intentionalism to distinguish it from the specific concept of Hungarian intentionalism.

practical concerns—such as preventing a Hungarian exit from the alliance and mobilizing resources—it was framed within antisemitic policies. Forcing Hungary's leaders to deport Jews was intended to implicate them in war crimes and hinder negotiations with the Allies. Although antisemitism wasn't the primary cause of the invasion, it justified subsequent actions. Once Hungary was occupied, this antisemitism triggered the annihilation of Hungarian Jews, with assistance from Hungarian authorities. Braham views the mass murder of Hungarian Jews as a direct consequence of the German occupation, intended to destroy the Jewish population. On the other hand, Götz Aly represents the new intentionalist view, arguing that the fate of the Jews was determined by Hungarian authorities and society's attitudes and behavior, not merely by the occupation. Aly contends that the Germans couldn't predict the Hungarian reaction to deportation attempts and would have abandoned total deportation plans if faced with strong passive resistance within Hungarian society.

László Karsai aligns with Randolph L. Braham in asserting that the primary responsibility for the Holocaust in Hungary lies with the Germans. While Karsai acknowledges that the occupation wasn't solely motivated by the intent to deport and murder Jews, he agrees that this was one of the expressed goals. He argues that Hitler directly ordered the destruction of Hungarian Jewry, entrusting its execution to Himmler and the SS. This explains why senior SS officers, including Kaltenbrunner and Eichmann, swiftly arrived in Hungary after the occupation, sealing the fate of Hungarian Jews. The Hungarian government's failure to leverage its remaining power to reduce the number of victims, through cautious sabotage or increased resistance after the Normandy landings in July 1944, further compounded the tragedy.⁵⁰⁹

This study attributes primary responsibility for the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry to Adolf Eichmann, despite László Karsai's argument that Hitler directly ordered their destruction. This perspective does not contradict the study, as will be elaborated upon. The rapid annihilation of most Hungarian Jews within two months was a unique event that required extensive planning and coordination, as illustrated by the study. It was all orchestrated by Eichmann, whose methods were both highly organized and effective. The study further emphasizes Eichmann's central role, highlighted not only by his immediate arrival in Hungary but also by his swift actions, such as meeting with the Jewish Council and his prior visits to Auschwitz. It also examines Eichmann's involvement in various rescue negotiations, highlighting significant aspects of his approach. Furthermore, the study explores Kasztner's interactions with another Nazi official, Kurt Becher, who,

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

unlike Eichmann, appeared more inclined to release Jews in exchange for money. It delves into the political tensions between Becher and Eichmann and discusses the period when Becher, who was subordinate to Himmler, assumed greater authority in dealings with the Jews. This raises the further question of whether, in Eichmann's absence, a deal might have been reached to save more Jews with leaders like Becher or Wisliceny. Considering all these factors and the unique manner in which Eichmann orchestrated his actions, it appears that, regardless of whether the order came directly from Hitler – as Karsai argues, a point the study neither confirms nor denies – Eichmann remains the primary figure driving these tragic events.

II

Kovacs notes that Karsai opposed the new intentionalist argument first introduced by Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, which Gerlach later clarified during a conference on the Holocaust's sixtieth anniversary. Gerlach and Aly argued that while Germany's occupation of Hungary was inevitable, the fate of the country's Jews was not predetermined. They suggested that the German occupiers initially considered other measures, such as property confiscation, forced labor, and ghettoization, rather than immediate deportation. Karsai dismissed this view as baseless speculation and a harsh accusation, arguing that the deportation decision was not the result of an "interactive" process.⁵¹⁰ Aly and Gerlach argued that the fate of Hungarian Jews was shaped more by the Hungarian authorities and society than by the German occupation itself. They believed that the Germans were uncertain about how the Hungarians would react to deportation efforts and would have abandoned the plan if they faced strong resistance. The decision to destroy Hungarian Jewry was made only after the Germans were convinced of the Hungarian authorities' willingness to collaborate and the lack of serious societal resistance. According to Aly and Gerlach, a significant portion of the Jewish population might have survived if the Hungarians had refused to cooperate.⁵¹¹

Kovacs highlights a growing shift toward Gerlach and Aly's new intentionalist approach, which emphasizes Hungarian actions and argues that Hungarian anti-semitism was a primary driver of the Holocaust in Hungary. He notes that other

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., pp. 11–12. Christian Gerlach, "A magyar zsidóság deportálásának döntéshozatali mechanizmusa" [The decision-making process of the deportation of Hungarian Jewry], in A holokauszt Magyarországon európai perspektívában, ed. Judit Molnár (Budapest: Balassa Kiadó, 2005), 469–78. László Karsai, "A holokauszt utolsó fejezete" [The last chapter of the Holocaust], Beszélő 10.10 (2005).

scholars, such as Krisztián Ungváry, Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, have also contributed to this perspective. Kovács contrasts this with his earlier findings that recent trends in Holocaust studies suggest a mix of factors, alongside antisemitism, as the main motivators in different contexts. However, regarding Hungary, Gerlach and Aly's new trend places Hungarian antisemitism at the forefront as the primary motive.⁵¹² Kovács identifies two key issues: first, whether Hungarians should be viewed as perpetrators, as Aly suggests, or collaborators, as Braham argues; and second, whether antisemitism was the primary motive. From Braham's perspective, antisemitism was not the main motive for the Nazis, while for Aly, it was central from the Hungarian perspective.

This study addresses these debates by providing a clear and compelling response regarding the role of the Hungarians as collaborators during the first two months of the transportation to Auschwitz. It reveals Eichmann's role as the main orchestrator and how he relied on their anticipated actions and assistance. It further examines Kovac's scholarly discussion on old and new intentionalist trends, acknowledges both views, and argues that in reality the primary reason for the method used during the initial two-month phase—when most Jews were sent by train to Auschwitz—was Eichmann's exploitation of the opportunity to annihilate them. In the second phase, after the transports stopped and the Germans appointed a new Hungarian government and the antisemitic Arrow Cross Party, the killing rate decreased significantly. The study aligns with both perspectives and yet emphasizes how the new general intentionalist approach, which highlights how the Germans recognized and utilized Hungarian antisemitism, was a key factor influencing Eichmann's actions. This also emphasizes the study's examination through the concepts of genocide studies, which interpret German occupation as a trigger for genocide. In the context of these debates, the study also focused on the rapid and extraordinary annihilation observed during these two months. How did this

⁵¹² See Kovacs, p. 11 and p. 13. Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági, *A végső döntés* [The final decision] (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2013), 146ff. and 191ff. Kovacs refers to scholars Aly and Gerlach, who argue that the fate of the Jews was shaped more by the attitudes and actions of Hungarian authorities and society than by the German occupation itself. Krisztián Ungváry shares a similar view to Kádár and Vági, but with a different focus. While they highlight the antisemitic views of key decision-makers, Ungváry emphasizes that the fate of the Jews depended on Hungarian decision-makers at all levels, not just those in top positions. He argues that "cumulative radicalization" was driven not just by figures like Endre and Baky but by a widespread mentality within the state apparatus. Ungváry concludes that Hungarian authorities, aided by a zealous bureaucracy, bear primary responsibility, with around 200,000 people involved in deportations. After the German occupation, the Hungarian government, seeking to retain power, had the discretion to decide how to restrict the Jews. While the Germans did not dictate the methods, the Hungarian government chose to deport the entire Jewish population, including those in Budapest, revealing the failures of Hungarian politics and public life.

happen? The crucial point the study compellingly shows is that one person—Eichmann – was behind it. It seems that this is indeed what occurred in this historical event, and it cannot be ignored as we incorporate new perspectives. This highlights the significance of this study in shedding light on ongoing debates and new angles, presenting fresh perspectives, and providing a clearer understanding of the events and their implications.

III

The two approaches mentioned by Kovacs—the old and new intentionalists – offer a framework that could be further developed. The study suggests that we could categorize two types of antisemites: those (like Hitler) who overtly oppress all Jews as part of their agenda and those who harbor antisemitic views based on financial or other motivations but manage to suppress their hatred and coexist with Jews as needed. This distinction seems to be exemplified by Miklos Horthy. Tovah Kortchin, in her 2021 book, describes Miklos Horthy as a pragmatic antisemite. Kortchin details how Horthy, in a letter to his Prime Minister, Pál Teleki, admitted his dislike for Jews and claimed to be one of the earliest proponents of antisemitic views – likely referring to policies like the Numerus Clausus and other discriminatory laws. However, Horthy also expressed that, in his view, the welfare of the country was paramount, and Jews who contributed to society, such as businesspeople and doctors, should be treated as equal citizens.⁵¹³ This distinction helps us better understand Horthy's actions and why Hungary did not join the Final Solution until 1944. Until that point, Horthy's pragmatism allowed for a degree of tolerance. However, once the extermination of Jews began, Horthy became a bystander to the atrocities.

This is a fascinating perspective, as it aligns with Doris Bergen's analysis of Horthy's dual personality, as discussed earlier in this book. It also broadens our understanding of antisemitism by drawing attention to the second type as well: those who may not publicly or directly persecute Jews through propaganda or violence, but who, given the right circumstances, will act against them. This nuanced understanding helps us recognize that antisemitism can manifest in different ways, and that those who seem moderate or even cooperative might still harbor dangerous biases that could emerge under certain conditions.

This chapter began with a quote from Holocaust survivor Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, who recalled an incident in 1982 in Australia when he was subjected to antis-

⁵¹³ Kortchin, p. 193.

mitic verbal abuse. This powerful reminder underscores that antisemitism, unfortunately, persists even decades after the Holocaust. It is crucial that we remain vigilant, actively raising awareness and taking decisive steps to combat this hatred. Only through continuous education, advocacy, and solidarity can we hope to eliminate antisemitism and build a society where such prejudice has no place. This work is not just a remembrance of the past but a call to action for the present and future.

IV

Tuija Parvikko's new book, *Arendt, Eichmann, and the Politics of the Past* (Helsinki University Press, 2021), revisits decades of debates surrounding *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Parvikko argues that earlier critics often misunderstood Arendt's approach, while contemporary perspectives are better equipped to grasp her intentions. Parvikko clarifies that Arendt was critical of Zionist politics, focusing her critiques on Jewish leadership rather than ordinary Jews. Arendt recognized the challenges of organizing effective rescue operations during the war, suggesting that had Jewish leaders acknowledged the Nazi threat in 1933, they might have acted more decisively. Furthermore, Parvikko contends that many of Arendt's readers surprisingly failed to interpret her work in its proper context, noting that Arendt understood the connection between the controversy surrounding her book and the politics of history. This connection implies that Jewish organizations sought to obscure the actions of European Jewish leaders during the war. Parvikko also discusses new approaches that go beyond Arendt's initial interpretations, illustrating their application in political studies with several examples in the book's prologue.⁵¹⁴

The study aligns with Parvikko on these points and further critiques Jewish leadership, including the actions taken by the Jewish Agency during their rescue mission. It agrees that politics played a significant role, both during and after the establishment of the state, and continued to influence the Eichmann trial, as highlighted in Hannah Yablonka's book. However, the study argues that this context does not alter the facts that underscore Eichmann's pivotal role in the annihilation of Hungarian Jews. While Parvikko's work commendably emphasizes Arendt's contributions and addresses earlier criticisms, it does not diminish the compelling arguments regarding Eichmann's actions presented in the study, which challenge Arendt's perspective. This study devotes a section to Adolf Eichmann, highlighting his substantial power and decision-making authority, while refuting views from

⁵¹⁴ Tuija Parvikko, *Arendt, Eichmann, and the Politics of the Past*, Helsinki University Press, 2021. Refer to Chapters 4–5, and the conclusion and prologue sections for further insights.

scholars like Arendt, who depicted him as merely following orders within the Nazi chain of command. Nonetheless, the study acknowledges that the phenomenon of individuals following orders did occur in other instances during the Holocaust and various genocides, echoing Milgram's experiments on obedience. Additionally, it embraces Arendt's concept of the banality of evil, recognizing that individuals may act in such a manner by simply obeying orders.

Parvikkko added a prologue to the latest edition of her book, emphasizing that the complexity of Arendt's views remains crucial for understanding the intersections of individual and collective responsibility. Arendt focused on Heinrich Himmler, whom she portrayed as an ordinary, respectable family man who nevertheless played a critical role in the Nazi machinery of mass murder.⁵¹⁵ Regarding Eichmann, this study delves into his strict adherence to Nazi ideology and anti-Semitic beliefs, which constituted one of four key factors influencing his actions. However, this does not preclude Arendt's characterization of Himmler as an ordinary family man who transformed into a ruthless predator from also applying to Eichmann. The study examined Eichmann's life and psychiatric reports to uncover the motivations behind his extraordinary efforts within the Nazi regime, suggesting that these factors played a significant role alongside his potential anti-Semitic beliefs. When considering all these elements together, we gain insights into how individuals can become perpetrators of extreme actions.

V

Tovah Kortchin further raises profound questions about how ordinary people with families could commit atrocities, such as killing women and children, and then return to a normal life after the war. Delving into the troubling reality that seemingly regular individuals can engage in horrific acts, Kortchin echoes Tuija Parvikkko's portrayal of Himmler as an ordinary person who orchestrated extraordinary evil. This concept is a powerful example of what Hannah Arendt termed the "banality of evil"—the idea that great atrocities can be committed by average individuals who are simply following orders or fulfilling what they see as their duties.

Kortchin also recounts a chilling example involving a priest who, after witnessing Nazis murder the parents of 90 children and babies, saw the children suffering from thirst but made no attempt to bring them water, even though he had the opportunity. This indifference seems to be another manifestation of the banality of evil, illustrating how apathy and inaction can be as damaging as direct involvement in violence. This

⁵¹⁵ Ibid. Refer to the prologue.

concept appears to be extended by Kortchin beyond the perpetrators to include the bystanders and neighbors who allowed these atrocities to occur without protest. Years after the war, Kortchin revisited the town in Slovakia (which had been transferred to Hungary during the war) where her family members perished. She was deeply shaken by the locals' apathy, as if nothing had happened and the neighboring Jews had simply vanished from their lives without consequence. This experience reinforced her understanding of the widespread indifference that allowed the Holocaust to unfold.⁵¹⁶

Hannah Arendt viewed Eichmann as a regular person who became an opportunist and orchestrated genocides. She believed that humans have an inherent evil inclination, which, while present from birth, can grow and flourish under certain circumstances. Kortchin further elaborates on this idea, noting that Eichmann was not observed to have any irregular mental disorders. In fact, as this study mentions, psychological reports from the time of his trial did not indicate such disorders. Instead, his actions may have been driven by a deep-seated fear of failure and a strong motivation to succeed, rooted in his childhood experiences.

Tuija Parvinkko's analysis of Arendt's work reflects a similar approach, suggesting that Eichmann's actions were more about self-preservation and opportunism than about any specific malevolent intent. However, on the other hand, scholar Yaakov Lazovik disagrees with Arendt. In his book *The Bureaucrats of Hitler*, Lazovik argues that the Holocaust was not merely a result of following orders but also involved a conscious commitment to the ideology behind it.⁵¹⁷

The study aligns with both perspectives. It is possible that Eichmann harbored an ingrained antisemitic hatred, which, combined with other elements, pushed and enabled him to act as he did. Personally, I believe this was the case, though my study does not aim to prove it definitively. It is equally plausible that, as a regular person motivated by fear and ambition, he acted as described in my research. From this perspective, the study makes an important contribution and further underscoring that Eichmann, as a single individual, orchestrated the annihilation of Hungarian Jews.

VI

The study also addresses a recent development: the release of the Eichmann interview tapes, featured in the 2022 Netflix documentary *The Devil's Confession: The Lost Eichmann Tapes*. It makes a significant contribution by offering a unique analysis to

⁵¹⁶ Kortchin, pp. 1–12.

⁵¹⁷ Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil*, London and New York: Continuum, 2002.

verify Eichmann's testimony and motivations, arguing that he was largely truthful, contrary to Hannah Arendt's claims. The study examines Eichmann's motives for the interview and the reasons to consider his statements credible, using Christopher Browning's method for assessing perpetrators' reliability. While understanding someone's mindset and decision-making influences is challenging, the study presents a compelling argument about the factors influencing Eichmann's actions. The recent release of additional tapes, and the 1960 *Life* magazine publication of excerpts from Eichmann's earlier interviews, further highlight the significance of his statements. The study does not rely solely on these tapes or Eichmann's statements to counter Arendt's argument, fully acknowledging the limitations of perpetrators' testimonies. It disagrees with those who seek to reject Arendt's view solely based on what Eichmann said in the interview. Instead, it argues that we must approach the issue from the opposite direction, supporting the credibility of Eichmann's statements in the interview, as this study does. The study relies on its own evaluation, recognizing the testimony's potential to offer insight into Eichmann's mindset—particularly given the inherent difficulty of accessing an individual's inner thoughts. In doing so, Eichmann's testimony further provides a valuable perspective on the four identified factors of the study. The study suggests that an imagined interview with Eichmann, based on its conclusions, would closely reflect his actual statements from the 1960 interview. For example, the book's introduction quotes Eichmann discussing his reliance on the Jewish Council, while Chapter 9 notes his belief that the fate of Hungarian Jews was sealed following his meeting with Hungarian leaders upon his arrival.

“Evil comes from a failure to think”, Arendt later wrote, a phenomenon she attributed to Eichmann's claim during the trial that he was simply following orders. Arendt noted that Eichmann was neither Iago nor Macbeth—fictional characters in Shakespeare's *Othello* and *Macbeth*; Iago, the main antagonist, and Macbeth, who became a tyrannical ruler, committed murders to protect themselves. “Except for an extraordinary diligence in looking out for his personal advancement, he had no motives at all. He merely, to put the matter colloquially, never realized what he was doing. It was sheer thoughtlessness”. This study, however, presents a different perspective, showing how Eichmann was the main orchestrator of the annihilation of Hungarian Jews. Yet, at trial, Adolf Eichmann refused to accept responsibility for the millions of lives taken by the Nazis. Chapter 8 had further analyzed the difference between Eichmann's claims in the interview and at the trial. Arendt's idea that evil comes from a failure to think is a popular and powerful way to comprehend how anyone could willingly participate in the unthinkable. But in the case of Adolf Eichmann, after verifying the reliability of his statements in the interview, the study provides a better understanding. In recordings made in Argentina in 1957, four years before his trial in Jerusalem, we hear Eichmann in his own voice saying, “I regret nothing”. He adds, “Every fiber in me resists the idea that we did

something wrong. I must tell you honestly, had we killed 10.3 million Jews, then I would be satisfied and say, good, we have exterminated an enemy . . . that is the truth. Why should I deny it?”⁵¹⁸

Eichmann’s evil is not the result of a failure to think. His evil is the product of deliberate, calculated thinking that made him proud to orchestrate genocide. However, as mentioned, the study does not suggest abandoning the concept of the banality of evil, as this phenomenon can and has occurred in many other instances. But in the case of Hungary, Eichmann played a pivotal role. In the interview, Eichmann was sitting in someone’s living room, as he was describing how his job was, quote, the physical extermination of the Jews. The people in the room were stunned. Sassen asks him to clarify, and Eichmann does. Here’s that moment:

EICHMANN: “I didn’t even care about the Jews that I deported to Auschwitz. I didn’t care if they were alive or already dead. There was an order from the Reichsführer that said Jews who were fit to work were sent to work. Jews who were unfit to work had to be sent to the Final Solution. Period.”

SASSEN: “And with that, you clearly and openly meant physical extermination?”

EICHMANN: “If that’s what I said, then yes, for sure”.⁵¹⁹

In that moment, the tapes reveal that even the men in the room were stunned by the truth of what Eichmann was saying. During the trial, Eichmann portrayed himself as a mere bureaucrat, claiming he was simply responsible for making the trains run on time. He maintained this facade even as he went to the gallows. However, the tapes reveal a starkly different narrative. In a recording made just four years earlier, Eichmann is heard telling Sassen that he “did not care” whether the Jews he sent to Auschwitz lived or died. While Eichmann insisted during the trial that he was unaware of the fate of the Jewish civilians aboard the trains, the tapes capture him stating bluntly, “Jews who are fit to work should be sent to work. Jews who are not fit to work must be sent to the Final Solution, period”.⁵²⁰

The following quote, mentioned earlier from Eichmann’s conversation with Sassen, stands out as one of the most significant from the tapes: “Every fiber in me resists the notion that we did something wrong. Honestly, if we had killed 10.3

⁵¹⁸ The recordings were shared widely and publicly for the first time in the new documentary, *The Devil’s Confession: The Lost Eichmann Tapes*. This program aired on July 15, 2022. See <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2022/07/15/the-eichmann-tapes-and-the-nature-of-evil> and <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2022/07/15/the-eichmann-tapes-and-the-nature-of-evil>.

⁵¹⁹ See <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2022/07/15/the-eichmann-tapes-and-the-nature-of-evil>.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*

million Jews, I would have been satisfied and said, ‘Good, we have exterminated an enemy’. It reveals that Eichmann’s evil was not due to a failure of thought but rather the result of deliberate, calculated thinking that made him proud of orchestrating genocide. It may be time for us to reconsider the concept of the “banality of evil”.⁵²¹

VII

In concluding this study, it is crucial to emphasize that the lessons of the Holocaust must be internalized by all. This study focuses on one specific case—Hungary—where the majority of Jews were murdered in a short period. By examining these events, drawing conclusions, and proposing insights, it seeks to contribute to efforts to prevent such atrocities from ever happening again. The Holocaust serves as a stark reminder of the necessity of upholding universal morals and ethics. Mere remembrance is not enough; we must actively apply its lessons to build a more just and humane world. A collective commitment to human dignity and justice is essential in ensuring that genocide does not repeat itself. The true measure of learning from these dark chapters lies in our ability to create a future where respect for every individual’s rights is paramount, and the legacy of the Holocaust serves as a catalyst for lasting change.

⁵²¹ See more on <https://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2022/07/15/the-eichmann-tapes-and-the-nature-of-evil>.

