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ARTICLE



Arendt's *Krisis*

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ABSTRACT

Crisis occupies an ambiguous place in the writings of Hannah Arendt. Not only does crisis undermine categories of judgment, but in doing so it eliminates prejudices as well, forcing us to judge without them. Although Arendt never had an opportunity to fully develop her understanding of judgment, we know that she considered it to be ‘the most political of man’s mental abilities,’ and her writings on education reflect this. In her essay, ‘The Crisis in Education’ she draws a connection between judgment and crisis, linking it to the work of the classroom. It is this relationship, between crisis and judgment, that I examine. In doing so, I turn to two figures central to Arendt’s work – Immanuel Kant and Adolf Eichmann – each of whom embody opposing aspects of what it means to judge, epitomized by a conceptual tension between example and cliché.

KEYWORDS

Arendt; Eichmann; crisis; example; cliché; education

‘A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it ... with prejudices.’

(Arendt 1961b, 174)

In 1958, Hannah Arendt published an article in the *Partisan Review* entitled, ‘The Crisis in Education.’ Although the theme of her essay is the poor state of education in American public schools, she makes clear that her subject is not limited to the simple fact that children are not learning. ‘Certainly,’ she says, ‘more is involved here than the puzzling question of why Johnny can’t read’ (Arendt 1961b, 174). At issue, in fact, is a far more demanding problem, located at the intersection of education and politics: the enormous task of integrating the newcomer.

There has always existed a temptation to use education as an instrument of politics. ‘The role played by education in all political utopias from ancient times onward shows how natural it seems to start a new world with those who are by birth and nature new’ (Arendt 1961b, 176), but the dangerous misconception of this tradition lies in the assumption that education is a legitimate political activity at all. ‘Education can play no part in politics,’ Arendt cautions, ‘because in politics we always have to deal with those who are already educated’ (177). Instead of a contestation among equals, upon which genuine political community is

founded, we find in its place a fraudulent effort to shape the views of those who have none, a 'dictatorial intervention, based upon the absolute superiority of the adult' (176). Every attempt to bring education into the political domain, she insists, is mere pretense, a thinly concealed effort to exercise 'coercion without the use of force' (177).

Sensitive to this danger, proponents of American progressive education formulated principles designed to buffer children against the threat of those who would seek to treat the classroom as a political stage. Among these principles, she tells us, are three main ideas: that within the classroom children should, as much as possible, be left to govern themselves; that teachers should refrain from presenting themselves as figures of authority; and that instruction based on the acquisition of knowledge should be superseded by a curriculum based on action. Despite their stated intention, however, Arendt contends that these principles can never actually accomplish what they are designed to achieve because the means by which they seek to protect children from political manipulation involves casting children in the role of political actors. In an effort to prevent the classroom from becoming a site of political *coercion* the classroom is, in effect, transformed into a site of political *autonomy*, thereby missing entirely the central issue which concerns not the *kind* of political system that will rule the American classroom, but the imperative to keep these two domains separate.

Not everything is, nor ought to be, political and there are those for whom politics should be placed beyond reach. But this does not mean, of course, that education is therefore altogether detached from politics. Public life requires preparation and insofar as the principal achievement of the classroom lies not in telling children what to think, but in teaching them how to think, education makes way for politics. It is the responsibility of education to prepare the political environment and it is the task of the educator to *create conditions through which children can eventually become political without allowing education itself to become an instrument of politics*. This delicate undertaking is made all the more important by the diminishing influence of tradition in modern life and the general crisis of authority introduced by its disappearance. 'The crisis of authority in education,' Arendt contends, 'is most closely connected with the crisis of tradition, that is with the crisis in our attitude toward the realm of the past' (Arendt 1961b, 193). Because we are no longer easily persuaded by tradition and have grown skeptical of its capacity to guide judgment, we are left, certainly more so than past generations, without the shared beliefs that make agreement dependable. Yet despite this, it remains the special responsibility of the educator 'to mediate between the old and the new' (193), to introduce the world as it has been to the lives of those who have very recently arrived.

Presented with this responsibility the educator is left with something of an unresolved problem because unable to rely on tradition as a source of authority and knowing full well that children do not yet possess a capacity to assume responsibility for themselves, it is unclear what standard should guide the work

of the classroom. One possibility, which Arendt considers elsewhere, is to replace old traditions with ones that are new. 'Theoretically,' she writes, 'it is, of course, quite conceivable that one could first define the general rules and standards that have lost their validity, analyze what was wrong with them, and then proceed to think up some other standards we hope will do better' (Arendt 2018c, 329). But this path is insufficient and simply returns us to the problem we sought to escape. Rather than attempt to replace the past, we must instead modify our relationship with it. 'We must try to think and to judge and to act not without taking account of the past but without trusting the validity of any so-called lessons of history' (330). When assigned to the educator, this injunction takes the form of lessons designed to accommodate children to a world without fixed traditions, where the child is taught how to think in light of the past, but not in solidarity with it.

This curriculum also reflects the challenge of politics in modern times. Thinking in the absence of tradition is, for Arendt, the quintessential characteristic of modernity and has shaped every aspect of modern political life, altering beyond recognition the standards by which political decisions are made and the means by which political consensus is reached. What the crisis of tradition has exposed to the modern age, and what Arendt intends when she insists that we not ascribe truth to history, is the simple fact that politics has no predetermined goal and for this reason is not oriented toward truth. By unsettling the worldview upon which the authority of tradition depends, crisis holds the potential of reanimating politics – especially when political discourse has claimed for itself a fixed orientation. What this suggests, and what these pages intend to show, is that if the task of the educator is to prepare the way for the eventual participation of children in political life; then, the work of education coincides with a capacity to think from the standpoint of crisis.

Crucial in this respect is the fact that, folded into Arendt's assessment of the critical situation facing American education, is the observation that the situation also conceals an opportunity, 'the opportunity provided by the very fact of crisis.' (Arendt 1961b, 174) The important thing to keep in mind, as she tells us in 'Understanding Politics,' is that although it is certainly true that crisis brings about the 'ruin of our categories of thought and standards of judgment,' (Arendt 1953, 388) by doing so it also disassembles our biases and disrupts our prejudices. 'The disappearance of prejudices,' she insists, 'simply means that we have lost the answers on which we ordinarily rely without even realizing they were originally answers to questions' (Arendt 1961b, 174). By making habitual answers inaccessible to thought, crisis 'forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments' (174). Because crisis blocks access to what was once fixed and familiar, we are obliged to judge in the face of that which is without precedent and for this reason, when it is properly understood, crisis, like education, teaches us how to judge.

The word *krisis* is derived from the Greek verb *krinō*, meaning to choose or to decide, but also to separate or divide, and can be traced back to its archaic form by way of its Proto-Indo-European root, *krey-*, which refers to the simple practice of passing material through a sieve, suggesting that according to its earliest uses ‘crisis’ finds its original meaning in acts of separation, the winnowing of wanted elements from unwanted material.

Starting from this background it is not especially difficult to see why *krisis* would eventually acquire a juridical meaning, as it will in Athens and throughout the Attic world, where the idea of separation carries over to the discernment necessary in order to judge, acquiring political significance principally because such judgement, expressed by the verb *krinein*, bore the constitutional meaning of a binding decision. Nicole Loraux shows us, for instance, in a study dedicated to political reconciliation in the ancient world, that the vocabulary of division is abundant in texts associated with Athenian trial practices and throughout the relevant literature ‘*krinein* remains the essential verb of the decision conceived as division’ (Loraux 2001, 234). We find a similar usage in biblical sources as well, where the juridical meaning of *krisis* acquires theological significance in reference to the day of judgment (*hēmera krisis*), denoting the moment of decision when the saved will forever be separated from the damned.

Practically speaking, however, the legal decision in antiquity was marked by an important division of its own, between two methods of juridical settlement: *dikazein* and *krinein*. Although the precise meaning of these terms is the subject of debate, consensus holds that whereas *dikazein* denotes a method of judgment dictated by oath or by ‘the application of the appropriate formula [*dikē*]’ (Loraux 2001, 234), especially during the archaic period when legal sentences where, as Loraux puts it, ‘mechanically determined,’ *krinein* involves something more akin to discernment, a manner of judging not entirely bound by fixed laws. Much the same interpretation is given by Michel Foucault during his first seminar at the Collège de France, in 1971, where he raises the topic of *krinein* as part of his analysis of the distribution of knowledge (‘the will to know’) during the archaic period. ‘*Krinein*,’ he explains, ‘comes into play where law is lacking, tradition is silent, and the role assigned to the litigant can no longer be properly fulfilled’ (Foucault 2013, 102). And a decade later, in a series of lectures delivered in Louvain, he returns to the subject. *Krinein*, he tells us, ‘was precisely the form of justice that was put into play when no explicit law existed’ (Foucault 2014, 47).

Central to Foucault’s the investigation, and to the topic more generally, is a fragmentary legal inscription discovered among the ruins of the agora in the Cretan city-state of Gortyn, the so-called Gortyn Code. According to the description provided by the text, which is, in fact, the most extensive legal inscription of pre-Hellenistic Greece to have been discovered, we learn that local judges were ordinarily obligated to render their decisions in accordance with written law, (‘the judge shall give judgment [*dikazei*] as it is written’), in which case resolutions were procedurally quite automatic. But in cases where no written law was

available, the judge, taking an oath to proceed fairly, was obliged to decide on his own ('in other matters he shall himself take an oath and decide [*omnunta krinei*].') (Robb 1994, 103). Although both juridical actions are commonly translated by the verb 'to judge,' there is nothing inherent in the terms to mandate a single meaning. What the inscription in fact reveals are two distinct protocols for decision – one accompanied by criteria, designated by *dikazein*, and another performed in the absence of criteria, designated by *krinein* – and only in the case of the latter do we find an etymological association with *krisis*. Thus, as far back as the first half of the fifth century BCE, when the Gortyn Code is believed to have been written, there exists a connection between *krisis* and a specific manner of judging, *between a lack of criteria and an imperative to decide*.

Alongside its juridical usage, *krisis* makes an equally important appearance in an early medical discourse where it denotes the turning point in the progress of an infectious disease. The *krisis* of an illness marks the moment – described by Hippocrates as a set of 'critical days' ('Seventeenth day. Rigor; acute fever; sweating; crisis ended the fever.') (Hippocrates 1868, 187) – at which it is determined whether a patient will either recover or succumb, and has been described by at least one commentator, following Celsus (*De Medicinia*), as 'the determination of the disease as it were by a judicial verdict' (Withington 1920, 65). Our modern meaning of crisis inherits from this medical application the sense of a sudden and potentially catastrophic change internal to an ongoing process, which will carry over in a more generalized form to any process that has reached a decisive threshold beyond which the familiar protocols that had until that moment permitted it to function are no longer available for use.

Originally used to denote judgment in the absence of criteria, over time *krisis* came to be associated less with the act of judgment and more with the calamitous circumstances responsible for the loss of criteria, which is why when one speaks of crisis today it is typically in reference to a threatening situation rather than a particular manner of judging. Although the modern etymological history of crisis contains much to reward further investigation, including, for instance, the path that eventually joins *krisis* to the notion of *kritik*, it is the ancient lineage that joins *krisis* to judgment that is of interest to us because it is this nexus that Arendt appears to revive.

In 1966, Arendt returns to the subject of crisis in a brief address entitled, 'The Crisis Character of Modern Society,' where she explains that although 'crisis has often been defined as a breakdown of . . . rules and standards, [this is] not because we have become all of a sudden so wicked as no longer to recognize what former times have believed to be eternal verities, but, on the contrary, because these traditional verities seem no longer to apply' (Arendt 2018c, 328). At such moments, when the precarity of our worldview is exposed and our future is no longer predictable, what we discover is 'the simple fact [that] there are no general standards to determine our judgments unfailingly, no general rules under which to subsume the particular cases with any degree of certainty' (Arendt 2018c, 328).

This condition which describes the special precariousness of crisis is, as we have seen, also for Arendt precisely the condition that characterizes politics.

And if judging in the absence of criteria is somehow fundamental to political activity; then, Arendt's well-known fondness for Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* is easily explained, not only because nowhere in the history of modern thought has the faculty of judgment been subjected to a more comprehensive philosophical analysis, but because judging without criteria, in the absence of rule or principle, is precisely the problem addressed by Kant in his analysis of aesthetic judgment and determinations of taste—undertaken in response to a crisis of his own time. The objective of the third *Critique* is, after all, not simply to establish principles for gauging the legitimate use of taste, but to wrestle with the fact that the habits and protocols of taste that had once policed the frontiers of good judgment had begun to fail.

At the heart of Kant's analysis is a distinction, which appears neither in the first or second *Critique*, between two types of judgment: logical judgment and aesthetic judgment. The distinction is made on the grounds that the former is accomplished by the extension of a general rule to a particular case, as, for instance, when we *determine* this object to be a 'chair,' hence Kant's reference to these judgements as 'determinative.' The situation concerning aesthetic judgment, on the other hand, is quite different not only because in such cases only the particular is given, but because when we judge something to be beautiful we are not, in fact, subsuming a particular case under a general rule, since beauty refers to the quality of an experience, not an attribute of an object. In order to access beauty, we must *reflect* on the subjective experience of an encounter, hence the reason Kant refers to such judgements as 'reflective.' In the Second Introduction Kant describes the difference:

'Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is determinative ... But if only the particular is given and judgment has to find the universal for it, then this faculty is merely reflective' (Kant 1987, 179).

But difficulties arise when we wish to communicate the quality of our experience to others, when we insist that an object is beautiful not just subjectively, but universally. This is the crux of the problem.

For our purposes, however, the important thing to notice is that the distinction Kant makes between determinative and reflective judgment repeats the ancient division between *dikazein* and *krinein*, insofar as the difference between determinative and reflective judgment is decided by the presence or absence of criteria. Considered in this way, Kant's description of reflective judgement as performed in the absence of criteria signals, in effect, an unspoken engagement with the classical notion of *krisis*. And when Arendt turns to Kant's philosophy of judgment, guided perhaps by an awareness of the connection between

aesthetic judgment and *krisis*, she does so in order to expose its political implications. Kant's solution to the problem of universally valid aesthetic judgment is embraced by Arendt not because it solves the problem associated with judgments of taste, but because she sees it as a political project in disguise. 'The reason I believe so much in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*,' she writes, 'is not because I am interested in aesthetics but because I believe that the way in which we say "This is right, this is wrong," is not very different from the way in which we say, "This is beautiful, this is ugly"' (Arendt 2018a, 382).

Simply put, political judgment is not determinative, it does not operate on the basis of pre-established criteria, in which case the problem of judging would be a simple matter of proper application. Political judgment is instead much closer to reflective judgment because its operation cannot presume the existence of a common framework capable of deciding between opposing claims but must instead find a passage between heterogeneous descriptions of the world in order to arrive at agreement. Due to her death, Arendt was denied the opportunity to fully develop her understanding of judgment, but we know of course that she considered judgment to be 'the most political of man's mental abilities' (Arendt 1978, 192). What is at stake in both aesthetic and political judgment, then, is agreement rather than truth and, according to Arendt's somewhat idiosyncratic reading, criteria for judgment must arise from within the judging community itself. 'Culture and politics, then, belong together,' she writes, because in both cases, 'it is not knowledge or truth which is at stake, but rather judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world' (Arendt 1961a, 222–3). What lies in the balance is not certainty but the possibility of arriving at actual agreement with others and, to the extent that this is the case, judgment is necessarily political. Thus when Kant sat down to formulate a theory of judgement he unwittingly called forth the axial problem of politics, and the conspicuous circularity that burdens political judgment – that the criteria for passing judgment do not transcend the act of judging – happens to be equally applicable to aesthetic judgment, which is, as he puts it, 'object to itself as well as law to itself' (Kant 1987, 153)

But in what sense is this possible? How can the criteria for judging also constitute the judgment? The answer lies in the peculiar nature of examples, which function for Kant as the basis for guiding non-determinative judgment. The Kantian doctrine of the example refers to the exemplarity of aesthetic judgment which requires the agreement of a universal rule which cannot be stated. Examples do not depend on rules. Indeed, examples refer precisely to an absent or implicit rule. Unlike moral rules or normative principles, what the example promises cannot be adequately legislated and one's response to the exemplary cannot, therefore, take the simple form of obedience – mere adherence to reasonable principles. Taste it is never simply a matter of following a set of pre-given rules and therefore cannot be legislated. And since taste cannot acquire guidance through *a priori* principles, it acquires it through examples. As

Kant remarks in the concluding paragraph of §32, it is for precisely this reason that ‘among all our abilities and talents, taste is ... what stands most in need of examples’ (Kant 1987, 147). Since an *a priori* aesthetic basis for judging one thing better than another can never be established, because no rule can be established that can account for each single case, examples always occur *a posteriori*, as a byproduct of historical reflection. Taste requires instruction, practice and exercise, which follows not from adherence to rules, but from exposure to examples worthy of emulation. And it is this circularity – that the object of judgment is also a standard for judgment, e.g., that the beautiful object is also the only available criteria for learning how to judge what is beautiful – that typifies not only aesthetic judgment for Kant, but also political judgement for Arendt.

In its conventional usage the example is that which clarifies a point; it is that to which one turns after a theory has been worked out in abstraction. The example does not traditionally yield knowledge, it presupposes it. But for both Kant and Arendt the case is different, for in their writings the example exceeds its role as a mere case-in-point, such that when one encounters the exemplary it is as testimony, not as clarification. Through the example, one comes to knowledge in the manner of the witness and it is in this way that judgment is founded on a different sort of authority, which Kant speaks of as ‘exemplary validity.’

If learning to judge without criteria, to think ‘without a bannister’ (Arendt 2018b, 473), so to speak, requires exposure to exemplary things, then perhaps this tells us something about the nature of education and the authority particular to it. But before returning to the classroom and the task of teaching children how to judge, it is necessary to consider the alternative, because it is not possible to adequately understand the significance Arendt attributes to the faculty of judgment without appreciating the danger summoned by its absence.

When, in April of 1961, Arendt travelled to Jerusalem to witness the trial of Adolf Eichmann, she encountered a figure she did not anticipate. What she saw in ‘the man in the glass booth’ was neither a psychopath nor an extremist, but a man ‘terribly and terrifyingly normal’ (Arendt 1992, 276) and in this normalcy Arendt famously locates the moral danger of modern times.

Arendt’s analysis of Eichmann turns on the danger of acting without thinking, which we must take care not to confuse with mere mindlessness. The danger of acting without thought rests not in mindless reflex, nor in surrender to coercion, but in the active use of ready-made doctrines and stock principles deployed in the face of circumstances that call for novel thinking and judgment. Eichmann acted not simply from orders, but from a type of conviction – at least insofar as it is possible to embrace obedience itself as a moral principle. Although Eichmann’s commitment to the interests of the Reich was the result of a willful decision, the authority to which he thereby submitted himself deeply constrained the scope of what it was thereafter possible for him to think. ‘The longer one listened to him,’ Arendt recalls, ‘the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely

connected with an inability to think' (Arendt 1992, 49). Genuine communication with him was made impossible, 'not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such' (Arendt 1992, 49).

What was this safeguard that insulated Eichmann? To what had he surrendered his power of thought? To answer these questions, it is necessary to appreciate how closely Arendt associates the inability to think with the inability to speak, because the safeguard Eichmann deploys assumes the form of the peculiar manner of speech which Arendt repeatedly characterizes as *cliché*. Throughout Arendt's account of the trial this verbal form returns so persistently that its repetition must be placed at the center of her interpretation. '[T]he point here is that officialese became his language because he was genuinely incapable of uttering a single sentence that was not a cliché' (Arendt 1992, 48). Eichmann's reliance on cliché, not as a courtroom strategy but as a means of his own self-awareness, shielded him from the reality of his past and so too from the inquiries of the court. In a far-reaching passage that situates the cliché at the intersection of judgment and irresponsibility, Arendt explains that 'All these clichés have in common that they make judgment superfluous,' so that even in the most probing circumstances, 'to utter them is devoid of all risk' (Arendt 1992, 297).

Throughout the duration of the trial Eichmann sought tenaciously to avoid the pronouncements the law expected of him. Each time the cross-examination attempted to appeal to his conscience, to his will, they were confronted not with the man himself, but with clichés through which he was perfectly capable of bearing the weight of the inconsistencies in his testimony. The genuineness of Eichmann's testimony – a point Arendt insists upon – was neither a simple matter of rationalization, nor of an appeal to authority, although both certainly played a role. It emerged instead from a certitude made possible through routine, for in the face of facts that reason finds impossible to reconcile, the sheer force of repetition made possible. The mobilization of routine as a defense against the pursuit of justice, deployed by a man positioned before the eyes of the world, marks for Arendt the peculiar dilemma of Eichmann's case. 'These habits of Eichmann's,' she observes, 'created considerable difficulty during the trial – less for Eichmann himself than for those who had come to prosecute him, to defend him, to judge him, and to report on him.' (Arendt 1992, 54).

Although it is not possible to say with certainty whether Arendt's appraisal of Eichmann was shaped by her earlier research, it is tempting to suppose that her early study of habituation in Augustine may have played a role in her evaluation of the trial. Among those writers who decline to place habituation in the service of virtue, as Aristotle had in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, few have done so with as much force as Augustine. In the eighth book of the *Confessions*, in a section devoted to his early struggle against sin, Augustine describes his will as having been bound by the 'chains' of habit, so much so, he tells us, that 'when I did not resist the habit it became a necessity' (Augustine 1961, 164). Thus, far from being the proximate

genus of virtue, as it was for Aristotle, for Augustine, habit stands as its adversary. '[T]he rule of sin is the force of habit,' he writes (Augustine 1961, 165). Although her study of the Eichmann trial was written more than three decades after completing her early work on Augustine, Arendt began revising her study of Augustine for publication in the early 1960s (signing a contract for its publication in 1962), the very years during which she published the series of articles for *The New Yorker* which would become *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Although she ultimately abandoned idea of publishing her material on Augustine – the text would not be published in English until after her death, in 1996 – it is not unreasonable to suppose that her return to the subject of Augustinian thought may have influenced her composition of the Eichmann study, permitting her to rediscover the problem of habituation within Eichmann's own clichéd thinking. For Arendt, cliché is the expression of habit as it appears under the category of thought, and more than banality itself it is the cliché that characterizes for her the peculiar passivity of evil in modern times.

The essential point, simultaneously infuriating and comical, was that Eichmann the individual could not be separated from the empty formulas through which he expressed his intentions. The more the prosecution pressed to uncover the truth of the man, to gauge the limits of his moral agency, to explain his motivations and, finally, to seize within him a will capable of bearing responsibility for the deeds, the more the court was confronted by the 'officialness' of a person whose will had merged with the requirements of his station. For this reason, Arendt tells us, in a passage that underscores her insistence that his words were neither mindless nor insincere, 'Eichmann needed only to recall the past in order to feel assured that he was not lying and that he was not deceiving himself, *for he and the world he lived in had once been in perfect harmony*' (Arendt 1992, 52. emphasis added). Like a child placing a shape into its proper hole, each time a question is posed to him for which he has a precise answer, his demeanor records a minor triumph, and at certain moments, when he is able to correct the prosecutor concerning some small detail of the camp and its operations, his face registers an unmistakable pleasure. These are the points at which Eichmann deploys his safeguard. The cliché holds out the promise of certainty made possible by a dramatic narrowing of reality such that, in the end, everything one encounters doubles as criteria.

The principle effect of fascism, but also a great part of its appeal, had been to excuse an entire nation from the burden of judgment. ('German society of eighty million people had been shielded against reality and factuality by exactly the same means.') (Arendt 1992, 52). The demands of the world in which Eichmann lived coincided with the character of the man Eichmann had become, and this coincidence was not that of a man whose will had been broken, a man compelled by force or cowardice to obey, but of a man whose will had become indistinguishable from what the law required from it. Here is the condition of 'perfect harmony' of which Arendt speaks and the moral safety arising from the

coincidence of law and will, which made its conspicuous appearance in the form of clichéd speech. What Arendt shows is that Eichmann had lost the capacity to see the world from a standpoint other than that given by the law, and this was not the case because he was callous or self-centered. Quite the opposite. His inability to see things differently, to grapple with the profound heterogeneity of context and circumstance, and therefore to judge, was a result of the harmony he had established between himself and the order governing the world in which he lived – *the very opposite of crisis* – a life defined by a comforting abundance of criteria.

For Arendt, the participants in the trial demonstrated, but also failed to understand, that a new type of person stood before them and along with this new person a standard for judgment that was neither moral nor strictly speaking legal. This new person, epitomized by Eichmann, was the bureaucratic subject, for whom judgment was no longer a requirement. For whom it was really no longer possible to be in crisis. The man of the office speaks only to fulfill his office, to solve problems prescribed in advance, to complete its narrative and devote himself to his task for the sake of his own reassurance and satisfaction ('this horrible gift of consoling himself with clichés') (Arendt 1992, 55). One could even say that, from Eichmann's point of view, judgment did not *follow* the actions he performed but *coincided* with them. Immediately and without delay. To presume now, years later, to return to those events in the context of the courtroom so as to judge them collectively was to quibble over actions that had already been taken and approved on the spot. Action coincided with what had been commanded of it and for precisely this reason the official was insulated from the juridical interrogation of the court. Eichmann, sitting in a courtroom in Jerusalem, was able to deliver his answers from the standpoint of a judgment that had already occurred.

We have before us, then, two figures of judgment. On the one hand, Kant, whose presentation of aesthetic judgment elevates the example, making it a condition for the possibility of judgment in the absence of general rules. On the other hand, Eichmann, whose stock phrases and clichéd speech released him from the obligation to judge. In a certain sense, the example and the cliché are positioned on opposite sides of judgment. Yet the space that separates them is narrow, troubled by a constant danger that one will slip into the other, that the example will itself become a cliché – an idol or a stereotype. The challenge in every encounter with the example is to avoid this slippage, to emulate without sacrificing judgment. For this reason, the example is perhaps best understood not as a special class of object, but as a type of practice, a manner of receiving the elements of history and tradition such that we learn from them without abandoning ourselves to them, and it is this practical side of the example that requires a pedagogy.

For Arendt, the gravest danger is not that the example might be transformed into a cliché, or that judgment will give way to habituation, but that

we will remain mindlessly unaware that it has. Vigilance is required to prevent this from happening and within this vigilance it is possible to grasp the striking proximity between education and crisis. For the virtue of crisis – of thinking from the standpoint that crisis makes available – is that it exposes this slippage by unsettling the habituated world upon which the cliché depends, thereby reanimating judgment. The responsibility society has bestowed upon its educators – ‘the obligation that the existence of children entails for every human society’ (Arendt 1961b, 184–5) – rests in propagating this vigilance among the young, the newcomers, so as to inoculate them against the tendency of thought becoming habitual, of judgment giving way to cliché. Simply put, the purpose of education is to defend society against the cliché by teaching children how to learn from examples of the past without succumbing to them, which is to say, by teaching them how to *judge in the absence of criteria*. This is the particular burden of the educator, who must exercise authority in order to guide children toward a disposition that is not susceptible to authority, and who bear the enormous responsibility of mediating between the old and the new – between the past which remains a source of criteria and the future which requires that we learn to think in its absence.

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