

The Banality of the Absolute

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Animesh Shukla¹

Abstract

Banality or Banality of Evil and Absolute are distinctly formulated concepts of Hannah Arendt. Absolute was formulated by Arendt in the context of the American and French Revolutions and also in regard to totalitarianism, whereas Banality was formulated by her in the context of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. Arendt never sought to analyze the possibilities of these two concepts being related to each other. However, the endeavor of this article is to emphasize that Banality and Absolute, far from being distinct from each other in actuality, presuppose each other. The said argument would be further explained by dividing the article into three sections. The first section analyzes the historical moment of absolute, which was witnessed in Nazi Germany, where the intrinsic relation between banality and absolute was experienced. The second section engages with the philosophical moment of the Absolute, wherein Kierkegaard's text *Fear and Trembling* is used as an instance to emphasize how the evocation of absolute presupposed banality in this philosophical moment. The third section would engage with Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *The Feast of the Goat*, which narrates another instance of how Absolute and Banality interpenetrate each other. The article would conclude with an emphasis on how a conception of ethics, which could be termed "grounded immanence", needs to be imagined to weaken the hold of Banality on modern humans.

Keywords

Banality, Absolute, Grounded Immanence, Totalitarianism

Introduction

The article is inspired by the two concepts of Hannah Arendt: Banality and Absolute.¹ The concept of Banality, or as Arendt would put it, Banality of Evil,

¹Kumaraguru College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Corresponding author:

Animesh Shukla, Kumaraguru College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu
641049, India.

E-mail: animeshfreespirit@gmail.com



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was developed by Arendt in the context of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, and the concept of Absolute was articulated by Arendt in regard to the distinction between the American and French Revolutions, along with the totalitarian understanding of law and its fixation on absolutes.

According to Arendt, the evil that the world witnessed in totalitarian regimes was far from inspired by any perverse sadism or by any satanic worldview that affirms killing millions of people for whatever reason; rather, the evil in totalitarian regimes was banal. It was banal because people who followed Hitler or Himmler, or Goebbels were not necessarily convinced of the viability of the final solution or of the utopia that an Aryan race could be fabricated on a global scale; rather, they just obeyed the top rung of Nazi leadership. They sent millions of people to death chambers, not necessarily because of any personal hatred for the Jews, but only because it was expected of them that they would follow orders, and in this, their banality or the banality of the evil was manifested. As Arendt (2003) would argue in her book *Responsibility and Judgment*,

Out of the unwillingness or inability to choose one's example and one's company, and out of unwillingness or inability to relate to others through judgment, arise the real skandala, the real stumbling blocks which human powers can't remove because they were not caused by human and humanly understandable motives. Therein lies the horror and, at the same time, the banality of evil. (p. 146)

Blindly obeying a regime or someone, without that obedience being mediated by individual judgment, which is formed, as Arendt would argue, based on remembrances, which induces thinking, and based on thinking, we form judgments concerning individuals or political regimes (Arendt, 2003). Those who blindly obey without any mediation of thought as such are also bereft of any memories, which throw up images, past events, deeds, which could be mobilized to form correct judgments. The presence of memories in an individual also ensures that any worldly event they witness is mediated by them through their own memories, ensuring that the event is not subjected to a thoughtless swallowing, but rather is prejudiced. A tension is set up between the event happening in the world with its own facticity and our imagination of it, colored by our memories, which are activated by the sight of anything in the worldly event, and now there is the tension between the event as it is and our perception of it. Whatever illusions, fallacious judgments, may emanate from the process described above, no banality would ever emanate from it, because banality is a state of being in which the above-described process is conspicuous by its absence. The banal mind is absolved from all mental restlessness; this mind is serene as it is calmed by the Absolute.

Eichmann, whose trial led Arendt to develop the concept of Banality of Evil, was blessed with a mind that was calm and composed, as it was not plagued by the constant tension between memory, imagination, expectations, and judgments resulting therefrom; rather, his mind was content with the thought:

Hitler may have been wrong all down the line, but one thing is beyond dispute: The man was able to work his way up from lance corporal in the German Army to Fuhrer of a people of almost eighty million.... His Success alone proved to me that I should subordinate myself to this man. (Arendt, 2006, p. 126)

The mind of Adolf Eichmann is fixated on the absolute success of Hitler and engages in no further effort to analyze the rise of Hitler's politics, thus attesting to his banality.

Absolute, just like Banality, is a presumptuous singular. The way Banality does away with all the restlessness of mental process in favor of serene thoughtlessness, Absolute, which is a political term, is Archimedean, as it implies a radical new beginning, a radical separation from the past, and a phenomenon that is strikingly distant from everyday concrete phenomena and their ensuing restlessness. Again, like Banality, the abode of the Absolute is not the plural everyday life of people, but the singular serenity of abstraction. A political regime, which is founded on the Absolute, is completely divorced from the citizens at large. The institutional structure of such a regime is Archimedean; it is imposed from the people from above, as the "Political"² of such a regime is not charged by, as Arendt would argue, the "working realities" (Arendt, 2006b) of the citizens at large, realities with which citizens of the concerned polity engage in their everyday lives. The political of the concerned polity, being founded not on the plural everyday realities of the citizens, could only be charged by absolutes like God, will of the people, will of the nation and the likewise, unlike working realities that acquire shape only along with the effort of many people, who constantly shape and re-shape the contours of working realities by their actions. Since working realities as a term signifies everyday life of the people, which inevitably involves strategizing, prudence, and aptness at getting things done, this implies that working reality as a term is insubstantial and without any strict adherence to any form. The insubstantiality and formlessness of working reality ensure that it generates action and perspective, which means that working reality is of restless nature, since it is not endowed with any pre-given abode; its abode forms with a given action of someone, but then gets demolished as someone else affects it with their own action. It also implies that working reality would never generate blind obedience, because it does not have any content of its own strong enough to generate obedience; it would only generate perspective and action. People would keep on challenging each other ideas. In the words of Arendt (1998), it would generate, like in Classical Greek times, an Agonal Spirit, where outdoing each other's actions by the splendor of one's action and perspective was the most dominating factor, which prompted the aristocrats of Athens, who participated in the affairs of the polis, to act and speak. In this vein, working reality would stimulate thought and not banality.

Absolute would generate no thought. Its images and words would not activate memory, thus initiating thinking, which leads to judgment; contrary to all these, absolutes would only generate veneration. What else would it generate since it does not originate from those domains of human life that are intense with plural action that constantly intersect among themselves! The origins of the Absolute are from some distant abstraction, which the imagination of everyday humans cannot fathom; the Absolute cannot be mediated by any human memory, as absolutes have never participated in our lives. For instance, absolutes like the will of the nation would never generate any remembrances, because the nation remains an abstraction, which people have experienced, if at all, only by the mediation of

local cultures and customs. The nation, in isolation from all concrete and effective factors, would not strike any relationship with people. And if a polity is governed by such an Absolute, then it would cultivate thoughtlessness among its citizens, or it would presuppose that the citizens would be thoughtless. As only a thoughtless person would venerate a phenomenon which, far from striking any chord in them, remains conspicuously distant. Eichmann was never troubled by any thought that could have prompted him to investigate what lies beneath Hitler and his “success,” which he held in awe. The figure of Hitler never generated in him any memory or any picture, which he could have contemplated and spoken about, and then eventually could have judged Hitler. However, Eichmann was without any memory, or at least his memory did not induce thinking; it could have relapsed to just like another bodily process that comes off and goes at its own volition. A polity could be based on an Absolute only if there is an abundance of people like Eichmann, who are incapable of thinking and all the restlessness ensuing from it, and could devote their lives to obeying a distant Absolute.

The article from this point onward is divided into three sections: The first section is on the historical moment of the Absolute, wherein it is analyzed precisely what the factors and modalities are through which totalitarian regimes manifested the commensuration of absolute and banality. The Second section is a study of two texts: one philosophical, that is, Soren Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling*, and the other literary, that is, Mario Vargas Llosa’s *The Feast of the Goat*. Through the analysis of these two texts, the endeavor is to emphasize how Banality and Absolute presuppose each other, and the banal attitude is not harmless ignorance; rather, it is already an implicit affirmation of the political, charged by an Absolute, and the Absolute can function only on the basis of wide-scale banality. The article concludes with an emphasis on how a conception of ethics, which is neither transcendental nor immanent and could be articulated as grounded immanence, which to explain itself further would metaphorically take recourse to Freudian psychoanalysis, needs to be conceived, which would weaken the Absolute inspired by banality.

Historical Moment of Absolute

Totalitarianism in Nazi Germany and Soviet Union under Stalin are classical examples of political systems that were charged by an Absolute in these two countries: In Soviet Union, the Absolute was the law of history, whose destiny was communism, and in Nazi Germany, the Absolute was law of nature, whose destiny was the creation of an Aryan race on a global level (Arendt, 2004).

Both the totalitarian regimes were geared toward the actualization of their absolutes, without any mediation from any worldly or practical realities. Arendt (2004) argues in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* that, in any polity, the constitution of law may be guided by some absolute, such as God, Reason, or Nation. However, the actual law that is constituted is created by people who translate the Absolute into the temporal context in which laws are formulated. In this process, the purity of the Absolute becomes reified, and law, with all its solidity, inevitably leaves a

lot of gaps that do not adhere to any strict form of codified law. Instead, these gaps invite manifold interpretations as to how law should be implemented in a situation where the law is silent. A constituted law, with a lot of gaps and ambiguities, which invites interpretations, is a law that engages people, provokes activity, and thinking. In a situation where no universal law is applicable, the situation needs to be legally dealt with. Such a situation would demand imagination and thinking on the part of those who are engaging with the situation, and since whatever perspective would eventually legally interpret the situation would inevitably be a perspective emanating from subjective memories culminating into a judgment of sorts, it being a subjective perspective would ensure that the consensus over the situation would soon be broken and another process would be initiated of further interpretation. Law in such a situation takes the shape of Arendtian political action, which always takes place in a plural sphere, whose form is always of perpetually opening all legal and political constellations, with the insistence that beneath those constellations lies secular speech and actions, rather than divinely ordained commands (Arendt, 1998).

Likewise, it can be argued that in a constituted law in which the Absolute is reified, resulting in a law, which invites multiple interpretation and political actions, a constituted law that stimulates thinking and is shaped by thoughtful speech and actions, such a constituted manmade law, which Arendt calls “Positive Law” (Arendt, 2004), stands in flagrant contradiction to an absolute law, which is without any gaps and ambiguities. No ambivalence ever gets manifested in an absolute law, which ensures that such an absolute law is founded on banality. As an absolute law, emerging from a location, which no human memory can relate to, as the Absolute is radical abstraction, heralding a beginning, which does not even remotely relate to the past, such an abstraction, such a new beginning can generate no remembrance among people, which is a repository of all human creativity and action. An absolute law would never be mediated and formed by any thoughtful human action, as absolute law never activates any memory, never throws up images of itself, with which people could relate, reflect, and eventually speak about. An absolute law could not even be spoken about. As only those entities offer themselves to human speech, which freely join the stream of human existence, absolutes which is strikingly distant from everyday existence could hardly be spoken about. It is here we understand as to why Eichmann’s language was beset with clichés, stock phrase, and other such “language rules.” Arendt (2006a, p. 86) argues, “Eichmann’s great susceptibility to catch words and stock phrases, combined with his incapacity for ordinary speech, made him, of course, an ideal subject for ‘language rules’.” Eichmann’s susceptibility to catch words and stock phrases was the result of the totalitarian regime in which he functioned, wherein the political was founded on an absolute. The political of such a regime never joined the stream of everyday existence, implying it can never become a phenomenon that could be spoken about. This led it to enunciate its own set of language rules, since the unfamiliarity of the Absolute with that of everyday existence could have led the Absolute to become an entity that cannot be spoken about. The only way to ensure that it does not happen, the recourse was to take stock phrases and clichés with which the Absolute would be referred to. Functionaries like

Eichmann of the totalitarian regime almost memorized those stock phrases to use them in various situations, as working under a singular absolute with its nauseating unworldliness has increasingly made them persons who do not interact with a situation. In all the novelty with which the situation presents itself, they would rather endeavor to offset the novelty of the situation by coming up with an apt stock phrase to suspend the novelty of the situation, and illusory make it submit to their absolute-dictated language rules. For functionaries of the totalitarian regime, the world has been exhausted by the Absolute and constantly repeats itself according to the Absolute. Just as our body is trained to respond to certain situations in a mechanical way, totalitarian functionaries respond with a catchword at the dawn of a new situation. The banality of the totalitarian functionaries is explained by their working in a regime whose ideals are not in the least reified; rather, the purity of the ideals demands the banality of those who are supposed to implement those ideals. Purity is divine, it is perfect, and without guilt; such purity can only inspire silence and not speech, which emanates with the presupposition that the world is imperfect, and the degrees of its imperfections could be reduced by constant negotiation and discussion. Purity has already joined the company of Gods. And does God speak? It is the profane world with its frail humans, which invites speech. As Arendt (2004) argues,

It is the monstrous, yet seemingly unanswerable claim of totalitarian rule that far from being “lawless”, it goes to the source of authority from which positive laws received their ultimate legitimation, that far from being arbitrary it is more obedient to these suprahuman forces than any government ever was before, and that far from wielding its power in the interest of one man, it is quite prepared to sacrifice everybody’s vital immediate interests to the execution of what it assumes to be the law of History or the law of Nature. Its defiance of positive laws claims to be a higher form of legitimacy which, since it is inspired by the source themselves, can do away with petty legality. Totalitarian lawfulness pretends to have found a way to establish the rule of justice on earth- something which the legality of positive law admittedly never attain. The discrepancy between legality and justice could never be bridged because the standards of right and wrong into which positive law translates its own source of authority – “natural law” governing the whole universe, or divine law revealed in human history, or customs and traditions expressing the law common to the sentiments of all men – are necessarily general and must be valid for a countless and unpredictable number of cases, so that each concrete case with its unrepeatable set of circumstances somehow escapes it. (p. 595)

Positive law never seeks to realize absolutes on earth; it constitutes legality in which absolute ideals get reflected, without any pretension of actualizing them. The legal space, which is constituted through positive law, would never exhaust all the events that take place in the legal space, implying that there would be situations wherein individual decisions would decide a legal state of affairs rather than a codified law, and dealing with an event in all its novelty presupposes thought and thinking, and not banality. The totalitarian absolute law is solely geared toward the actualization of an absolute, implying that the totalitarian law presupposes that its supporters would be singularly dominated by the absolute

goal. It is engaged with the concrete that stimulates thinking and creative responses. Even a selfish person engages in thought, as their stringent pursuit of self-interest is open to the public that responds to them accordingly, always being wary that this person, being as selfish as they are, would always endeavor to take advantage, which makes them circumspect toward them. The selfish person, knowing this, has to think of creative ways to deal with the situation. Any worldly way of being always requires thought because, in a world, our actions would not revolve in a void; they would affect other worldly people, who would respond in their own manner. However, a way of being, which is unworldly and fixated on the Absolute, can very well afford thoughtlessness. As thought is provoked when attention is paid to the immediate concerns, to those possibilities which arise from the immediate, but totalitarian is concerned only with the singular absolute, and least attention is paid to the fact how absolute would be mediated by the world, as insistence is only on the realization of the Absolute, even if the world with all its immediacy is sacrificed for it. Thought takes place when there is ever a possibility of discord and fraction, and ingenious ways have to be designed for those discordant situations. The possibility of discord and fractions, which are the preconditions of thought, could only take place in a plural sphere, whereas the Absolute occupies a singular sphere, with a singular concern of its realization. It hardly requires thought; what it does require is frantic soldiers, with no memory, no language to speak of, and no depth of being, but a commitment to realize the Absolute, which is incomprehensible because they do not know what good would be served by fulfilling the law of nature or history on earth (Arendt, 2004).

As Arendt (2006a, p. 145) argues, "He was quite capable of sending millions of people to their death, but he was not capable of talking about it in the appropriate manner without being given his 'language rule'." Absolute requires no language; also, it cannot be spoken about, as the domain of absolute is distant from our everyday lives, where the possibility of language lies.

Nazi totalitarianism believed in "organizational omnipotence" (Arendt, 2004). Nazis believed that everything is possible if the organization carries out its task in the precise manner with which it has been dictated. Nazis sincerely believed that the final solution could be implemented everywhere, if the organization would meet with its task, although it never occurred to them that it might not be possible to convince people to kill Jews for the larger purpose of the creation of an Aryan race, an ideal which might never have struck a chord in the normal German. They could not have conceived what that race would be, but still, they were with the Nazis because they were uprooted and lonely people who could not identify with the world, and there was no authority to bind them in a certain structure, which would generate remembrance among people. The rise of the secular age in Europe has not provided people with an authority that would bind and give them the kind of stability that Christianity, with its myths and legends of sacred beginning and sacred end, once provided. In modern times, people were uprooted from all ties of the past, and the only stability they could still feel was the biological processes of their bodies, which is strictly a lonely experience (Arendt, 2008).

Loneliness, the common ground for terror, the essence of totalitarian government, and for ideology or logicity, the preparation of its executioners and victims, is closely connected with uprootedness and superfluousness which have the curse of modern masses since the beginning of the industrial revolution and have become acute with the rise of imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century and the break-down of political institutions and social traditions in our own time. (Arendt, 2004, p. 612)

The loneliness of the modern person, who lives without any foundations, provided impetus to the totalitarian belief that everything is possible, as being rooted in a world acquaints us with the specific possibilities of the world and also with the current impossibilities of the world. However, being uprooted from the world makes us oblivious to the world's possibilities and impossibilities. The totalitarian belief in everything is possible through organizational competence and is borne not out of engagement with the world but with the hysterical fixation on the Absolute, which inspires its own mechanical repetition. The caution of the world not only sets limits on our actions but also stirs our thoughts and engages us in finding out ways to actualize our ideals, if not absolutely, then only partially. It is in this vein that worldly-wise lawmakers constitute positive law, which reflects absolute ideals, whereas totalitarian banality endeavors to actualize the Absolute in the world.

The historical moment of the Absolute was commensurate with banality; Absolute and Banality, far from being distinct phenomena, in actuality interpenetrates each other. The world always positions us in the middle, and it is through thought that we manage our middle position in the world. Insistence on a position that sees the world from an Archimedean perspective not only forecloses the possibility of thought but also implicitly affirms banality.

Philosophical Moment of Absolute

The philosophical moment of the Absolute gets manifested in Soren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. The book is a praise of the Biblical legend of Abraham. It is praised because Abraham represents for Kierkegaard an extremity of existence, which cannot be mediated. Abraham's devotion to God is so absolute and solid that no Hegelian spirit could sunder its moments apart. It is difficult to write the content of Abraham's faith as his faith neither retains nor anticipates anything. His faith resides in his acts of devotion to God, and those acts are performed. Although the essence of Abraham's faith continues to reside in those devoted actions which he has already performed, the performance of those actions has not made his faith jump to some anticipations of a blessed hereafter in the company of God; rather, his faith continues to be there in those actions already performed and would be there in other devoted actions to come, and in nothing more.

The essence of Hegel's Spirit, which Kierkegaard is critiquing through the extreme figure of Abraham, functions through the mode of consciousness in which Hegel would argue a This or Here or Now is always constituted by plurality of Theses and Nows.

What abides is a simple complex of many Heres. The Here that is meant would be the point; but it is not: on the contrary, when it is pointed out as something that is, the pointing-out something shows itself to be not an immediate knowing [of the point], but a movement from the Here that is meant through many Heres into the universal Here which is a plurality of Heres, just as the day is a simple plurality of Nows. (Hegel, 2008, p. 64)

According to Hegel, our consciousness never lets go of the past; it continues to resonate in our present affirmations and denials, implying that our present affirmation does not necessarily emanate from our present but harbors within itself the lived past. This harboring of the past in the present breaks out the solidity of the present and of its acts. From here, the march of Spirit begins, which forces all its moments apart, and insisting on one moment, becomes most unspirit-like. It is in this vein that we can argue that Hegelian spirit functions through the retention mode of our consciousness. As he would say, "Spirit is, in its simple truth, consciousness and forces its moments apart" (Hegel, 2008, p. 266).

The moments of Abraham's faith cannot be sundered apart because the only content of Abraham's consciousness is his faith, which is unconditionally unconditioned and contains the memories of the last devoted act toward God, and his devotion toward God continues to be the same. So, if Abraham performs any devoted act in the present, the concreteness of that act cannot be broken by insisting that it carries within itself a lurking retention of a less devoted act toward God. In Abraham's consciousness, there is no such retention; thus, the only content of Abraham's consciousness, as argued by Kierkegaard, is his devotion to God. Such a singularly devoted and unrelenting consciousness cannot be mediated and raised to the level of Spirit.

As Kierkegaard (2003) argues,

The Paradox of faith has lost the intermediate term, i.e. the universal. On the one hand it contains the expression of egoism (doing this dreadful deed for his own sake) and on the other the expression of the most absolute devotion (doing it for God's sake). Faith itself cannot be mediated into the universal, for in that case it would be cancelled. (p. 99)

The moments of Hegelian spirit are individual, particular, and universal. All of these moments are broken in themselves, which ensures that every moment of the Spirit interpenetrates each other. However, faith cannot be mediated into the universal because it is a pure moment; beneath it no profanity lurks. Abraham's action toward God represents such an extremity that cannot be spoken about, as Kierkegaard points out, "Talk he cannot, he speaks no human language" (Kierkegaard, 2003, p. 138), or "Abraham cannot speak" (p. 139). Abraham's inability to speak also represents, as Kierkegaard argues, his extreme egoism, which, because of its stringency, cannot be broken. Similarly, his faith cannot be mediated because of its fixity. It can be argued that Abraham's unworldly nature, manifested in his reluctance to speak and his relation to the Absolute without any mediation, attests why Abraham's faith cannot be mediated. As Kierkegaard (2003, p. 144) puts it, "So either there is a paradox, that the single individual as

the particular stands in an absolute relation to the Absolute, or Abraham is done for.”

The absoluteness of Abraham’s faith is also the attestation of his Banality. As totalitarian absolute cannot be mediated since it lacks any relation with the world, it also cannot not be spoken about, except in clichés and stock-phrases, collectively referred by Arendt as “language rules”. Similarly, Abraham’s faith also could not be mediated, as the acts that are done for the sake of the faith are wordless; they cannot even be communicated to someone else. The only content of Eichmann’s consciousness was following the orders of the Führer, and, in following it, he was not troubled by any memory or thought. The only content of Abraham’s consciousness is following the orders of God, and, in so doing, he is also not troubled by any thought or memory. Now supposing that if Abraham would ever have been tried in a court of law and was inquired why did he follow God in such an absolute manner that in following it you have destroyed people, it is hard to conceive that Abraham would have defended himself in any other way than by using cliché or stock-phrases, an instance of it could be: “What could I have done, he asked me to kill Isaac.”

In Kierkegaard’s book, absolute and banality are commensurate with each other. As Abraham’s devotion to God is absolute, it is the only content of his consciousness, which implies that Abraham’s mind is not populated with any remembrances, which lays the foundation for thinking and prepares the ground for judging. The Abraham’s portrait that Kierkegaard gives is of a mind not troubled by perpetual activation of memory and the ensuing restlessness; rather, the mind of Abraham is calm, singularly focused on God, a characteristic of mind that is a manifestation of banality.

Literary Moment of the Absolute

Mario Vargas Llosa’s novel *The Feast of the Goat* is another instance of how intrinsic the relation is between Absolute and Banality (Llosa, 2012).

The novel is set in the Dominican Republic during the time when Rafael Trujillo was ruling the country. It narrates the various facets of Trujillo’s rule over the country, most importantly, how the dictatorship of Trujillo affected the souls of Dominicans. It narrates Trujillo’s rule over the country and the events related to it not in chronological sequence, but in the form of remembrances of a daughter named Urania Cabral, whose father, Agustin Cabral, was a prominent person in Trujillo’s regime. Urania left the country when Trujillo was still in power and came back after 30 years to find her father in a seemingly vegetative state, dependent on others for fulfilling the most basic biological necessities of his life, not the least of the characteristics of a close aide of hypermasculine Trujillo. Urania Cabral remembers sitting next to her father, the times of her childhood, when Trujillo was in power. She narrates to her father what she was able to remember at that point. Her father apparently listens to what she narrates, and the only witness of his apparent capacity to listen is his eyes that change expressions as his daughter revisits the horror comic times of Trujillo ruling the country (Llosa, 2012).

Along with the remembrance of Urania Cabral, the novel also unfolds Trujillo's time through the remembrance of those assassins, who were waiting in their car for Trujillo to come, so that they could initiate the next step of their plan, which culminates in their Killing Trujillo and finishing his dictatorial reign in the country. While waiting, they remember and narrate their experiences with Trujillo's regime, most of which have been painful. The prominent among the assassins are Antonio Imbert, Antonio de la Maza, and Salvador Estrella Sadhala (Llosa, 2012).

The narrative of the novel, far from being consumed in an absolutist conception of time, where the only essence of time is linear sequencing of events, attempts to effect a sort of restlessness both to time and to the events enacted during Trujillo's rule. These events, with a singular focus on perpetuating his regime, now acquire a fictional, restless character, as now they are narrated not through the objectivity or concreteness of their original enactment, but as they are remembered. The act of masculine Trujillo gets fictionalized in the narration of *The Feast of the Goat*.

The novel narrates the commensurability of absolute and banality by showing that the people who were supporters of the absolute rule of Trujillo over the country were divested of even the most basic human emotions, which was also the result of the absolute identification they wanted to have with Trujillo. If the world, with its norms and minimal rules, was coming between them and their desired identification with Trujillo, then they would do away with the world for the mystical conception of a relationship with Trujillo. Here, just like previously in the case of Eichmann and Abraham, these would involve the emptying of their consciousness of all worldly contents. In the case of Eichmann, the only content of his consciousness was the Führer and his orders; in the case of Abraham, it was his devotion toward God; and in the case of supporters of Trujillo, it would be Trujillo's order and their execution of them. Next, we will look at a couple of instances to emphasize how certain elites of the Dominican Republic who were aides of Trujillo were banalized during his absolute rule.

Urania narrates to her father that once she had met an official of the World Bank, Senator Henry Chirinos, at an official occasion. Senator Chirinos was a very powerful person in Trujillo's regime, and he continues to be in high ranks even in the civilian Government of President Balaguer. Urania listens to how Chirinos narrates tales about Trujillo to other prominent people who were gathered on that day. One of the tales narrated by Chirinos to others caught her attention, and, in a way, suspended her for a moment, and a cold ran throughout her body. Chirinos was narrating that once Don Froilan, an aide of Trujillo, said something that was disliked by Trujillo, and he decided to humiliate Froilan "by humiliating him where it hurt most, in his honor as a man" (Llosa, 2012, p. 62). Chirinos started to narrate what Trujillo actually said to humiliate Froilan:

"I have been a well-loved man. A man who has held in his arms the most beautiful women in this country. They have given me the energy to go on. Without them, I never could have done what I did" (He raised his glass to the light, examined the liquid, confirmed its transparency, the sharpness of its color). "Do you know which was the best of all the cunts I fucked?" ("Forgive me, my friends, for the vulgarity",

the diplomat (Chirinos) apologized, "I am quoting Trujillo exactly"). (He paused again, inhaled the bouquet of his glass of brandy. The silvery head looked for and found, in the circle of gentlemen listening to him, the fat, livid face of the minister. And he concluded:) "Froilan's wife!" (Llosa, 2012, p. 62)

What further disgusted Urania, as she continued narrating to her father, was the response of Don Froilan's, which she remembered Chirinos stating, "Don Froilan smiled heroically, laughed, celebrated with the others Chief's witticism. White as a sheet, not fainting, not falling down with a heart attack" (Llosa, 2012, p. 63).

Urania asks her father in astonishment why men have succumbed so terribly to Trujillo that even the most prevalent human emotions do not move them, as if the entire history that constitutes humans, which affects their actions, has been done away with, and the ensuing void is occupied by Trujillo.

"How was it possible, Papa? How could a man like Froilan Arala, cultured, educated, intelligent, accept that? What did he do to all of you? What did he give you that turned Don Froilan, Chirinos, Manuel Alfonso, you, all his right- and left-hand men, into filthy rags?" (Llosa, 2012, p. 63)

They have become filthy rags because following an absolute leader has banalized them. Their consciousness has been emptied; it no longer contains any restlessness. Froilan has forgotten that mentioning somebody's wife in such an indecent manner is bound to cause a sense of anger and shame. Such anger and shame is a worldly phenomenon, but Froilan is oblivious to that. The content of his consciousness is Trujillo, which implies that he would be happy in anything Trujillo does, as Froilan is no longer an individual, but rather an extension and articulation of Trujillo's will. An absolute commitment to a leader like Trujillo presupposes banality.

Trujillo's men were wordless creatures; no worldly way of being ever visited them. They were always haunted by the possibility of what if Trujillo's latest mood swing would make them lose Trujillo's trust and favor. As the novel narrates that Trujillo always played with his allies the game of fear, he always made some movement to make sure that his allies were never confident and sure about themselves, rather always apprehensive. Trujillo did this for two reasons: first, to perpetuate his rule by keeping his allies in perpetual anxiety, so that they never were stabilized and start thinking and acting in ways that may harm the regime. Second, a person who is singularly concerned about perpetuating his rule, even after so strongly occupying it for so many years, can only hold on to life by precisely playing these games. Such a person develops the illusion that only they can decide the fate of the collective, and, in lieu of this, demolishes all acceptable authorities. Then they turn inwards, seeking within themselves the key to govern and enlighten the community or the nation, but sadly, they only find a fragile, perpetually moving body with its processes. This banal body is interpreted by dictatorial leaders as the key for the nation, and this process is projected onto the outside world, where every day someone is losing favor, someone is gaining it, and then losing it again. It goes on without rhyme and reason, just like our body and other natural processes (Arendt, 1998).

Trujillo expressed this in the novel, when, during a conversation with President Balaguer, Trujillo feels that Balaguer is seemingly very confident about himself, which makes Trujillo think, “Was he going too far? Had he succumbed, like Egghead (Agustin Cabral, Urania’s father, who has earned the animosity of Trujillo), to the idiocy of believing himself safe, and did he also need a dose of reality? A curious character, Joaquin Balaguer” (Llosa, 2012, p. 260)

What saves humans from being subjected to the potential arbitrariness of fellow humans, of their arbitrary wills and mood swings, are institutions and norms of the world, which give them a certain permanence of being, even if they witness pathological traits all around them. It is the world that soothes our paranoia and acquaints us that there is always more to the world than what few men can imagine or conceptualize.

Trujillo’s aides have broken up with the world; their consciousness, instead of swarming with the contents and way of being in the world, in actuality, has plunged into the Absolute figure of Trujillo. But the plunge in the Absolute Trujillo has only earned them perpetual bouts of anxiety and fear. Perhaps only to these they were fated, as they had imagined that Trujillo carried divinity in him and the plunge would be their salvation; however, alas, Trujillo was human! Since they were now one with Trujillo, they were the projections of Trujillo’s natural body, which can never be stabilized and would always be in motion. The Banality of Trujillo’s men was the result of their fixation on Trujillo.

The banality of Trujillo’s men had evil manifestations, which gets expressed only in the end of novel when Urania narrates to her Aunt Adelina and others that Manuel Alfonso persuaded her father to send his daughter Urania, then only a little girl, to Trujillo, to sleep with him, to sacrifice his virgin daughter at the altar of Trujillo, so that he could regain the his favor, which he has recently lost! Manuel Alfonso to Cabral (Urania’s Father),

Do you know something, Egghead? I wouldn’t have hesitated for a second. Not to regain his confidence, not to show him that I’m capable of any sacrifice for him. Simply because nothing would give me more satisfaction, more happiness, than to have the Chief give pleasure to a daughter of mine and take his pleasure with her. (Llosa, 2012, p. 314)

The Banal Egghead agreed to this proposition.

Conclusion

In modern times, as Arendt would argue, there is a crisis of authority. The Roman Trinity of religion, authority, and tradition that gave the then Romans a structure, which their present temporal actions had to preserve—the present temporal actions for the sake of augmenting and preserving the foundation of the city of Rome. This gave the Romans a past, a depth, which mediated their present actions (Arendt, 2008). The sense of time for the then Romans would not have been time as pure chronological sequence; rather, time for the Romans had a meaning, as they had to perform actions and take decisions, which would break the pure

sequentiality of time and give it a meaning. This is in consonance with the Roman ideal of preserving and auguring the foundation of the city. This is in contrast to the moderns, who are swept up by the flow of time and thus encapsulated in the Absolute conception of time as flow, resulting in their banality. Their banality is the result of their inaction in relation to time and other entities. The act of giving meaning to something, even prejudicial, fictional, or illusory, still remains a thoughtful act, and thus antithetical to banality, which is the incapability to think. Banality, on the other hand, is manifested when we receive things as they are and agree to go along; for instance, if time is a flow, then we would flow with it.

The other reason behind the fixation of the moderns toward the Absolute and their ensuing Banality is that, as Arendt would argue, when authority disappears from the modern world, the only entity left, which still offers some permanence and is available for experience, is the human body, with its natural processes (Arendt, 1998). The retreat of modern humans to their bodies as the only source of understanding and shaping reality affirmed for them the modern concept of time as a flow, unarrested by the past, along with the belief that it's possible to actualize the law of nature or history on earth (Arendt, 2004). The retreat of modern humans to their bodies creates a void, which could be occupied by absolutes. The Absolutes go unresisted by modern humans because of their sole reliance on their bodies for understanding reality, and since the body is only a flow, in which everything comes and goes, the modern human believes that the Absolute reality would also follow this motion of flow. The lack of those institutions in modern times, which could generate remembrance among people, further contributes to their banality. Without memory, modern humans are only a mass, without any character or depth (Arendt, 2003).

It is in this regard that an ethics needs to be envisaged, which insists on the ground, prompting people to act in some way to give meaning to things, almost as if they would not act, the ground would devour them. The ground provides people the basis to act; it provides the energy to act, and if they do not, then this ground would paralyze them. The metaphor for such a conception of ethics as grounded immanence could be Freudian psychoanalysis. As Freud would argue that we receive all our energies from our unconscious, it alone carries all the resources with which we can work in our everyday life, but at the same time, the unconscious drives are expenditure-oriented. The unconscious knows nothing about the retention of energy, the expenditure-oriented nature of the unconscious, which wants to satisfy its drives even at the risk of annihilation of the person carrying these energies. This nature of the unconscious conflicts with our civilized mode of being, with the larger civilization, which runs on the principle of economy of energy (Freud, 2003a). This conflict between our unconscious and our ego (which manages our everyday life) can never be completely resolved; it can only be managed. According to Freud (2005), ingenious ways need to be invented to sublimate some quantity of unconscious intensity in different sets of works so as to ensure that there is no build-up of cumulative, inevitably repressed intensities of the unconscious, which would force its way up to our ego, which would eventually lead to neurosis. Further, Freud (2003b) argues in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*,

There is nothing in the Es(Unconscious) that could be compared to negation; we are also surprised to find in it an exception to the philosophers' assertion that time and space are necessary forms of our own psychical acts. There is nothing in the Es that corresponds to a concept of time; no recognition of the passage of time; and- and this is particularly remarkable and awaits philosophical consideration- no change in its psychical processes as time passes. Both wish-impulses that have never gone beyond the bounds of the Es through repression, are virtually immortal; even after decades, they behave as if they had only just happened. They can only be cancelled out, robbed of the energy invested in them, and recognize as belonging to the past, if they have been made conscious through psychoanalytical work; and the therapeutic effect of analytic treatment on this to no small extent. (p. 68)

The unconscious could serve as the metaphor for a permanent ground, which the ethics as grounded immanence conceives; and the sublimation—robbing the energy—could serve as the metaphor for meaningful, thoughtful actions which, the ethics argues, are meant to weaken the hold of banality on modern men.

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Notes

1. In the article, those conceptions of the Absolute would be considered as Banal that are drastically singular: those who are conspicuously liberated from all the constraints and complications of the world. The inspiration for this article is the thought of Hannah Arendt. Arendt developed the concepts of Absolute and Banal at different stages of her intellectual journey and never attempted to consider the possibilities of them being related to each other. However, the author of this article is endeavoring to see the possibilities of considering Absolute and Banal as entities that presuppose each other. The aim of this article is not a puritanical presentation of Arendt's thoughts but to perform a fictional stretch on Arendtian concept of Absolute and Banality. The justification of such a fictional stretch of concepts could be sought in the thought of Jacques Lacan. Lacan argued that a psychoanalyst analyzing a neurotic patient also undergoes the mirror stage. This implies that the psychoanalyst should also endeavor to dialectically open their own imaginary structure by bringing the real to the surface, for only then can an intersubjective space be created in which speech serves to evoke rather than to inform, and it is through evocation that political spaces are created, where information insists on current political constellations. Similarly, a fictional stretch of Arendtian concepts would create conditions for speech and open new avenues for politics, whereas a puritanical analysis of Arendt's thought would insist on the imaginary subjectivity of Hannah Arendt.
2. The usage of the word "political" here is inspired by the thought of Carl Schmitt.

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