



Resources

Holocaust Unit

Choices - Resource B.4

Speech made by Adolf Eichmann to Court - December 13th, 1961

'I have heard the severe sentence of the Court. My hope for justice has been disappointed. I cannot accept this decision.

I know that punishment is demanded for the crimes committed against the Jews. The declarations made by the witnesses here in this Court have astounded me, as I was similarly stupefied to see myself considered responsible for the atrocities.

I was unfortunate enough to have been mixed up in these horrors. But, these misdeeds were not of my own doing. It was not my desire to kill people. These mass murders are solely the consequence of the Führer's policy.

I tried to give up my job, to leave for the front so that I could fight honourably, but I was kept at obscure tasks.

Let me emphasise once again:

My fault lies in my obedience, my submission to my task and to the requirements of my war office to which I was committed under oath. Since the start of the war, the law of warfare alone prevailed. This submission was not easy, and anyone who has commanded and obeyed knows what can be required of a man.

I pursued the Jews with neither enthusiasm nor pleasure. The government did that. As for the prosecution, only a government could make that decision, never I.

I accuse those governing of having abused my obedience. At that time, obedience was required, just as it was later from the subalterns.

Obedience was elevated to a virtue. On this subject, may I ask you to consider that I obeyed and not whom I obeyed. I repeat: the authorities, of

which I was not a part, gave the orders; they imposed atrocious tasks upon me which, on their orders, were to result in victims.

But now, the subalterns are also victims. I am one of these victims. This cannot be lost sight of. It is said that I could have refused to obey and that I should have done so. This is a consideration after the fact. Under the circumstances of the moment, this was impossible. It could not have been any different for anyone.

I know from experience that the legend must be kept alive, as it was done after the war, that it was possible to resist orders.

A few men were able to go into hiding, but I was not among those who thought that this was conceivable.

It is a grave mistake to think that I belonged to the fanatic persecutors of the Jews.

Since the end of the war, it has outraged me to note that all the responsibility of my superiors and of the others has fallen on my shoulders. I have to all appearances done nothing which would allow me to be accused of fanaticism, and the responsibility for this crime of blood does not fall to me. This is where the witnesses have gone against the truth. The declarations and documents presented to the Court as a whole at first sight seem convincing, but are untrue.

I shall try, in the next few minutes, to clarify these errors. No one came to me warning me of my behaviour. Not even the witness Probst Gruber could support the opposite. He visited me and wanted only to obtain certain alleviations, without criticising my professional activity itself. He confirmed here, in the Court, that I did not refuse him, but that I explained to him that I would have to have the opinion of my superiors since I could not make the decision myself.

The Judge asked me if I wished to plead guilty, as had Hoess, the Auschwitz commander and the Governor General of Poland, Frank. Both had the same reason for acting as they did: Frank, responsible for the orders he had given, was afraid of being accused by his subordinates, while Hoess was the one who had actually carried out the mass executions.

My position is different.

I never had either the capability or the responsibility of someone who gave orders. I never had to deal with murder, as had Hoess. If I had received the

order to perform these massacres, I would not have taken refuge behind false pretexts; I explained this during my interrogation: if I had found myself faced with an order which I could not carry out, I would have put a bullet through my head in order to resolve the conflict between my conscience and my duty.

The Court feels that my present attitude is dictated by the requirements of my case in this trial. There is a group of points which would seem to confirm this. The apparent contradictions result from the fact that I was not able to recall precisely all the details at the very beginning of the police interrogation. I lived through too many things that year.

I did not refuse to reply: the preliminary report of 3,500 pages shows this. It was my duty to assist in the explanation of the facts. Mistakes or errors occurred, but I have to rectify them. I cannot be reproached for such errors when a 16 to 20 year period is in question, and my spirit of cooperation must not be taken as trickery and lying.

My rule for living, which I was taught very early, was: the will and ambition to attain an ethic of honour.

After a certain period, Reasons of State prevented me from following this path. I had to choose outside this ethic and commit myself to another of the multiple paths of morality. I had to bend myself to the requirements of the reversal of all values by virtue of Reasons of State.

I undertook my own self-criticism, I accused my conscience, an area which is only the province of my Inner Self. Considering myself legally not guilty, I neglected totally to take into account this point of view in this examination.

I would now like to ask the Jewish people for their forgiveness, to confess the shame which overcomes me at the idea of the injustices committed with regard to them and the deeds undertaken against them. Nevertheless the basis for this judgement appears to me false. I am not the barbarian I have been made to seem. I am the victim of an argumentation: I was seized in Buenos Aires, kept tied up on a bed for a full week, then given an injection in my arm, and taken to the Buenos Aires airport; from there I left Argentina by plane. It is completely obvious taking only this into account, that I was considered responsible for everything.

It all rests on the fact that a few socialist nations today, and others, spread calumnies about me. They wanted to place their guilt on me or humiliate me for reasons which escape me. A certain element of the press has been, regarding these incredible and false assertions, making suggestive propaganda for fifteen years.

This is the basis for this unjust condemnation.

This is the reason for my presence here.

I thank my defence lawyer who made himself responsible for my rights.

It is my deep conviction that I am paying for what others have done.

I must accept what fate has placed in store for me.'

Source: <http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org>

