This past 27th January 2021 marked the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, recalling the date of the liberation of the survivors of Auschwitz, in Poland. It has been 76 years since the world learned the true dimension of the atrocities of the Holocaust caused by the Nazi regime.

Since then, people have mobilized in defense of Human Rights, where John Locke's theories of natural rights and the works of lawyer Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term "genocide", and also Hersch Zvi Lauterpacht, Jacob Blaustein, Maurice Perlzweig, Jacob Robinson, and Peter Solomon Benenson were relevant, not only for their conception but also assertion.

The struggle for the universality of Human Rights was preponderant in the conception of two international conventions, one on civil and political rights (right to life, private property, freedom of thought, among others) and another on economic, social, and cultural rights (rights to work, education, and health, in particular). Both were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed by the United Nations in 1948, the basis of the European Convention on Human Rights, in 1950; and, later, of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, in 1981, which added the right to self-determination.

This was followed by the institutionalization of concern for other issues, such as the status of women, children's rights, racial discrimination, and freedom of information. In November 1959, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child was unanimously adopted by the United Nations.

The process of affirmation and recognition of Human Rights was consolidated at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, 1993. On this date, the legitimate concern of the entire international community for the violation of Human Rights was established, everywhere and at all times.

Nowadays, as we live in unprecedented times caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and faced with the resurgence of populism and extremist positions, UNESCO has asked the world governments, particularly this year, to mobilize in initiatives to strengthen memory, to combat forgetfulness, denial, and anti-Semitism, among other forms of segregation and violation of Human Rights.

In effect, 76 years later, in the 21st century, and despite the lessons of history, Human Rights continue to be seriously threatened, not only by the context but especially because of a

certain degradation of human beings and their propensity to degenerate. In fact, sometimes out of fear, other times hoping to achieve personal aspirations, humanity tends to disclaim responsibility, focusing on scapegoats, i.e., blaming innocent ones for the guilt that they are unaware of and do not have. Moreover, Hobbes stated long ago that fear and hope are the most effective tools to control people.

Therefore, evil is not something transcendent to man. On the contrary, evil seems to reside in people, it is common, it has become generalized, and it is everywhere. For all these reasons, and contrary to what one might suppose, more people can do evil than those who cannot, making the phenomenon banal.

The concept of the banality of evil was created by Hannah Arendt, in the context of the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a supporter of Nazism captured by the *Mossad* in Argentina, years later, where he had taken shelter shortly after the Nazi defeat in World War II. Note that Adolf Eichmann was responsible for the logistics of the mass deportations of Jews to the ghettos and extermination camps in the Eastern Europe areas occupied by the German during World War II.

Hanna Arendt analyzed Adolf Eichmann’s behavior throughout the trial process, describing him as a perfectly ordinary man, normal, passive, and without initiative. Furthermore, in the absence of an order, or regulation, to guide him, Eichmann felt totally lost, not knowing very well what to do.

Hannah Arendt soon realized that Eichmann used technical administrative language to express himself, using words such as economy, routine, administration, and evacuation to refer to the concentration camps, executions, and the extermination of human beings, as if it were a normal job. In short, a bureaucrat who obeyed the command of any imperative voice telling him what to do. Consequently, Hannah Arendt refers to Eichmann as unable to think for himself and to live without a master, merely serving without questioning. Above all, he was unable to understand someone else’s perspective and reflect critically on his actions and the respective consequences.

Furthermore, Hannah Arendt stated that she was in the presence of a loyal and compliant person, who followed carefully the superior instructions coming from the Nazi state, and ultimately from its disturbed leader Adolf Hitler.

In this sense, the evil acts committed by Adolf Eichmann resulted from his thoughtlessness and total inability to think and discuss anything, let alone with depth and abstraction. Nevertheless, he was fully aware of the things he was doing and of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, yet he collaborated by doing his part.

In practice, Eichmann did not care about morals, ethics, or honor, but only about his personal success and career advancement as a worker for the regime. Amazing how what the Jews and other minorities perceived as the terror of the Holocaust meant success for Eichmann in what he claimed to be his job.

In this sense, Eichmann was not an isolated case. In fact, the main defendants in the Nuremberg trial behaved similarly, claiming compliance with the law and obedience to orders issued by the competent authority.

This brings us back to more complex issues of law and justice and to the ideological positivism that prevailed in Germany in that period. The Nazi regime established a legal framework that provided support to its flagitious acts, considering only the legal norm as mandatory despite its content, i.e., devoid of any axiological property, based on laws of purely formal structure.

After all, Eichmann's evil did not emerge from something supernatural or an exceptionally gifted being, but from a very normal human being, even mediocre, used by the regime as a means and not as an end. Unfortunately, this is a contemporary evil. An evil that is often disguised in society and that can even come from any normal person with a family, a taxpayer, who celebrates with friends and relatives and is even capable of professing a religion. At last, an evil that, not being infinite, has alarming proportions and can be used by the different forms of populism.

For all these reasons, it is the normal and the inability to think that should be fought. Finally, it is not a problem difficult to detect, but it is, in fact, an immeasurable challenge. Portugal, unfortunately, is not free of it either.

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Imagem de Marie Sjödin por Pixabay. Auschwitz