

conscience; the depersonalization of beings caught in the chains of instrumentalist thinking; and the enjoyment of power. I have chosen these concepts—perhaps they are really no more than themes for reflection—because they involve only a moderate degree of abstraction. More general than the observable acts to which they refer, they nonetheless do not derive from any unitary psychological, anthropological, or political theory that would reduce all actions to a single cause. Once again, what interests me are the banal sources of exceptional actions, the ordinary attitudes that could make “monsters” of us, too, were we to have to work in a concentration camp.

Todorov, Tzvetan:

Facing the extreme

fragmentation

FORMS OF DISCONTINUITY

Survivors of Auschwitz as much as latter-day observers repeatedly point to one trait that was common to all the camp guards, even the cruelest ones. That trait is behavioral inconsistency. In the same place, often in the course of the same day or even hour, a person could help one prisoner and, without batting an eyelash, send another to his death. It is not that good and evil had reached some kind of equilibrium—evil had the upper hand, by far—but rather that there was no guard who was wicked through and through. Instead, all the guards seemed subject to constant shifts in attitude and temperament, so much so in fact that there is no better word to describe their behavior than “schizophrenic,” even though none of these people, as far as we know, had any specific mental illness. What we have here is the “social schizophrenia” specific to totalitarian regimes. As Primo Levi observes, “Compassion and brutality can coexist in the same individual and in the same moment, despite all logic” (*Drowned* 56).

Let us take as a first example of discontinuity an excerpt from the private diary of Dr. Johann Paul Kremer, a member of the Auschwitz medical corps in 1942. On September 5, Kremer writes, “This noon was present at a special action in the women’s camp—the most horrible of all horrors. *Hschf.* [Adjutant] Thilo, military surgeon, is right when he said today to me we were located in ‘anus mundi.’ In the evening at about 8 p.m. another special action with a draft from Hol-

land." The following day, September 6, Kremer writes: "Today an excellent Sunday dinner: tomato soup, one half of chicken with potatoes and red cabbage (20 grammes of fat), dessert and magnificent vanilla-cream" (214-15). Is it really the same person who one day watches the "most horrible of all horrors," describing it with what would become a famous expression, *anus mundi*, and then, scarcely twenty-four hours later, thinks only of recording what he had for dinner? The juxtaposition is actually even more brutal: when he made his entry of September 6, Kremer surely could not have avoided re-reading the previous day's entry just above it. He reread the one, then added the other: a horrific execution, a fine dinner.

One finds similar discontinuities in other characters of sinister reputation. The torturer Wilhelm Boger sometimes helped the Jews who worked under him. Johann Schwarzhuber, who as *Lagerführer* of Birkenau was directly responsible for the death of thousands, one day intervened to save the lives of sixty-eight boys from Terezin who had been marked for the gas chamber. Dr. Frank took special care of the Jews around him but never missed his turn on the incoming railway platform where the selections—that euphemism for on-the-spot death sentences—took place. Even Mengele was capable of giving individual patients the best of care, in between selections. These shifts in mood were not really random occurrences; seemingly chaotic, they nonetheless obeyed certain rules. An inmate whom a guard knew personally, for instance, had greater chances of eliciting his compassion. The inconsistencies in behavior occasionally had an ideological component; some overseers, for example, were accommodating to Russian and Polish prisoners but merciless to Jews. The situation was much the same in all the camps, and even on the outside; in fact, according to Speer, Hitler himself could slip in an instant from intolerance to charity.

Depending on one's point of view, this coexistence of good and evil within the same person can be cause for hope or reason to despair. Even the basest individual has his or her good points; conversely, the presence of good in no way guarantees against the emergence of evil. The most awful thing about informers, Grossman writes, "is the good that is in them; the saddest thing of all is that they are replete with virtues, that they do good deeds. . . . That is what is really awful: the

fact that there is so much good in them, in their human essence" (*Forever Flowing* 82-83).

To this first form of fragmentation, which manifests itself as an alternation between benevolence and malice, we can add a second, more systematic form, a consequence of the fact that two of the "ordinary virtues," caring for others and the life of the mind, do not necessarily coexist. We have already seen the passion so many of the Nazi guards had for music; yet the same Josef Kramer who wept when he heard Schumann and who had been a bookseller before becoming commandant of Birkenau was also capable of crushing a prisoner's skull with his truncheon because the woman wasn't moving along quickly enough; at Struthof, his previous assignment, he would push naked female prisoners into the gas chambers with his own hands and then watch their death throes from a specially constructed window. "I had no particular feeling in carrying out these operations," he testified at his trial (Tillion 209). Why did music make him weep, but not the deaths of other human beings? The same Maria Mandel who would hasten from her duties as head guard of Birkenau to hear Alma Rose's orchestra perform "her" aria from *Madama Butterfly* also personally ordered, and took part in, beatings—when she wasn't urging doctors to perform more selections. The deeds of Dr. Mengele, a music lover who was forever whistling strains from Wagner, are of course notorious. Pery Broad, another guard, played Bach and also tortured prisoners in their barracks. Eichmann played Schumann and organized the deportation of the Jews. The point is not that music had ceased to be good; but because of personal fragmentation, this aesthetic activity did not affect behaviors in any significant way. The small good that is music was largely outweighed by the vast evil of the circumstances in which it was produced.

In the Soviet camps, under Stalin, the guards had more literary inclinations, but a love of Pushkin was no more salutary in its moral effect than was a fondness for Bach. The massive printings of both Russian and foreign classics, an act that inspired the admiration of Western intellectuals and facilitated their approval of Communism, in no way reduced the population of the gulags; as in Nazi Germany, the number of prisoners climbed into the millions. Germany, too, was hardly a country lacking in culture. "In German cities," Borowski

writes, "the store windows are filled with books and religious objects, but the smoke from the crematoria still hovers above the forests" (*This Way* 168). Indeed, people with university educations could be every bit as cruel as the illiterate, so long as the life of the mind was cut off from the rest of life. One can only smile at the naïveté of the Nuremberg prosecutors who found an aggravating circumstance in the fact that the *Einsatzkommandos* were not "uneducated locals incapable of appreciating life's higher values" but persons with advanced degrees—eight attorneys, one university professor, a dentist, and so on. As if a sense of morals were something one learns at universities!

PRIVATE AND PUBLIC

Another form of discontinuity, the split between the private and public, seems to have played the paramount role in totalitarian crimes. Expanding the notion of the enemy to include not only enemy soldiers but also the regime's internal opposition, its adversaries at home, totalitarianism generalizes the state of war and with it the schism characteristic of the warrior psyche. As John Glenn Grey notes, "Men who in private life are scrupulous about conventional justice and right are able to destroy the lives and happiness of others in war without compunction" (172). This separation of public and private could be found in nearly all the guards: they behaved with the utmost brutality toward the inmates while continuing to lead private lives filled with love and concern.

Borowski tells the story of kapo Arno Boehm, who "administered twenty-five lashes of the whip for each minute a prisoner was late or for each word uttered after the evening bell and who also wrote brief but moving letters to his elderly parents in Frankfurt, letters filled with love and longing" (*Monde* 149). When Josef Kramer stood trial, his wife came to testify in his behalf. "Our children were everything to my husband," she said (*Langbein* 307). *Lagerführer* Schwarzhuber, too, showed great fatherly concern, fastening a name tag around the neck of his six-year-old child so that the little boy would not be thrown into a gas chamber by mistake as he wandered about the

grounds of Birkenau. Even the sinister Höss sounds human when, in his last letters, he writes about his children.

As for Maria Mandel, she was not content, as Kramer was, simply to protect Alma Rose's women's orchestra and encourage its activities; she also had a weakness for children—not her own, for she had none, but those of others. One day she discovered two Jewish children whose mother was trying to hide them. She called them into her office, leaving the mother trembling on the doorstep. "Five minutes later they reappeared, each clutching a packet of cake and chocolate. . . . She was capable of a normal, motherly woman's reaction, and of turning herself into a wild beast" (*Lingens-Reiner* 146). Fania Fénelon recounts an incident that ended less well. Mandel rescued a Polish child from the gas chamber, took him home with her, and showered him with gifts and caresses; for the first time, the inmates saw her laugh. Several days later, however, she strode into the barracks, looking especially grim, and demanded to hear *Madama Butterfly*. The inmates later learned that she'd been ordered not only to give up the child but to deliver him to the gas chamber herself. Fénelon reflects that, most of the time, "her brain, like all German brains, was compartmentalized, made of watertight compartments, like a submarine. One might fill with water, while the others remained dry and untouched" (*Playing* 226). This time the compartment to which she had consigned her private life threatened to spill over into the one belonging to her "professional life"; she had therefore to reestablish the seal between them. Maybe so, but are German brains the only ones to be so constructed? And are all Germans really cast from the same mold?

Personal documents at our disposal—letters, interviews, memoirs—concerning a few individuals who practiced this separation between public and private afford us a close-hand look at how the process worked. One particular case, that of Eduard Wirths, the head doctor at Auschwitz, has been analyzed in detail by Robert Jay Lifton. Wirths, it seems, subscribed to Nazi doctrine and was thus a professed anti-Semite, but before his appointment to Auschwitz, while still a country doctor, he had continued treating Jewish patients, something many of his colleagues refused to do. He performed "medical" experiments on Auschwitz inmates but was known for his personal scruples;

in a world of rampant corruption, he stands out in his refusal to obtain any provisions beyond those to which his ration-book tickets entitled him. In Wirths's mind, his love for his family seemed to make up for the drawbacks of his professional life: "Nothing is impossible, as long as I have you, my beloved," he wrote to his wife. The faster the selections succeeded one another, the more he filled his letters with questions about the children's first teeth and with commentaries on the photographs she had sent him. In his letters one sees a growing relationship between the two sides of his life, as if he were working at Auschwitz only out of love for his children: "It must be done for our children, my angel," he writes, "for our children." Wirths's daughter recalls a loving father; her desire to understand the past takes the form of the following question: "How is it possible for a good man to do bad things?" (Lifton 396, 411).

Gitta Sereny interviewed Franz Stangl, the commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka, while he was in prison. Stangl was a zealous policeman, much more a careerist than a fanatical ideologue, who came to the concentration camps after working in the euthanasia "institutes." He, too, was a man who adored his wife. During their early separations, he wrote to her every day; later, he transferred this attachment to his children. In his lengthy conversations with Sereny, he himself explains his life at the time in terms of a fragmentation that recalls Fénelon's image of the submarine. "The only way I could live," Stangl says, "was by compartmentalizing my thinking." Burning corpses is not a pleasant pastime; he therefore latched on to the idea that he himself wasn't lighting the fires but only supervising construction projects or arranging the transfer to Berlin of the gold found on the victims. "There were hundreds of ways to take one's mind off it [the liquidations]. I used them all. . . . I made myself concentrate on work, work, and again work" (Sereny 164, 200).

Stangl sought to convince his family and himself that his work was more compartmentalized than it really was, that one could be involved with the arrival of the trains but not with the fate of their passengers, with the construction of buildings but not with what went on inside them. "I see it," he told his wife, "but I don't *do* anything to anybody" (136). Eventually Frau Stangl learned the truth. She was shocked. (For the next several days, she refused to have sex with him!)

In the end, however, she resigned herself; after all, he was a very good husband. Much later, when Stangl was in prison, his middle daughter, Renate, told Sereny, "He was my father. He understood me. He stuck to me through thick and thin, and he saved me when I thought my life was in ruins. 'Remember, remember always,' he once said to me, 'if you need help, I'll go to the ends of the earth for you.' . . . I, too, would go to the ends of the earth for him. . . . I love him. I'll always love him" (350). How strange that Stangl's words, as reported by his daughter, are so like those lived but unspoken by Pola Lifszyc, who truly did go to the ends of the earth for her mother. For Pola Lifszyc, the ends of the earth was a place called Treblinka, and Stangl was its master. He presided over the executions of Pola and her mother. If circumstances had so ordered, would he have jumped aboard the cattle car to be with his daughter, to suffer the same fate as she? Who can say?

Some people tend to question the authenticity of such familial devotion. Others brush it aside in the belief that it has nothing to do with the crimes of which men like Wirths or Stangl were accused. Being a good husband and father, they argue, justifies nothing and explains nothing. I, for my part, am convinced that such testimonials are true and that they are indispensable to our understanding of the personalities of the guards. My impression is that these individuals needed to fragment their lives in this way so that no spontaneous feelings of pity might hinder them in their "work" and also so that their admirable private lives might serve as a counterweight, at least in their own minds, for the things that may have troubled them about their professional activities.

That an individual might be virtuous in private life does not mean that his or her public activities or the doctrines he or she professes will necessarily benefit from that virtue. Vasily Grossman makes this point about Lenin, founder of the Soviet gulag system. In a way, Stalin is a handier adversary: his personal brutality is consistent with his policy of extermination; Lenin's personality, on the other hand, is much more seductive. "In his personal and private relations," Grossman writes, "Lenin invariably showed sensitivity, delicacy, gentleness, courtesy. . . . Lenin in whom the thirst for power burned and who was capable of everything and anything in his struggle to seize it, was

extremely modest personally, and he did not seek for himself the power he won" (*Forever* 202-4). Exemplary traits like these make it tempting to excuse the system because of the individual: can a man so honest, someone who doesn't care about getting rich (Wirths, living solely off his ration book), who is so attentive in his personal relationships (Stangl with his family)—can such a sincere idealist really bring about so much evil?

The answer is, obviously, yes. It was this same Lenin who also developed the concept of the internal enemy, organized massive repression, fulminated against pity and sympathy. "The man in the arena of world affairs," Grossman writes, "turns out to be the exact opposite of the man in his personal life. Plus and minus, minus and plus" (204). Lenin's internal fragmentation was every bit as complete as Stangl's. And since Lenin was a successful politician whose public personality touched infinitely more people than his private behavior did, the former has to count for more than the latter in our overall assessment of him. His intellect, his modest tastes, his ascetic lifestyle neither influenced nor justified his political acts, but they may perhaps have helped him convince himself—as his admirers tried to convince themselves much later—of the rightness of his ideas.

Another form of disconnection between convictions and actions is exemplified by the Pharisee whose conduct belies the lofty principles he claims to espouse. This division, in which moralism replaces true moral action and stands in its way, can be found in many intellectuals who preach generosity and tolerance but who, we sometimes later learn, are irascible and self-serving in their personal lives. Whereas in the camps, people professing vicious doctrines might act with virtue, here the opposite is true: the doctrine professed is virtuous, but the person who professes it is not. We are to do as he says, not as he does. In his eyes at least, the visible surface is supposed to compensate for the imperfections of the hidden core: I beat my wife at home, but outside I strike blows against American imperialism. This particular pattern of fragmentation, of course, was not altogether unknown in the camps: Henry Bulawko remembers how Moshe, the leader of his work unit, always kept a club within easy reach. "He was a pious man," Bulawko says. "He said his prayers three times a day—and every day, he beat us" (Langbein 171). The *Einsatzkommando* operat-

ing in the region of Simferopol, inside Russia, was ordered to kill three thousand Jews and Gypsies before Christmas. The order was carried out with exceptional speed so that the troops could attend the celebration of Christ's birth; Otto Ohlendorf, the group's leader, delivered an emotional sermon to his men that Christmas Eve.

Basically, for those with cause for self-reproach, it matters little if it is the public or the private sphere where the harm was done. What counts is that there are two spheres and that one of them—the one they take to define their essential being—can, from their point of view above all, make up for the other. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt comments on the attempts of various Nazi officials to use this notion of a divided self to defend themselves. "The sinister Dr. Otto Bradfisch," she writes, "former member of one of the *Einsatzgruppen*, who presided over the killing of at least fifteen thousand people, told a German court that he had always been 'inwardly opposed' to what he was doing," while a former *Gauleiter* argued that "only his 'official soul' had carried out the crimes for which he was hanged in 1946, his 'private soul' had always been against them" (127). There is no question of accepting these arguments as the excuses they were intended to be, yet the fact that they are offered as such permits us to understand how ordinary people can become murderers and how people living under totalitarian regimes can submit, as they inevitably do, to the external order and still preserve a little of their self-respect.

CAUSES AND EFFECTS

Because far more attention has been paid to the Nazi camps than to the Communist gulags, there has been a tendency to explain the fragmentation in the guards' behavior in terms of a German national character or of German history. The Germans, by these accounts, are a people who value only intimacy and the inner self and are indifferent to public acts and behavior. It has been this way, the story goes, at least since Luther, who, as the founder of Protestantism, proclaimed the separation of religious and secular life and sought to concern himself only with the former. Faith alone counted; actions did not. As

we've seen, Fania Fénelon thought all Germans had compartmentalized brains; Alma Rose, a German, reproached her for having the opposite defect: "You French are so irresponsible," she said, "you seem to forget that there's a time for everything; you confuse work and play, you mix everything up!" (*Playing* 116).

Despite their penchant for "mixing everything up," we know today that during the war the French proved themselves quite able to separate their sense of family responsibility from their indifference to the Jewish children who were being deported to Auschwitz. We also know that the German character does not explain the atrocities committed in the Communist camps and that, whatever the supposed defects of this national character, concentration camps existed in Germany only under its two totalitarian regimes, the National Socialist and the Communist.

The fact that the concentration camp, unlike the penal colony, is a uniquely twentieth-century institution might prompt us to inquire whether fundamental traits like fragmentation are not somehow linked to other aspects of modern society. It is tempting to make a connection between this fragmented mentality and the ever-growing specialization that has invaded not only the world of work but also that of interpersonal relations. Of course, division of labor has existed since neolithic times and was stigmatized well before Karl Marx; nonetheless, the growing complexity of workplace tasks during this century has increased the need for labor specialization enormously. Who can pretend not only to have mastered the techniques particular to his or her line of work but also to grasp all the implications or consequences of it? Might not the division of individual lives into watertight compartments be an understandable response to the progressive compartmentalization of the world at large?

(This attitude, I've noticed with some surprise, has its supporters these days. The disclosure of Heidegger's Nazi involvement has prompted some of his disciples and admirers to seek excuses for him, the most convenient of which is to say that the philosopher who was a genius and the man who was a Nazi need have nothing in common. One apologist, on the other hand, sees unity where others have found rupture and goes so far as to say that Heidegger's mistake was precisely

his desire to establish continuity between his philosophy and his life. Hitler made the same mistake. One must always act the good citizen; as long as one doesn't seek to put them into practice, one can profess whatever views one likes. As if the world were not sufficiently compartmentalized already and we had to struggle to put up still more walls!)

The splintering apart of the world—with its corollary of professionalism and the psychological fragmentation that results—is especially characteristic of totalitarian countries; what was originally a feature of industrial production becomes a model for the functioning of society as a whole. First separation: the party or state takes charge of all social goals, and thus of the definition of good and evil. The subjects are to concern themselves only with the means—in other words, everyone with his or her own area of expertise. As Albert Speer remarks, "The ordinary party member was being taught that grand policy was much too complex for him to judge it. Consequently, one felt one was being represented, never called upon to take personal responsibility" (33). Second separation: each profession sets itself apart from the others. Once again, in Speer's words, "Worse still was the restriction of responsibility to one's own field. That was explicitly demanded. Everyone kept to his own group—of architects, physicians, jurists, technicians, soldiers, or farmers. . . . The longer Hitler's system lasted, the more people's minds moved within such isolated chambers" (33).

Separation suited Speer just fine on days when he found his Nazi commitment flagging: "I felt myself to be Hitler's architect. Political events did not concern me. . . . I felt that there was no need for me to take any political positions at all. Nazi education, furthermore, aimed at separatist thinking; I was expected to confine myself to the job of building." Later, when Speer became minister of armaments, he maintained this point of view, even though his work had changed. "The task I have to fulfill is an unpolitical one," he said in 1944 (112). Finally, in February 1945, he began to see that he had to take some interest in matters beyond his own specialty. "Something must be done, you know," he told Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, in the course of a meeting. To which Dönitz tersely replied, "I am here only to represent the navy. The rest is none of my business. The Führer must know

what he is doing" (426). It was up to the Führer to decide on objectives, and for everyone else to mind his or her own area of expertise. This is the totalitarian subject's standard way of thinking.

The most thoroughgoing product of this system, however, is not Speer or Dönitz but Adolf Eichmann. In reading the transcript of his questioning by Captain Avner Less, one is struck by the fact that, even in 1961, Eichmann's attention is focused not on the horrendous acts of which he stands accused but on the possibility that his accusers may be running roughshod over the neat delineation of responsibilities among the various divisions of the Third Reich. To his mind, the separations were watertight and remained so. His department was responsible only for organizing transfers of peoples, for finding trains and selecting stations, a limited and specific task as far as he is concerned. "The only matters we dealt with in IV B 4 [Eichmann's department] were purely technical" (*Eichmann* 136). Any thoughts about ultimate ends were brushed aside; the question was purely one of means, and even then, only those means relevant to one segment of the process. "As for who was going to the gas chambers and who wasn't, or if it was time to begin or not, or if we were supposed to stop or speed up, . . . I had nothing to do with any of that" (112). Each time that Less offers up a hideous fact for his consideration, Eichmann fails to react to the basic issue, taking up only the question of which department had responsibilities in a given domain. The sterilizations? No, that wasn't us. It was another department. Whoever says it was us is completely unreliable. The extermination of the racially mixed? Same thing. On a completely different floor, a colossal mess! The only thing that concerned him at the time, Eichmann says, was "avoiding conflicts with other departments about assignments and responsibilities" (221).

Both in the course of his interrogation and during the trial itself, the prosecution sought to establish that Eichmann had personally participated in this or that particular killing. He defended himself fiercely: "I had nothing to do with the execution of the Jews!" he argued. "I never killed a single one. . . . I never killed anyone and I never gave the order to kill anyone" (339-40). Höss made similar protestations. "I never mistreated an inmate," he claimed, "and I never killed a single one with my own hands" (Höss 251). Stangl, too,

when he speaks of his work at the euthanasia "institute," insists that he was never "involved . . . in the operational sense" (Sereny 57); he also claims never to have killed anyone at Sobibor. This response, repeated again and again by so many of the accused, excuses nothing; it does, however, explain a great deal. There is little sense in wanting to prove that Eichmann, Höss, and Stangl tortured and killed like any common killer, with their own hands as it were, when in fact they participated in the murder of millions. But they each did so by concerning themselves with only one small link in a vast chain and by seeing their task as a purely technical problem.

Compartmentalization and the bureaucratic specialization to which it gives rise are at the root of this absence of feelings of responsibility one finds in those who carried out the "final solution," as well as in every other agent of the totalitarian state. At one end of the chain there are people like Reinhardt Heydrich: his sleep is never disturbed by the millions of deaths that took place on his orders. He never sees a single suffering face; all he does is manipulate large and odorless numbers. Then comes the policeman, a Frenchman, let's say. His carefully circumscribed job is to ferret out Jewish children and take them to a camp where they are turned over to German personnel. This policeman does not kill anyone; he merely carries out a routine order to arrest and expedite. Now Eichmann enters the picture, his purely technical job consisting of making sure that a certain train leaves Drancy on the fifteenth and arrives at Auschwitz on the twenty-second. Just where is the crime in that? And then we have Höss, who gives the orders to empty the trains and lead the children toward the gas chambers. And finally, the last link: a group of inmates, a special commando that pushes the victims into the gas chambers and releases the lethal gas. The members of this commando are the only people who kill with their own hands—although they quite obviously are victims themselves, not executioners.

No element in this chain (which is actually much longer) feels responsible for what has been accomplished; the compartmentalization of the work has suspended considerations of conscience. Only at either end of the chain is the situation slightly different. Someone has to make the initial decision, of course, but that takes only one person, a Hitler or a Stalin, and the fate of millions veers into the macabre.

That person, moreover, never deals with the actual corpses. And at the other end of the chain, there must be someone to deliver the final blow, someone who will know no peace of mind until the day he dies (a day that, at all events, is not far off) but who nevertheless is not really guilty of anything. Those who made all this possible—Speer, Eichmann, Höss, and all the countless other intermediaries, the police, the bureaucrats, the railway employees, the manufacturers of the deadly gas, the suppliers of barbed wire, the builders of the high-performance crematoriums—can always shift their responsibility onto the next link in the chain. We can tell them that they were wrong, that even in a totalitarian state the individual remains responsible for his or her actions or failure to act; still, we have before us an entirely new kind of responsibility that cannot be considered the same as that of the ordinary criminal. The nonrecognition of this responsibility by the perpetrators of totalitarian crime and their consequent dismissal of the moral problem make it easier for such crimes to be committed.

It would be hypocritical, however, to see the effects of compartmentalized labor as peculiar to the totalitarian state when in fact all of us are well acquainted with them, regardless of where we live. Today we can shake an accusatory finger at the workers in the German factories that produced Zyklon B, but, as George M. Kren and Leon Rappoport ask, "Would workers in the chemical plants that produced napalm accept responsibility for burned babies?" (141). And why mention only the most spectacular methods of extermination? Are other weapons any different? Can anyone who manufactures explosives or cannons or missiles possibly imagine that they will never be used to kill people? And how can one know if they'll be used against "innocent" civilians or "guilty" soldiers—guilty, that is, of belonging to the enemy nation?

(I open today's newspaper; on page 12 there is an article about Bourges, a city I happen to know a bit. "The economic engine behind Bourges's growth is the military," the article says. "The factories of this industrial complex, all dedicated to the manufacture of ground weaponry (heavy cannon), employ some 2,000 highly skilled workers and . . . keep an extensive network of subcontractors busy as well. The bottom line? Bourges is proud of its low unemployment rate of 7

percent" (Le Monde, 29–30 April 1990). Here, then, is something elected office holders of every stripe, Communists, democrats, and nationalists, can agree on: Let us make even more weapons, they shout in a single voice. But who will buy these arms? Against whom will they be used? That's not the politicians' problem. Bourges is proud. . . . Why think about burned babies?)

The effects of internal fragmentation are no less widespread. Soldiers in the field who are bent on killing can be wonderful family men at home; inside them are two noncommunicating compartments, one for war, another for peace. This dissociation is not solely an effect of war; it has often been pointed out that the same American soldiers who landed in Europe and were so horrified by the anti-Semitism of the Nazis practiced racial segregation at home. And the French, who claimed their inspiration in the principles of the Revolution, liberty and equality, imposed regimes on their colonies that allowed the subject populations neither.

In a totalitarian system, social schizophrenia—the division of life into impermeable compartments—is a defense mechanism for anyone with some moral principles left to preserve. I may act passively and ignobly in this or that fragment of my life, but in the others, the ones I deem essential, I remain a respectable person. Without this division, I could not function normally. Like the fever that accompanies an illness, fragmentation itself is not the evil but my defense against it. Yet fragmentation makes evil possible, even easy, and it is for this reason that fragmentation is an "ordinary vice." Robert Jay Lifton, who in his book on Nazi doctors devotes a great deal of attention to this subject, refers to it as a "doubling" of the self (even though there are often more than two compartments). He describes the countless means by which the compromised individual manages to maintain a positive self-image: by agreeing to do one thing but not another, by isolating the private from the public, by trying to make up for public vice with private virtue.

The Nazi doctors were not alone in manifesting this kind of behavior; one finds it among all professionals who fail to apply the same ethical standards in their work as they do at other times and who, as specialists, accept the unacceptable by reassuring themselves that in

their “other” life, their “real” life, they behave with dignity and honor. The physicist who helps make nuclear weapons convinces himself that what he’s doing isn’t bad, because he also happens to be a good citizen and model husband. He believes in unity where it does not exist, where instead there is a fragmentation he fails to recognize. When we choose to ignore the horrors of the totalitarian world as we do today, when we imagine that the monsters responsible for those horrors are not like us at all, we are again trying to defend ourselves by fracturing the world into hermetically sealed compartments. All, or almost all, of us prefer comfort to truth.

A certain measure of fragmentation is indispensable to the individual’s psychological survival. We all know the limits of our actions and that we cannot rearrange the world to conform to our desires. We make certain matters our priority and neglect others. I may feel implicated in the world’s misfortunes, but I do little about them. I don’t even help all the street beggars I encounter between my house and the entrance to the metro; they are not a priority for me. How, then, to recognize the boundary beyond which fragmentation becomes censurable, even criminal? One way is to consider the context; in the fight against poverty, for example, giving alms is not the most effective weapon. Another way is to take into account the degree of evil I refuse to see; torture and death do not belong to the same category of evils as—to take examples from daily life—the problems caused by the pervasiveness of advertising or by the general decline in the quality of culture.

Inside the camps, the inmates saw the harm that fragmentation could do and promised themselves that if ever they were freed they would shun it in their own lives. “What a purposeful, humane life we would create for ourselves,” Eugenia Ginzburg remembers, “matching our deeds to our ideas” (*Within* 68–69). Milena Jesenska wanted much the same thing: “She was deeply repelled by the discrepancy between words and actions” (Buber-Neumann, *Milena* 172). Dr. Frankl, during his imprisonment, heard the call to “live my thoughts instead of merely putting them on paper” (183). These decisions, all of which begin with a condemnation of fragmentation, raise, however, a problem we’ve already encountered in relation to dignity, which is that consistency between idea and action or between the private and

the public is not necessarily good. The consistent Nazi is not better than the one who occasionally strays from his path and does something commendable. Dr. Frankl’s decision pleases me only because I agree with his ideas. Alone in his prison cell, Hitler might have one day made the same decision, but that hardly delights me. A little more fragmentation, some additional moments of good will like those Speer remembers wouldn’t have been a bad thing. Here, too, our judgment ultimately depends on the content of the acts carried out and of the ideas expressed. Fragmentation is an ordinary vice that can greatly facilitate the advent of evil but also temper its effects to some small degree; in and of itself, however, fragmentation is not an evil.