

## Book Reviews

*The Rigorism of Truth: "Moses the Egyptian" and Other Writings on Freud and Arendt.* By Hans Blumenberg. Ed. Ahlrich Meyer, trans. Joe Paul Kroll. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018. 108 pp. \$95.00 cloth, ISBN 978-1501704819. \$29.95 paper, ISBN 978-1501716720.

The only known correspondence between the two philosophers Hannah Arendt and Hans Blumenberg contains the amicable wish: "It would be nice if we could talk" (68). It was Arendt who, in November 1956, communicated this to Blumenberg, then lecturer at the University of Kiel, together with a greeting from their mutual friend, the philosopher Hans Jonas. The conversation indeed took place—Arendt visited Kiel a week later—but the desired result did not. In fact, the visit seems to have been such a failure that three years later Blumenberg reported to Jonas: "Since my conversation with Ms. Hannah Arendt, which came about at your suggestion, the suspicion has been darkly present to me that I no longer speak the 'right language.'"<sup>1</sup> Yet it was precisely Arendt's language that Blumenberg had always praised, right up to her intonation: In 1957 he described a "breathtaking lecture by Hannah Arendt in the night radio program of the NDR" as a "singular encounter, not only for the voice, exceptional for a woman, but for the factual excitement increased from sentence to sentence, the revolutionary accumulation of previously unknown theses on the philosophy of history and of politics."<sup>2</sup>

A version of this review originally appeared as Hannes Bajohr, "Der Preis der Wahrheit: Hans Blumenberg über Hannah Arendts," in *Merkur* 69.5 (2015): 52–59.

<sup>1</sup>"Seit der auf Ihre Anregung zustande gekommenen Unterhaltung mit Frau Hannah Arendt war mir der Verdacht dunkel gegenwärtig, daß ich nicht mehr die 'richtige Sprache' spräche." Letter to Hans Jonas dated 10 August 1959. Hans Blumenberg's estate, Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach (DLA). I would like to thank the DLA as well as Bettina Blumenberg and the Hans-Jonas-Archiv of the University of Konstanz for their kind permission to quote from unpublished sources.

<sup>2</sup>"Um noch einen Augenblick bei der Philosophie zu bleiben: habt Ihr den ganz unglaublichen, atemberaubenden Vortrag von Hannah Arendt im Nachtprogramm des NDR gehört? Es war eine in all meinen reichen Vortragserfahrungen singuläre Begegnung, nicht nur durch die für eine Frau exzeptionelle Stimme, sondern durch die von Satz zu Satz gesteigerte sachliche Erregung, die revolutionäre Akkumulation der bisher nicht gekannten Thesen zur Philosophie der Geschichte und Politik." Letter to Karl-Eberhard Schorr, January 19, 1957. DLA Marbach.

Blumenberg's enthusiasm for Arendt began as early as 1946, with the first essay she published in Germany since she had left it in 1933, fleeing the Nazis. "Organisierte Schuld"—a translation of "Organized Guilt," first written for *Jewish Frontier*—dealt among other things with the German petty-bourgeois, the *Spießler*, as perpetrator: "For the sake of his pension, his life insurance, the security of his wife and children, such a man was ready to sacrifice his beliefs."<sup>3</sup> Blumenberg's experience as a "half-Jew," who lived in constant fear of the Nazis and was sent to a labor camp of the *Organisation Todt* in February 1945, made him particularly sensitive to the discussion about guilt and responsibility in post-war Germany. He read the contributions to these debates with great interest, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's portrait of the anti-semitic or Alexander Mitscherlich's documentation of the crimes committed by Nazi physicians.<sup>4</sup>

Most important to him, it appears, was Arendt. She was the best analyst of the Nazi regime—and possibly of his own experience, as well. Her essay "The Concentration Camps"—in which she describes the camp system as the "killing of the juridical" and the "murder of the moral person," in the course of which the reality of the victims is lost, who in the end are believed less than the perpetrators<sup>5</sup>—he recommended to a friend as "the best thing that has been said about this subject, characteristically from the outside!"<sup>6</sup> His very first journalistic publication was a review of her volume *Sechs Essays* for the newspaper *Die Welt* (41–43); he counted the book "among the most significant" publications about the Nazi regime.<sup>7</sup> For Blumenberg in the post-war period, Arendt spoke nothing less than the rigorous truth about the "Third Reich."

*Rigorism of Truth* is also the title of a recently translated volume—edited by Ahlrich Meyer from Blumenberg's posthumous papers and excellently translated by Joe Paul Kroll—in whose material section one can find Ar-

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<sup>3</sup>Hannah Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility," in *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954: Formation, Exile, and Totalitarianism*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken, 1994), 128.

<sup>4</sup>Blumenberg's reading list 1942–1959. DLA Marbach.

<sup>5</sup>Hannah Arendt, "The Concentration Camps," *Partisan Review* 15.7 (1948): 755. Blumenberg read Arendt's own translation, which she prepared for Karl Jasper's journal *Die Wandlung*: Hannah Arendt, "Konzentrationslager," *Die Wandlung* 3.4 (1948): 309–330.

<sup>6</sup>"Dann will ich Euch noch eine in Amerika lebende Emigrantin empfehlen, deren Name Euch noch leicht bekannt ist: Hannah Arendt; von ihr sind hier 'Sechs Essays' erschienen, die ich zum bedeutsamsten zählen möchte (ich habe in der 'Welt' darüber eine Besprechung veröffentlicht), und kürzlich in der 'Wandlung' eine neue Arbeit 'Konzentrationslager'—das Beste, was zu diesem Gegenstand gesagt worden ist, bezeichnenderweise von außen!" Letter to Jürgen Harder, December 28, 1948. DLA Marbach.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

endt's request for a conversation and Blumenberg's early review of her essays. They stand at the beginning of a development that shifts from admiration for Arendt's analyses of totalitarianism to a brusque rejection of her *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1963). The longest text and the center of the volume, the essay "Moses the Egyptian," is dedicated to the book that brought the formula of the "banality of evil" to notoriety. Blumenberg wrote the text toward the end of the 1970s, a considerable time after Arendt's report was published. Now, the author Blumenberg once praised for speaking the politically necessary truth "from the outside" and with moral rigor had joined the apolitical sticklers for principles who "from their love of truth feel entitled to expect everything of themselves and of others" (1). The essay is just twelve pages long, but one finds biographical, political and philosophical aspects so compressed in it that the publication—especially with the additional material and Meyer's detailed commentary—is fully justified.

For his attack on Arendt, Blumenberg takes a detour via Sigmund Freud. In *Moses and Monotheism*, Freud had, in a speculative application of the patricide motive, unceremoniously declared Moses to be an Egyptian apostate, who first imposed his foreign religion on the Jews and then was killed by them. It is not the content of Freud's "historical novel" (the subtitle Freud originally intended for the Moses book; 14) that Blumenberg reproaches; after all, Blumenberg takes recourse to imaginative speculation in his own writing often enough. Rather, he reprimands the timing of the publication: "To take from the beaten and humiliated [Jews] the man who, in the beginning, had founded their trust in history" (1) in 1939, "at the apex of Hitler's power" (3)—for Blumenberg, this could only be explained with narcissism on Freud's part, who in the pose of the *vir impavidus*, the fearless man in tempestuous times, had promised himself a "worthy exit" (2). But the case of Freud is only a stopover and an "aid to understanding the incredible" (4): Arendt's account of the trial against Eichmann. The surprising analogy: "As Freud took Moses the man from his people, so Hannah Arendt took Adolf Eichmann from the State of Israel." (5)

There is much in this short but intense argument. It cannot be ruled out that it stems from the disappointment of someone who once received orientation from Arendt for his own identity. In an earlier version, which Meyer records, Blumenberg, like many other readers of Arendt, shows himself to be personally hurt by her claim that the Jews' cooperation made them complicit in their own annihilation. According to Blumenberg, Arendt demanded more from the victims than they could have accomplished, and wrote "from the distance of one who does not know what it means to want to save one's skin" (48). For him, who knew exactly that, Arendt had turned from an accuser of the Germans into an accuser of the Jews.

In another text, this sentiment is expressed even more drastically. Blumenberg quotes Thomas Mann's diary about a 1941 party at Max Horkheimer's

in California: "These Jews have a sense of Hitler's greatness that I cannot bear" (61). Horkheimer was, explains Blumenberg, a "genuine enemy of Hitler"; his Jewishness left him no choice but to take up this role. Mann, on the other hand, was an "active enemy" of the Nazis, but his enmity was based on a contingent political decision; at other times it could have turned out differently. Blumenberg comments: "So here he is bothered by these Jews, who are unable to find small the man who is all set to be the doom of their people. This will be repeated two decades later in Jerusalem, when Hannah Arendt will see in Adolf Eichmann, brought to justice before the people that was his victim, a buffoon of pathetic insignificance" (61). As subtle as the accusation may be, Blumenberg here groups Arendt with Mann, suggesting that she had denied her Jewishness to such an extent that she could no longer be a genuine enemy of Hitler's, but only a contingent one. Arendt as a parvenu—this judgement is so unfair that it seems as if it can only be explained by the deep insult Blumenberg felt from the *Eichmann* book.

In his afterword (118), Meyer compares Blumenberg's sharp reaction with that of Gershom Scholem, who had accused Arendt of lacking "ahavat Yisrael," love for the Jewish people.<sup>8</sup> And yet it is more complicated than that. It is not just a moral argument, nor just one of tact or reverence that Blumenberg brings forth (and ultimately, biography alone is always a dubious explanation). For Blumenberg introduces his accusation about Arendt's lofty distance with the words: "Historically justified . . ." (48). He does not deny that she is *indeed* telling the truth. But his objection is a political one: By making Eichmann a "buffoon," Arendt sabotaged his function as the quasi-mythic sacrifice through which the new state received its legitimacy. Eichmann is, in Blumenberg's words, "the negative founder of the state" of Israel (10)—the one against whose image it was created. To mock Eichmann is thus not only an expression of Arendt's anti-Zionism, but also of her lack of a sense for political symbols.

There is still a third line of attack on Blumenberg's part, which goes against what he assumes to be her philosophical convictions. Where Arendt would have preferred to see Eichmann before an international court, Blumenberg's point is precisely that he could only be judged in Jerusalem. Arendt's claim that the Nazi criminals should be "prosecuted because they violated the order of mankind, and not because they killed millions of people" must have appeared grotesque to Blumenberg.<sup>9</sup> The "order of mankind" or any other abstract invocation of *humanitas* as a moral entity he found deeply suspect—to him it was precisely the millions that necessitated the state of Israel and thus the trial as its consolidating symbol. The difference between Blumenberg and

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<sup>8</sup>Gershom Scholem, Letter to Hannah Arendt, June 23, 1963, in *The Correspondence of Hannah Arendt and Gershom Scholem*, ed. Marie Luise Knott and Anthony David (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 202.

<sup>9</sup>Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (London: Penguin, 1994), 272.

Arendt is that the latter insisted on the universal and moral, the former on the political and particular truth.

What power, what claim does truth have? When *Eichmann in Jerusalem* appeared in German translation in 1964, the journalist Günter Gaus asked Arendt whether an insight once made would also oblige one to publish it. "Or are there reasons to be silent about something you know?" Arendt rephrases the question: "So: fiat veritas pereat mundus?"<sup>10</sup> Let truth be told though the world may perish—that is, in maximum compression, the charge Blumenberg, in the phrase "rigorism of truth," levels against Freud and Arendt. And indeed, when it comes to Arendt, he is onto something; she is serious about the power of truth.

"Fiat veritas, et pereat mundus," Arendt asks again in her 1967 essay "Truth and Politics." In politics as the realm of opinions, the truth—and for Arendt that is: the truth of unchangeable facts—is always at risk. Because such factual truth brings forth a "world" in the first place, which is composed of the perspectives that its inhabitants have on it, systematic lying destroys our sense of reality and, in the end, this world as a whole. On the one hand it follows from this that "the sacrifice of truth for the survival of the world would be more futile than the sacrifice of any other principle or virtue," for it is questionable "whether life would still be worth living in a world deprived of such notions." But on the other hand, this does not mean that we must sacrifice everything to uphold the truth. For all her warnings against the suppression of factual truths, and this reveals a great optimism on Arendt's part, she nevertheless held that people can lie for some time, but never systematically and permanently. "Facts assert themselves by being stubborn, and their fragility is oddly combined with great resiliency."<sup>11</sup> Factual truth can only "temporarily be made to disappear."<sup>12</sup> It seems that

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<sup>10</sup>Hannah Arendt, "'What Remains? The Language Remains': A Conversation with Günter Gaus," in *Essays in Understanding*, 18. In the German original, Gaus's question reads even starker: "Oder erkennen Sie Gründe an, die das Verschweigen einer erkannten Wahrheit erlauben?" [Or do you acknowledge that there are reasons that allow you to keep silent about a truth recognized?] Hannah Arendt, "Fernsehgespräch mit Günter Gaus," *Ich will verstehen: Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk*, ed. Ursula Ludz (Munich: Piper, 1996), 67.

<sup>11</sup>Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Penguin, 1978), 260, 229, 258–259. It is interesting to note that Kant, in his *Perpetual Peace*, discusses the proverb "fiat iustitia, et pereat mundus" as an example of a possible political morality inspired by the categorical imperative. One must ask whether Blumenberg, who called himself a follower of Kant, would have counted his hero among the "moralists" as well, or whether the substitution of *iustitia* with *veritas* makes all the difference here.

<sup>12</sup>Arendt writes that political life "is limited by those things which men cannot change at will." In the German version, translated by Arendt herself, the sentence continues "and which can only be made to disappear temporarily through lying

for Arendt, truth has its own agency, its own power. But Arendt thus comes close to the ancient Greek concept of reality, in which truth has precisely such an undeniable presence, and which Blumenberg called “instantaneous evidence.” For him, this is the truth that Plato’s sun in book VII of the *Republic* brings to light and that no deception can permanently resist.<sup>13</sup>

And here lies the philosophical core of Blumenberg’s attack on Arendt and on her stance towards the truth: he suspects her of *Platonism*. To make an absolute, self-revealing truth the yardstick, as if it were the light of the ἀγαθόν, means for him to advocate for a dangerous “absolutism of truth.” And if there is one conviction that holds Blumenberg’s whole work together, it is his firm rejection of all absolute claims.<sup>14</sup> An absolutism of truth is destructive, especially in politics, for it pretends to know what ‘the real thing’ is, and it posits norms that are no longer subject to any discourse.

Thus thought through to the end, Blumenberg moves from sensibly following a trace in Arendt’s work to a very harsh reading. Arendt, for whom “Being and Appearing coincide,” is far from any type of Platonism,<sup>15</sup> which Blumenberg once characterized as a “philosophy against the rule of the word, the postulate of visual perception against listening, of self-evidence against persuasion, of *res* against *verba*.”<sup>16</sup> Directed at Arendt, who favored an Aristotelianism that values speech, rhetoric, and the attempt to persuade, this claim seriously misses the mark.

Perhaps Blumenberg was so quick to sense Platonism in Arendt’s work because he confused it with the moral determination he had so admired as a young man. In an unpublished text from his papers, Blumenberg asks

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self-deception.” [“Was ihn begrenzt, sind die Dinge, die Menschen nicht ändern können, die ihrer Macht entzogen sind und die nur durchlügenden Selbstbetrug zum zeitweiligen Verschwinden gebracht werden können.”] Hannah Arendt, “Wahrheit und Politik,” *Zwischen Vergangenheit und Zukunft*, ed. Ursula Ludz (Munich: Piper, 1994), 356.

<sup>13</sup>Hans Blumenberg, “The Concept of Reality and the Possibility of the Novel,” in *History, Metaphors, Fables: A Hans Blumenberg Reader*, ed. Hannes Bajohr, Florian Fuchs, and Joe Paul Kroll (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 501–502.

<sup>14</sup>Blumenberg notoriously describes what needs to be avoided as the genitive attribute of an “absolutism”—the absolutism of reality, of dreams and desires, of language, of the book, of self-assurance, of institutions, of the ego, of being, of essence, of time, of reason, of depth, of means, of the present, of last justifications, of surprises. . . . The series could be continued—for instance with the “absolutism of norms” in the present volume (6).

<sup>15</sup>Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978), 19. Emphasized in the original. On the complex of politics and reality in Arendt see Hannes Bajohr, *Dimensionen der Öffentlichkeit. Politik und Erkenntnis bei Hannah Arendt*. Berlin: Lukas, 2011.

<sup>16</sup>Hans Blumenberg, “The Concept of Reality and the Theory of the State,” in *History, Metaphors, Fables*, 94.



what one can learn from history. His answer: "Above all protection from illusions, perhaps even from one alone: the possible congruence—or even only partial congruence, even the affinity—between politics and morality." An absolute truth need not take any considerations; the absolute morality it engenders knows no exceptions; and the absolute politics that follows this morality is necessarily inhuman in its rigorism. Against this, Blumenberg demands: "But every morality must be judged from the perspective of its exceptional situations [*Ausnahmesituationen*]." <sup>17</sup> This, Blumenberg believes, is precisely what Arendt missed by universalizing Eichmann and making the truth about him the concern of mankind.

Blumenberg's harsh verdict against Arendt may stem from personal injury and may thus be as justified as that of other, mostly Jewish, critics of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Philosophically, however, it is based on a systematic misunderstanding that drowns out all the theoretical commonalities that persist between the two. It is striking how often they speak almost the same language. <sup>18</sup> For Blumenberg, truth is not completely relative, but dependent on a historically shifting reality; it has, one could say with Adorno, a "temporal core." <sup>19</sup> The question is thus not *whether*, but *when* one can tell the truth. "Must one always [*jederzeit*, at all times] tell the truth? Surely not," Blumenberg writes in a preliminary text (51). And Arendt, too, acknowledges in the Gaus interview that there is another option in dealing with a recognized truth: not to tell it. "Because one can also hold one's tongue" [*Man kann ja die Schnauze halten*]. <sup>20</sup> That would also have been Blumenberg's advice to Arendt in the Eichmann case. Here, of course, ends any desire for conversation, for discourse as such.

*Rigorism of Truth* is as philosophically complex as the book is biographically and politically convoluted. Blumenberg hardly ever spoke of his own Jewish origins; the reasons for this may have been manifold, but Christian Voller's assertion that Blumenberg was "probably never a conscious Jew" <sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>"Kann man aus der Geschichte lernen? Nichts. Oder: sehr wenig. Vor allem Schutz vor Illusionen, vielleicht sogar nur vor einer einzigen: vor der möglichen Kongruenz oder auch nur teilweisen Kongruenz, ja vor der Affinität von Politik und Moral. Jede Moral muß aber von ihren Ausnahmesituationen her beurteilt werden." Hans Blumenberg, "Die amoralische polit[ische] Moralistik," undated index card, DLA Marbach.

<sup>18</sup>On their similarities, see Hannes Bajohr, "The Unity of the World: Arendt and Blumenberg on the Anthropology of Metaphor," *Germanic Review* 90.1 (2015): 42–59.

<sup>19</sup>Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 2004), 371.

<sup>20</sup>Arendt, "What Remains?" 19. A more literal translation would read: "Because you can keep your trap shut."

<sup>21</sup>Christian Voller, "Die Kunst des Defensivspiels: Der Briefwechsel zwischen Hans Blumenberg und Jacob Taubes," *Merkur* 68.2 (2013): 165.

is more difficult to maintain after reading this book. The fact that with this text, as Ahlrich Meyer suggests, Blumenberg wanted to rehabilitate the role of myth in politics is not beyond doubt either; Meyer himself points to *Präfiguration*, a posthumously published essay, in which Blumenberg warns precisely of the continuing political efficacy of myth. One of its editors, Felix Heidenreich, notes the “polyvalence of mythical significances as a plea for a liberalism of distance,” whose function lies in “making the answer to final questions unnecessary or at least postponing them.”<sup>22</sup> Thus understood, Eichmann, as a mythical figure of legitimation, would be an exception to dealing with the aporia of the founding of the state—positing a beginning from nothing that Arendt described in *On Revolution*—rather than a norm of political action.

Freud and Arendt are the main characters of *Rigorism of Truth*. But the real interlocutor may have been someone else entirely. Long before Blumenberg read *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, he wrote to Hans Jonas, the mediator of the first encounter, that he would like, “once again to test the helplessness of our philosophical principles in a quite exceptional case, the Eichmann affair.”<sup>23</sup> Jonas remains the absent third in Blumenberg’s text. Shortly after Arendt died in 1975, Jonas wrote in a letter to Blumenberg about the “numbing effect of Hannah Arendt’s death” and enclosed two memorial texts he had written. In one, he quotes Arendt, who, conscious of her age, wanted to turn once more to philosophy and tackle the “ultimate themes. . . . With a vulgar German expression, which we could share, we agreed, ‘Jetzt geht’s um die Wurst’ [approx.: it’s do or die].”<sup>24</sup>

Blumenberg replies: “As an expression of a fundamental, common philosophical mood—as it would be quite unthinkable in this country at the moment—the use of the idiom ‘Jetzt geht’s um die Wurst’ has touched me; as vulgar as it may sound, so irreplaceable is it for the identification of an effective urge not to hold back the stakes any longer. I thought that was magnificent.” Even if a consideration for Jonas’s mourning may have played a role here, Arendt’s vehement commitment, which always ran the risk of turning into rigorism, seems to call forth his former respect from Blumenberg. Nevertheless, he cannot refrain from adding with regard to the second essay by Jonas: “I was

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<sup>22</sup>Felix Heidenreich/Angus Nicholls, “Nachwort der Herausgeber,” in Hans Blumenberg, *Präfiguration: Arbeit am politischen Mythos* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 107.

<sup>23</sup>“Welche Chance auch, noch einmal die Hilflosigkeit unserer philosophischen Prinzipien an einem ganz exzeptionellen Fall zu erproben, der Eichmann-Affäre.” Letter to Hans Jonas, July 7, 1960. DLA Marbach.

<sup>24</sup>Hans Jonas, “Acting, Knowing, Thinking: Gleanings from Hannah Arendt’s Philosophical Work,” *Social Research* 44.1 (1977): 28.



surprised by your statement that Arendt was ‘intensely moral, but completely unmoralistic.’ Of course, I don’t dare ask: Are you entirely sure about that?”<sup>25</sup>

Contrary to all rhetoric, Blumenberg really does not ask any further, even if he writes, only for himself, “Moses the Egyptian.” His respect for the friendship between Jonas and Arendt is so great that in the end it is the sole reason he decides not to publish the text. He later writes confidentially to the journalist Henning Ritter: “For years I have had an essay, ‘Moses the Egyptian,’ under lock and key, which brings together the monstrous ambushes of Freud and Arendt. Essentially, it was only my consideration for Hans Jonas that prevented me from letting anyone read it.”<sup>26</sup> That the truth is not worth every price—this truth was not worth every price to Blumenberg either.

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<sup>25</sup>“Es hat mich bewegt, was Sie in Ihrem Brief über die betäubende Wirkung des Todes von Hannah Arendt schreiben, und ich habe sogleich auch den Text Ihrer beiden Gedenkreden gelesen. Als Ausdruck einer gemeinsamen philosophischen Grundstimmung, wie sie hierzulande im Augenblick ganz undenkbar wäre, hat mich die Verwendung der Redensart ‘Jetzt geht’s um die Wurst’ berührt; so vulgär es klingen mag, so unersetzbar ist es für die Kennzeichnung einer aktuellen Nötigung, mit dem Einsatz nicht weiter zurückzuhalten. Ich fand das großartig. Verwundert hat mich Ihre Äußerung, die Denkerin sei ‘intensely moral, but completely unmoralistic’ gewesen. Natürlich wage ich nicht zu fragen: Sind Sie sich da ganz sicher?” Letter to Hans Jonas, June 2, 1976. DLA Marbach. Blumenberg quotes from the second enclosed essay: Hans Jonas, “Hannah Arendt, 1906–1975,” *Social Research* 43.1 (1976): 4.

<sup>26</sup>“Ich habe seit Jahren einen Essay ‘Moses der Ägypter’ unter Verschuß, der die monströsen Hinterrücklichkeiten von Freud und Arendt zusammenbringt. Im Grunde hat mich nur die Rücksicht auf Hans Jonas gehindert, es auch nur jemanden lesen zu lassen.” Letter to Henning Ritter, February 10, 1988. DLA Marbach.

*Hannah Arendt’s Ethics*. By Deirdre Lauren Mahony. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. x + 228 pp.

Hannah Arendt’s contributions to our thinking about public life and politics are widely acknowledged. Less so are her perceptive insights into ethics and the challenges of exercising free and responsible moral agency in a world that gave rise to the gas chambers of Auschwitz, and where even today totalitarian solutions remain a strong temptation whenever it seems impossible to address the problems of modernity in a way befitting human dignity. Dierdre Lauren Mahony’s *Hannah Arendt’s Ethics* attempts to right this imbalance. The book places Arendt’s moral theory front and center, focusing on what Mahony correctly identifies as Arendt’s driving ethical concern: