



Between the ethics of forgiveness and the unforgivable: Reflections on Arendt's idea of reconciliation in politics*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to examine the role that memory and oblivion, forgiveness and unforgiveness play in Hannah Arendt's thought in relation to acts of violence in the political sphere. Political communities do not always decide to remember the crimes they have committed or the wrongs they have suffered, but neither can they always forget their mutual harms, even when there is already peace between them. Without striving to exhaust the entire subject matter of Arendt's work, I would like to illustrate the difficulty of understanding the role forgiveness plays in her thought as well as to indicate possible solutions when forgiveness becomes unachievable within the framework of her considerations. Her reflection can be divided into two stages. The first is a focus on the idea of radical evil and the need to forgive perpetrators for their crimes. Second, under the influence of the Adolf Eichmann trial, she developed the idea of the banality of evil. This idea points to situations so terrible that they transcend all human moral judgment, making forgiveness impossible. However, even when the moral possibility of individual forgiveness has been rejected, when the legal possibility of seeking justice has been exhausted and when victims and perpetrators in the community are still unable to live together peacefully, Arendt's thought leads us to the possibility of political reconciliation.

KEYWORDS

coercion; Adolf Eichmann; crime; evil; perpetrators; political oblivion; amnesty

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