1-1-2003

Joy in Work Is Man's Desiring

Anthony Parise
Grand Valley State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/gvr/vol26/iss1/9

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Grand Valley Review by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.
Joy in Work Is Man's Desiring

In old age, after a lifetime with books, with words, I have taken up the luthier's craft. I have not renounced words—how could we know anything, including ourselves, without words?—but my words now tend to rise out of palpable matter, out of wood; my ideas, by definition airy, rise up from the physical, from muscle shaping wood into viols. (The viol, by the way, is a bowed string instrument, possibly ancestor of the modern violin family. It is often known by its Italian name, *viola da gamba* or, illogically, as a *gamba*. In the 18th century the viol family—treble, tenor, and bass—was rendered obsolete by the violin, viola, and cello but has now found a new life, partly because of renewed interest in early music, partly because it is so well suited to the amateur player.)

My work as a luthier I regard as an autumnal calling, not as a hobby—that trivializing notion—and certainly not as a way of beguiling the time until the next big event of my life, the awful one. To build viols is to make myself useful to musicians, to supply a real need (of which more later). From a more narrowly personal perspective, it is my way of understanding certain calamities gathered under the rubric of Progress. Specifically, I build viols in order to know, even with my bones and muscles, what it feels like to do skilled, useful, dignified work in a world intent on degrading all work to the condition of labor.

In his book *Working*, that humane giant Studs Terkel transcribes the statements of several hundred people speaking about their jobs. These are people of small account, not those "whose articulateness and expertise offered them other forums" but just ordinary working folk, the people who, driven by necessity, do necessary work and are never heard from, certainly never consulted: factory workers, janitors, truck drivers, store clerks, postal workers and such. Being employees—literally, people who are used, or in the unself-conscious jargon of management, "human resources"—their work
Luthier trimming the body of a bass viol. The thick plywood mold, around which the sides are bent, is still in place.


is generally unfitted, distressing, hazardous. But not all of the point: “This blunts nature, about violins, about their body.” That another “disutility of labor” respondents know their hearts.

But not all of desperation, and Murray Bates, a filled by his work, both intellectually happiness. His work, he knows exactly.

As an experienced friends—broadly, "What makes a any occupation to humanity?” It was a question because my the subjectivity of work itself. Our discussion was:

“What makes depends on the is fitted to do and all that.”

"Yes, true and itself that lends.

"Well, all worried"

"Oh, come on! the State Tort"

"I wouldn't want like it. You can As for the State with moralcoef.

"True, I think what is there I believe in the"

"Oh, that is demand that identify his feeling"
is generally unfulfilling or worse: dehumanizing, distressing, hazardous. Terkel’s first sentence goes right to the point: “This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence—to the spirit as well as to the body.” That anodyne abstraction of the economists, the “disutility of labor,” masks the violence that Terkel’s respondents know in their bones and muscles and in their hearts.

But not all of Terkel’s workers lead lives of quiet desperation, and one of the notable exceptions is Carl Murray Bates, a stone mason. He is a happy man, fulfilled by his work. Even more exceptionally, he knows, both intellectually and viscerally, the deepest roots of his happiness. His work is good, useful, and satisfying and he knows exactly those qualities that make it so.

As an experiment, I have asked several of my friends—broadly educated and thoughtful people—“What makes a good job good? What is there in any occupation that makes it worthy of the worker’s humanity?” It was hard to get any answer to this question because my respondents turned their attention to the subjectivity of the worker, ignoring the nature of the work itself. Our exchange might run like this:

“What makes a good job good? Hmm. Well, much depends on the attitude of the worker. Not everyone is fitted to do every job. Square pegs in round holes and all that.”

“Yes, true and important. But what is there in the work itself that lends it dignity or worth?”

“Well, all work has dignity, you know.”

“Oh, come on! Is there dignity in driving a truck? Does the State Torturer do dignified work?”

“I wouldn’t want to drive a truck, but a lot of people do like it. You can’t argue with their feelings of fulfillment. As for the State Torturer, you are confusing the issue with moral considerations.”

“True, I think there must be a moral dimension. But what is there in truck driving that might lead us to believe in the trucker’s reported fulfillment?”

“Oh, that is arrogant! How like an intellectual to demand that everyone—a trucker even!—must justify his feelings.”

“Isn’t there a touch of arrogance in saying that some people are fitted by nature to their stultifying work? Wasn’t that just the argument for slavery?”

“Truckers are not slaves. They may own their own trucks—they’re capitalists, for chrissake! And they earn good money.”

This dialogue I have assembled using only bits and pieces salvaged from several real conversations. Now Carl Bates would have come right to the point. He knows why his work is good. He is a master craftsman and a free man, and the two are related. At work, he is the best judge of his virtue. He knows when he has done well, and it is his conscience that punishes him for defects. Wherever he goes, he sees work he has done, some of it forty years ago, and he remembers the particulars of each job. He knows of defects no one else can even suspect; and certain felicities in his work constitute his private joy. He is implied in his work in a pleasurable way, which is to say that he would never fall into the delusion that a thing is only what it is. He knows that a made thing is compact of all the joy and skill—or all the misery—of the maker. (We are all conscious of this in regard to a manifest work of art, hence our interest in the artist. But we tend to forget that a beautiful oriental carpet, say, is made of dead souls, the souls of the enslaved children who made it. And we repress our curiosity about them.)

At work, Bates exercises his body as well as his judgment; he is a material being shaping matter. He looks with genial pity upon his sons, successful bankers and accountants
bound to their swivel chairs and condemned to handle nothing more palpable than numbers. Seated before their computer screens they re-enact Plato's parable of the cave, engaging not the world available to the senses but the icons they worship. Or they prove Wallace Stevens' forthright pronouncement: "Not to live in a physical world is the greatest poverty."

(Apparently, Bates needs no philosopher or poet to tell him of the materiality of the world.)

Perhaps most significantly, Bates, through his craft, is an inheritor. Daily he is connected with the past, with timeless practices and ends, with experience that might qualify as universal. It is reassuring for him that mortar is still called mud; it was in fact mud when his Paleolithic forebears walled the entrances to their caves. The mortar he actually uses is no longer plain mud, yet it is scarcely superior to that of the Romans, whose stone and brick works still stand. Nor are Bates' tools and methods (apart from a powered mortar mixer) much different. It is still handwork, still one man exercising skill and judgment in regard to each stone. "Stone is still stone," says Bates, and "every piece of stone you pick up is different, the grain's a little different... It'll split one way or break the other." And Bates cherishes a resonant symbolic connection—one might call it a sacramental connection—with antiquity: "When they built Solomon's Temple, they started at the northeast corner," a practice still followed by stone masons. "If I was gonna build a septic tank, I would start at the northeast corner."

To the question "What makes a good job good?" Bates in effect answers thus: good work implies a free worker, one who exercises his own judgment. Good work is identified with the worker, expressing his skill and joy. Good work is physical, sensual, our bodies engaging the material world as Evolution has prepared us to do. Good work connects us with timeless human experience, not in its tragic or heroic aspects but in its quiet nurturance, its happy service to the necessary; hence, good work is competence untouched by the spirit of emulation, that desire to win, to triumph (which of course is also timeless).

Bates' freedom is not absolute, which is to say that he is only a craftsman. For absolute freedom one must become an artist, as Schumacher reminds us: "It is select your material. There is an intimate relationship between..." No, your manuscript."

Though Bates would seem to be isolated. As he has by need, his own art and work would seem to be a "miracle" of late capitalism. Schumacher, in _Gestures of the Plowman: Proper work, he says, may provide necessary and sufficient goods to enable every one of us to have gifts like good stoneworking, in cooperation with what we derive from Schumacher's unexceptionable—constitute a philosophy of the necessary. Howevet keeps giving has been having been supplied, as registered by the "consideration of their reasons. To all would compromise economies; dox economic theory, the freedom of the worker and choose his own freedom to be a human command economy: to command direct resources to their reasons. To all much, loved I not a happy by-blow of assurance, the freedom noted—is theoretic is meaningless, a...

For its own purposes, need and usefulness as whatever any...
become an artist, as Annie Dillard, in *The Writing Life*, reminds us: "It is life at its most free . . . because you select your materials, invent your task, and pace yourself."

There is an intimidating price for this freedom: "The obverse . . . is that your work is . . . so worthless to the world that no one except you cares whether you do it well, or ever." "No one," she brutally concludes, "needs your manuscript."

Though Bates is not as free as the artist, neither is he as isolated. As a craftsman, he is related to others by need, his own and others'. This mutual dependence would seem to be one characteristic of good work. E. F. Schumacher, in *Good Work*, makes much of mutual need. Proper work, he says, serves three purposes: "First, to provide necessary and useful goods and services. Second, to enable every one of us to use and thereby perfect our gifts like good stewards. Third, to do so in service to, and in cooperation with, others, so as to liberate ourselves from our inborn egocentricity. These conditions, which derive from Schumacher's religious convictions, seem unexceptionable—except that "necessary and useful" constitute a philosophical problem, a bone forever to be gnawed. However, this wonderful bone that gives and keeps giving has been buried by economic theory, needs having been supplanted by wants and desires, especially as registered by the Market. To be sure, economists have their reasons. To allow imponderables into the discipline would compromise its scientific aspiration. Also, orthodox economic theory makes much of freedom, especially the freedom of the individual to define his own needs and choose his own ends. And even if one does not hold freedom to be a high value, it is simply impossible for a command economy to establish everyone's needs and to direct resources to the satisfaction of those needs. This relationship between freedom and the Market in orthodox economics is not clear to me. Does the economist whisper to the Market, "I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not freedom more"? Or is freedom simply a happy by-blow of the iron laws of economics? But for sure, the freedom at issue—as some economists have noted—is theoretical only, for freedom without power is meaningless, a joke in dubious taste.

For its own purposes, economics has disposed of *need* and *usefulness* by reducing them to *utility*, defined as whatever anyone wants and is able to buy. Yet
for every person the philosophical bone remains. What do I need and to what end? Questions addressed more beautifully by Thoreau than by any orthodox economist. To reject such grand questions would seem to violate our human nature, yet such refusal seems to be the norm: wants and preferences—"life styles," the jargon again reductive—are largely shaped by those vast agglomerations of power that service those wants and preferences. Of course, it is not exactly news that the sciences of manipulation make progress and become ever more effective both in the Market and in politics. The point is that the needs manufactured by corporations seem unrelated to the promptings of nature or the counsels of philosophical deliberation.

Work that is needful, as philosophy or nature might specify, is often despised. Those who produce food, for example—farmers, as distinct from commodities traders—are not much honored except as businessmen. Also (as some feminists have lamented) mothering is too often regarded as a rather mean occupation, certainly inferior to executive command (as other feminists have argued). Teaching too, especially of children in their most formative years, is generally treated with condescension. (It is piquant to observe that Adam Smith, that great enthusiast of the division of labor, assigned to educators the task of humanizing those who have been dehumanized by their dull repetitive labors. He could not have anticipated a university whose main purpose is to form employees to the specification of the corporate culture.) Now, it seems, even doctors are becoming employees, factors organized by specialists in organization. Perhaps doctors will join those other authentic need-satisfiers, the nurses, who have for long performed desperately needed services without much honor or reward.

Nevertheless, although institutional arrangements and Market forces undervalue the work of mothers and teachers and doctors and nurses, these are just the workers most likely to find their best reward in the work itself. In part, surely, their reward comes from the confident knowledge that their work is needed—needed by the people served, by individuals. Every day, they exercise skill and judgment on a human scale, often in an intimate relationship with the persons whose needs are served.

It is far otherwise with most workers, for whom the idea of need shows itself only in perverse guise. Here is that usually wise and generous public intellectual, John Kenneth Galbraith, explaining why we must accept the perverse:

In all the industrial countries, there is the firm commitment to the consumer economy—to consumer services—as the primary source of human satisfaction and enjoyment and as the most visible measure of social achievement. There is also the even more urgent need for the income that comes from production. In the modern economy, a slightly bizarre fact, production is now more necessary for the employment it provides than for the goods and services it supplies.

I have tried to read this little book—The Good Society—as satire. And surely certain remarks show a cutting irony: "A vast and energetic advertising industry and the persuasive power of modern communications, especially television and radio, are now necessary to instruct the individual as to his or her desires and thus promote the resulting consumption." But irony cannot redeem the literal message. And as satire, it fails as all satire must fail, given the prevailing sensibility. Satire works by reminding people, either humorously or savagely, that they have strayed from their most seriously held convictions. But the devout faith in consumption as the "primary source of human satisfaction" offers satire no purchase. My intent here is not to compare consumption with the classical measures of achievement—martial glory, service to man, beauty, the quest for the fun of consumption, one's bread. Bread, that earthy particular and wish, in Thoreau's way.

Of course one must sing of the pleasures of discipline, conspiring that has reduced workers' production like land to the same economic level as the most representative is Adam Smith's ecstatic pleasure of pins can be to the tasks, resulting in a satire. Indeed, it is instructive that Adam Smith and David Hume's conviction that the destruction of everything for Smith, that included was not diluted by a
glory, service to man and God, the creation of deathless beauty, the quest for wisdom—but rather to oppose the fun of consumption to the homely dignity of earning one's bread. Bread, that palpable universal, at once an earthy particular and a metaphor to be gnawed if we wish, in Thoreau's words, to "live deliberately."

Of course one must not expect economics texts to sing of the pleasure and virtue of work, for it is this discipline, conspiring with the Industrial Revolution, that has reduced work to labor, a commodity, a factor of production like land, capital, and rent, hence subject to the same economic laws. The most famous, and perhaps the most representative, passage in *The Wealth of Nations* is Adam Smith's ecstatic account of how the manufacture of pins can be divided into a series of unskilled tasks, resulting in a spectacular increase in productivity. Indeed, it is instructive to read such early economists as Adam Smith and David Ricardo for their unsentimental conviction that the production of wealth implies the destruction of everything human in the producers (and for Smith, that includes the capitalists). Their attitude was not diluted by any sense of outrage or regret. Why

---

About twenty clamps hold the back to the sides while the glue cures.
kick against the consequences of science? He did.

The opinion is that the employment of machinery is detrimental to the prejudice and rect principle.

It is under principles of science, the craftsman must be rewarding work with material and spirit. Everything that is humanity, the work is to destroy. Anything and Smith's pinmakers, workers and doctors reduced to a cast, planted altogether, happiness and nothing in the work to seek fulfillment. The creative work is a jargon again future, there are sure, there are but they exist one yet devised a way, expect to “re-tovar” accommodate himself made for the “Yamaha.”

Was man mad for man? It seem boast than a so.

The subject is much those of identify with the might sign a very of the only be of “Yamaha.” The make a piano, the consequence and founding specialties are come.
The opinion entertained by the labouring class, that the employment of machinery is frequently detrimental to their interests, is not founded on prejudice and error, but is conformable to the correct principles of political economy.

It is under the conditions created by the “correct principles of political economy” that the luthier or any craftsman must search for dignified and intrinsically rewarding work, work that supplies the needs, both material and spiritual, of both consumer and producer. Everything that makes the work worthy of the worker’s humanity, the Economy seeks to “rationalize,” meaning to destroy. Any skill or art—not just the skill of Adam Smith’s pinnaker but that of craftsmen, even of teachers and doctors—is allowed scope only until it can be reduced to a collection of unskilled motions or supplanted altogether by machinery. This is to say that the happiness and virtue of the worker counts for less than nothing in the organization of society. The worker may seek fulfillment in work, but in an economic perspective work is a cost, something to be “downsized”—the jargon again full of unwitting self-incrimination. To be sure, there are still fulfilling jobs in a modern economy, but they exist only because managerial expertise has not yet devised a way of eliminating them. A worker should expect to “re-tool” himself several times over to accommodate himself to the demands of the system. Was man made for the Sabbath, or the Sabbath made for man? Was man made for the Economy or the Economy made for man? It seems that the obvious answer is more of a boast than a scandal.

The subjective rewards a luthier seeks are pretty much those of Carl Murray Bates. A luthier wants to identify with the work, to put his name on it as an artist might sign a work. I mean a personal name, the name of the only begetter of the work—not “Steinway” or “Yamaha.” There is no one in the whole world who can make a piano, for example. It is an industrial artifact, the consequence of specialties ranging from metallurgy and founding to the chemistry of varnish. These specialties are commanded by specialists in commanding, who could just as expertly command the making of frozen pizzas or ladies’ underwear.

The name on a viol matters. At gatherings of viol players, there is always an exchange of inquiries: “Who made your instrument?” There is often a further question: “This instrument is patterned on which early craftsman?” And these questions are more radiant among viol players than among violinists, I think. For violins seem to have evolved into a standard size and shape and construction technique while viols are so diverse in these respects that a casual observer might consider them to be different instruments. Professional performers might choose from among three or four different bass viols, depending on the piece of music performed, the time of its composition, or the effect intended. But even an amateur player is intensely aware of the individuality of his instrument, not just its virtues and defects but its relationship to the player. Strings may be long or short, close together or far apart. The body may be big or small. (The viol is held in place by the player’s legs, large viols forcing the legs quite far apart.) The bridge may be more or less arched (A pronounced arch allows a greater margin of error in bowing but makes wide leaps difficult.) All of this matters to the player, who is also an individual, with big or small hands, a big or small body, short or long legs, more or less bow control.

And I have not yet mentioned decoration. Quite apart from the music, viols evoke the era in which they flourished. They were meant to be looked at and admired. Hence original instruments have intricate
patterns of purfling on the front and back, elaborate carving on the pegbox, carving that culminates in a carved head at the top or else in a delicate and original scroll. Fingerboards and tailpieces may have delicate inlaid filigrees. Even the pegs are elaborate and are often decorated with ivory studs. None of this is functional—unless we extend the plain sense of the word, as perhaps early players did. It is clear that Renaissance and early Baroque musicians regarded the visual as an intimate complement of the sound. Instruction manuals of the period suggest even the facial expressions and the body movements that should support and enhance the emotional content of the music. And paintings of the period not only deal lovingly with the instruments but also show an elegance of dress and coiffure that surely was meant to make performance a spectacle.

In all these respects, the modern music scene seems austere. (Rock of course is another story.) Violins and cellos certainly have their own beauty, especially in their florid and erotic curves. But everything except the scroll is functional. Even the purfling—the thin inlaid line that borders front and back—has a function: it sets up a glue line that prevents a crack in the fragile overhanging front from extending into the body of the instrument. And in any case, the beauty of shape is not unique but standard. True, scrolls retain their individuality, sometimes identifying the maker, but this is evident only to an expert eye and only on close examination. As for the dress of performers—black, Victorian, and uniform—it introduces a whiff of repression into the concert hall. The exception—oh so welcome!—is the dress of female soloists, reminding us that eye and ear are parts of the same sensibility.

Of course all this decoration on an instrument comes at a price—maybe $12000 for a brand new "historically accurate" reproduction, which may or may not have a good sound. But even a rather plain instrument is costly just because it is the work of an individual craftsman working to the specifications of an individual player. As yet, the market for viols is not large enough to attract mass production. (The size of the market may be suggested by the size of the Viola da Gamba Society of America, which has only about a thousand members.) And, as noted above, there is no standard model. On the other hand, cellos, widely used and standardized, can be had for as little as $1000. This is good news for parents wishing to encourage their children toward musical talent, or else for older players learning his craft.

But the real problem is that one cannot afford to pay a good craftsman for the real thing, or one could not compete with the mass-manufactured instrument. There is, however, a happy exception: the viol. Among viol players, the high price of a viol to the individual is more than offset by the large size of the Viola da Gamba Society to get affordable instruments for the would-be players. A viol, of course, is a world of its own, a world of违る especially for teachers and performers. A violin, or viola, is simply another member of the violin family, and while most teachers and performers wear Chinese violins, there is no comparable quality as to the recording of it. So his instrument, costing at least $2000, is in effect anonymous, with no one in the world could possibly say it was a fine instrument. But even that is not the point. Recorders are the ideal instrument for children play in school. And as for cost, it is a nice question: should the recorder be paid for as much as the piano? There is at least one else: are not the violins the tools of salvation for the disabled?
and back, elaborate and original. The result is an instrument that is cheap, is presentable enough (the plastic is painted in "wood grain"), and is fairly resonant. No doubt the motive behind this enterprise was to benefit would-be viol players of modest means. (An incidental note: I was asked whether I would assemble the components, thus becoming an employee, an anonymous factor of production. Obviously, this enterprise was to benefit would-be viol players of modest means. (An incidental note: I was asked whether I would assemble the components, thus becoming an employee, an anonymous factor of production. Obviously, the magic persists and is under-hove in the Empyrean. Much of my thinking is strictly purposive, a con-

had for as little as $400, with bow and case. That’s good news for parents who want to explore the possibility of talent in their child, not encouraging news for a luthier learning his craft.

But the real price cannot be measured in dollars, nor can we say precisely who pays the price. There is a disturbing tension at the heart of the matter. We see this clearly in the experience of William Morris, a leader in the resistance to the industrial system of production. Speaking of decoration, he said: "To give people pleasure in the things they must perforce use, that is the great office of decoration; to give people pleasure in the things they must perforce make, that is the other use of it." So his Kelmscott press produced beautifully printed and bound books. The only people who could afford them were the wealthy who, one might reasonably infer, had fattened upon the industrial system. But even that irony does not get at the critical point, which is that there is not one class of people specialized as producers and another as consumers. We are all both—at least ideally. The industrial system pits each person against himself, like the unemployed shoemaker wearing Chinese shoes.

Among viol players it is frequently lamented that the high price of instruments limits the pleasures of the viol to the moneyed. It is the official aim of the Gamba Society to get affordable instruments into the hands of would-be players. In another early music community, that of recorder players, the problem has been solved by the Japanese, who make professional quality plastic recorders for about $50. A hand-made instrument of comparable quality, one signed by the person who made it, would cost at least $1000. The plastic instrument is in effect anonymous; as with the piano, no one in the world could possibly make one. It is the consequence not only of industrial organization but of a vast market. Recorders are the instruments that all Japanese school-children play in school. As in so many analogous cases, it is a nice question as to whether plastic technology responded to that market or created it.

There is at least one attempt to call plastic to the rescue of the viol player: a luthier with entrepreneurial talent now makes treble viols partly of plastic. The soundboard is wood, a machine-made violin top. I would guess that the neck, also wood, is carved by a laser guided milling machine. The result is an instrument that is cheap, is presentable enough (the plastic is painted in "wood grain"), and is fairly resonant. No doubt the motive behind this enterprise was to benefit would-be viol players of modest means. (An incidental note: I was asked whether I would assemble the components, thus becoming an employee, an anonymous factor of production. Obviously, Morris’ motive, to give people pleasure in the things they make, was not an entrepreneurial end.)

It should be clear by now that in large measure my reflections upon my craft are about the context, the social environment, in which I live and work. To be sure, my thoughts are not always so dismal. I am steadily dazzled by the work’s magical aura. To teach wood to sing! What romance, what myth, what tale of witchcraft or wizardry imposes a task more demanding of magical potency? It is no idle flourish to put the case in such high-flown terms, for this awe attending the work of Stradivarius and a whole pantheon of early makers. Mere physicists cannot explain the tone of the instruments. Mere chemists cannot duplicate the varnish. Mere acoustical engineers cannot determine whether it is the wood, the varnish, the modeling and proportions, or simply age that accounts for tone. Surely, if science can send a man to the moon... But no, the magic persists and is underwritten by a lot of cold cash.
sideration of ways and means. How to devise a clamp for the compound curves where sides are glued to neck block? How to tell whether the rising curves of the belly are symmetrical? Why does the back, which should be slightly convex, insist on being concave? And how can I persuade it otherwise? Being almost altogether self-taught, I have had to devote more mental and emotional energy to problem solving than does the worker who inherits the accumulated lore of the craft. Still, even for me many steps in the process have become established, ordained. Some familiar procedures have even taken a tincture of monotony—carving the top, or belly, for example. In the words of a 16th century English treatise on viols, the top is “digged from a plank.” This means hours of chiseling, gouging, and scraping to remove perhaps eighty percent of the plank in the form of chips. The wood—spruce—is particularly fractious. The grain lines are hard, but between them the wood is like marshmallow. The cutting tool wants to slip off the hard grain and plunge into the punk. Spruce is a splintery wood and can be cut only in one direction, no matter where the curves are. And this perverse wood often won’t stand up to the cutting tool; no matter how sharp the tool, the wood threatens to tear instead of parting cleanly. However, this obnoxious wood knows how to sing. And as so often is the case, all vices are forgiven in deference to one great talent. Still, while working with this prima donna of woods, one must deliberate over every stroke of the tool, a condition that over a period of hours manages to bring together anxiety and tedium.

Instrument grade spruce is expensive. I buy the cheapest grade—about a hundred dollars for a piece suitable for a bass viol top. The price adds somewhat to the anxiety (I have one piece that cost $270 and so far I have been afraid to work on it). But there is, in my view, a more real and more awesome cost, one that dollars cannot measure. I have counted on a typical piece of spruce over a hundred growth rings. I owe it to that tree to produce an instrument that will last at least a hundred years, and I am not confident I can make good on this moral debt. Eventually, glue will relax its grip and wood will crack. When that happens to my instruments, amoral calculation may determine whether the cost of repair will exceed the value of the instrument.

Though my relationships with hard maple I live in are generally, though not always, accommodating. It is an accommodating wood, closest grained and unselfish in any direction. Being cloistered in definition. For decorative elements of many period instruments, we fully exploit the sculptural qualities carved in maple—a wood that can be as detailed as hair and eyelids.

To be sure, maple is hyperbole—but in a good way. The cutting tool and this physical effort of this wood stands up to, that amounts to coming to terms and reproaches any grain lines at length the sanguine reconsiders the wood. I do not pretend that my love is that the wood itself that I love my teacher.

The cutting tool in making. More and more on the knives, for I some straight, some sharpened along the long end to a rounded tip. Most of the blanks of knife steel, and beveled on both the gouge edge with its readily finds its way a thin curl of wood. All the bulldozers, their edge is thin, tapering nothing insinuates it of the wood.

Fanciful? No doubt, it cuts clean. In a survey conducted by the C respondents cited the luthier says the obvious wood.

Fanciful? No doubt, it cuts clean. In a survey conducted by the C respondents cited the luthier says the obvious wood.
to devise a clamp; these are glued to neck curves of the belly, which should be in line. And how can the worker who
be as detailed as if carved in marble, even to the

Though my relationship with spruce is strained, with
hard maple I live in harmony. (Neck and body of a viol
are generally, though not always, made of maple.) This
is an accommodating wood to carve or to bend. It
is close grained and uniformly dense, hence can be cut in
any direction. Being very hard, it is capable of minute
definition. For decoration, I carve open scrolls like those
of many period instruments. But perhaps scrolls do not
fully exploit the sculptural potential of maple. Faces
carved in maple—as many early instruments have—
can be as detailed as if carved in marble, even to the
hair and eyelids.

To be sure, maple is not as hard as marble—that's just
hyperbole—but in carving it one must really lean into
the cutting tool and it is not hyperbole to affirm that
this physical effort engenders a sense of intimacy. The
wood stands up to, resists, the steel but it is resistance
that amounts to cooperation. It forbids bold strokes
and reproaches any desire for speed. Hence one exami­
ines at length the slowly evolving shape, judging and
reconsidering the sweep and grace of the scroll. I do
not pretend that my scrolls show artistic talent—only
that the wood itself has tutored me as best it can and
that I love my teacher.

The cutting tool itself is central to this intimate
making. More and more, I rely on the knife—or rather
on the knives, for I have many, of all shapes and sizes,
some straight, some curved in various arcs, most sharp­
ened along the long edge but some sharpened only at the
rounded tip. Most of my knives I have made myself from
blanks of knife steel. It

Fanciful? No doubt. Yet luthiers know that the knife
cuts clean. In a survey of seventeen "established luthiers,
" conducted by the Guild of American Luthiers, most
respondents cited the knife as their primary tool. One
luthier says the obvious: "A sharp knife will cut cleanly
through the cell walls leaving a surface that seems to
be polished." Indeed! And Dietrich Kessler, an English luthier, writes that sound holes can be gracefully cut only with a knife. (I agree, though I confess that when it comes to sound holes, I finish with a tool that most luthiers regard with stern reproach: sandpaper.)

While working I think a lot about the eventual failure of my glue joints. The glue I use is not one of those wonders of modern chemistry but the old hot hide glue used by luthiers since the beginning and still. It is water soluble, hence affected by humidity. There's a certain advantage in this drawback: those cracks that are the inevitable destiny of wood will be more easily repaired because the instrument can be disarticulated. But I wonder what some future repairman will think when he or she opens up my instrument and looks at its secret parts? I have seen the innards of several very old instruments—and they were crudely done, the tool marks clearly visible. Apparently the old masters invested no effort or pride on surfaces that are neither functional nor visible. A luthier of my acquaintance remarked that Guarneri was especially egregious in this respect. My viols are smoothly finished, inside and out. Will this future repairman regard this as a measure of my exacting standards? Or will he find fundamental faults gilded by a foolish punctilio? (And is it also foolish to worry about any posthumous attention directed my way?)

As for the tedium—the "disutility of labor"—that should be examined more closely. The novelist George Eliot regarded the manual crafts as redemptive, imposing a homely discipline that rescues the worker from the snares and delusions of the world. (Or, as Schumacher puts it, work serves to "liberate ourselves from our inborn egocentricity"). So in a poem on Stradivarius, Eliot celebrates that "plain white-aproned man who stood at work/Patient and accurate full fourscore years." She touches in passing upon the mystery of high craftsmanship, that "eloquent silence at the chasm abrupt/Where knowledge ceases." But she dwells at length on the monotony of the work. She honors Stradivarius because

... he never cried
"Why was I born to this monotonous task
Of making violins?" or flung them down

To suit with hurli
At labour on such
To suit with hurling act a well-hurled curse
At labour on such perishable stuff.

This wholesome craftsman she contrasts with an artist who borrows money and drinks while waiting for inspiration. In this respect, Eliot, herself an artist, takes her place in a long line of solid citizens—and no small number of artists as well, beginning with Plato—who have regarded the artist as a moral and social danger.

In this regard Eliot is thoroughly Victorian, though not as extreme as her contemporary, Thomas Carlyle, who cherished the pain, the unhappiness, the heroic abnegation of work. Especially the sacrifice of self: for Carlyle the injunction “Know thyself” is a wicked gospel seducing us with our own egocentricity. Work, though “never so Mammonish [and] mean,” conduces to spiritual health by turning all energy to the outward scene, dissolving the self and denying the ego. I suppose he would approve of Saint Benedict’s Rule for Monks, according to which a Monk who takes pride in his work is to be removed from it. As for the rewards of work, they are for Carlyle all implicit in the fact of work. Hence the man who labelled political economy “the Dismal Science,” accepted the Iron Law of Wages, that scientific law that holds that wages must suffice to feed the worker enough to work and procreate but cannot rise above this because competition will not allow. Carlyle regarded this not as obscene but as “indispensable.” However, he applied the Iron Law equally to CEOs and dishwashers: “Money-wages ‘to the extent of keeping your worker alive that he may work more’,... are indispensable alike to the noblest Worker and to the least noble!”

Carlyle, it seems to me, is a complex, profound, and self-deluded comforter of those afflicted by the factory system. He accepts the doctrine of the Fortunate Fall according to which Adam’s curse is a blessing and the sweat of the brow, though sorrowful and unremitting, is a gift from the Giver of good things only. There is a nub of good sense inside of Carlyle’s hyperboles; Heaven, where according to reliable reports the primary industry is pure contemplation and worship, must be pure Hell. But I resist Carlyle, partly because his attitude toward work is but one aspect of an all-embracing spiritual quest that is beyond my powers of comprehension. Or, rather, it is not a quest but an absolutely assured vision, totalitarian in scope and rendered more frightening by his wonderful bullying prose style. But I also resist Carlyle because he lacks the personal authority to declaim that “All work, even cotton-spinning, is noble.” He did not work in a cotton mill and did not give up his humanity to enrich the mill owner. (Herman Melville more accurately described the cotton mill as “The Tartarus of Maids,” in a story of that name.) Only then, when he is choking on cotton dust, might he plausibly report that “even in the meanest sorts of Labour, the whole soul of a man is composed into a kind of real harmony.” As for the pretension to be... happy,” he dub it “the whole Atheism.” When he says that “Our highest religion is named the ‘Worship of Sorrow,’” he means it. His spiritual quest, his fear of metaphysical despair, leads him to deny the reality of material desperation. As for wholesome pleasure, that is altogether beyond his powers of comprehension.

That prince of economists (and of course the laughing stock of all orthodox economists) John Ruskin, though he experienced even less of dire labor than Carlyle, knew more about work and happiness.

Now in order that people may be happy in their work, these three things are needed: They must be fit for it: They must not do too much of it: and they must have a sense of success in it...

I work about three hours a day in my violin workshop—but not every day. That’s not only because more would strain my old body. It is because I need...
to read Carlyle, among other great thinkers. Without them, my work would lose its color. I need words, ideas, in order to savor my life—just as Carlyle needed, unbeknownst to himself, an intimate encounter with the material world to ground his spirituality. Of course the luthier's work does not demand or even encourage reflection and expansive thinking. Like any purposive activity, it is quite mindless, meaning it is focused on ways and means and therefore unconcerned with and uncritical of ends. Yes, reflective engineers happen; the dam designer may be capable of asking, “Is this dam necessary? Will it conduct to greater happiness and virtue?” But we should recognize that such thinking is heroic. If such questions are genuine, they allow negative answers and thus threaten something dear and essential to the questioner. Such thinking is as difficult for a factory worker as for a scientist developing weapons-grade smallpox virus.

When I suggest to friends that one “must not do too much” of one's chosen work, I am asked, “Would you rather have your gall bladder cut out by a workaholic surgeon—an experienced and single-minded surgeon—or by one who spends afternoons with poetry?” A shrewd question, and I would like to avoid a facile answer. Especially, I would not insist on the moral effects of high art and philosophy, those endeavors that confront us with grand questions. And yet it remains that the person is at least as important as the function and that, my gall bladder aside, professional deformation is a serious affliction. The hero of Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel The Remains of the Day is a butler for whom competence is not enough; he aspires not just to work as a butler but to become one (italics in original.) He says: “A butler ... must be seen to inhabit his role, utterly and fully: he cannot be seen casting it aside one moment simply to don it again the next as though it were nothing more than a pantomime costume.” (He is at this moment reproaching himself for reading a novel.) No one would deny the pathos of the case in regard to a butler. Yet some might assert that to become a surgeon, to “inhabit the role, utterly and fully,” is an exalted destiny or even a saintly apotheosis. Perhaps, just barely perhaps. However, coming from anyone but a surgeon or a saint, the assertion is suspect. As for butlers

or cotton spinners or luthiers, it seems a patent absurdity.

It should be obvious to anyone that the person I swim in the river, that figment, that image of me the past is not gone, it is unique. To some degree all luthiers. From it, I have come away strongly in favor of the past and their sense of self-regard themselves as heroes. Or, more to the point, only in a general, non-scrutinizing way.

A craft—engineers and scientists, for example—is not an art and cannot be substituted for universals. In their practice they have no need for the humanities. It has always been the duty of a humanities scholar never become professional humanist” and those who practice the humanities are for professional humanists—not the same species. Still, perhaps it is understandable that the maker has encouraged me to have offered to pay me about here: I am not a professional musician. Hence I have denied me the satisfactions implied in the description, yearn to pass over to some technical knowledge of the instruments are making. The maker has encouraged me to volunteer work experience or the ego-satisfactions in poverty of spirit perhaps in wood sheaths for junk. Surely such people have the market for non-Marxist
thinkers. Without I need words, ideas, or cotton spinners or truck drivers—or luthiers—this seems a patent absurdity.

It should be obvious by now that as a luthier and as a person I swim in the sea of time—not in that imaginary river, that fiugment, that one cannot step into twice. For me the past is not gone or irrelevant nor the future utterly unique. To some degree, I think, this is true of professional luthiers. From infrequent and casual discussions I come away strongly impressed by their knowledge of the past and their sense of being inheritors. Whether they regard themselves as progenitors—well, I am not sure. Or, more to the point, I can reflect upon this question only in a general, non-empirical way.

A craft—engineering or stone masonry, for example—is not an art and only by a stretch can we examine it for universals. In this respect it differs from humane learning. It has always seemed to me that the most vital duty of a humanities teacher is to engage those who will never become professionals. Indeed, the expression "professional humanist" seems a contradiction in terms. If the humanities are for humans, scholarship is for scholars—not the same species—and hence scholars properly seek to replicate themselves, to engender professionals. Craftsmen too seek to replicate themselves, and thus it is understandable that only one professional viol maker has encouraged this aging amateur. The others have denied me their advice and instruction, though I have offered to pay their price. Nothing to complain about here: I am not the future of their craft.

Yet I myself, with something of a humanist's passion, yearn to pass on what I have learned. Yes, I have some technical knowledge but also some awareness of the satisfactions implicit in technique. And though my technique be as groping as Evolution itself, yet my instruments are making music, a couple in the hands of professional musicians and a couple dozen in the hands of amateurs who but for me would not possess this usually expensive instrument. True, at my level of skill there is no monetary reward in the craft: but many people do volunteer work expressly because of the moral content or the ego-satisfaction of such activity. And many others in poverty of spirit pursue hobbies, making napkin rings or wood sheaths for ball-point pens or stained glass junk. Surely such people demonstrate that there is a market for non-Market work. There are places of refuge;
Book Review


Perhaps more than any other historical event, the Holocaust gave new life to the concept of evil. The atrocities committed by the Nazis against the Jews of Europe and the other perceived enemies of the racial state added new dimensions and horror to humanity's repertoire of murder and human degradation: millions of innocents killed in the name of the racial state. Yet one of the most enduring and influential conceptions of evil that emerged from the study of the Holocaust stands in stark contrast to the enormity of the event: Hannah Arendt's (1965) notion of the banality of evil. When confronted with one of the central actors of the Holocaust, Arendt saw not the homicidal monster or psychopath that one might expect, but an everyday bureaucratic functionary. At his trial in 1961, Adolph Eichmann looked like an ordinary employee of a large organization and spoke of mass murder as if it were a typical industrial and bureaucratic process. The banality of evil challenges the assumption that the perpetrators of radical evil must be exceptional—great departures from normal, civilized behavior—and raises the possibility that even the most common individuals, engaged in everyday tasks, can be complicit in humanity's worst crimes.

In his book, Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil, Yaacov Lozowick rejects Arendt's thesis and argues that Eichmann was not at all banal. He may have appeared banal when on trial in 1961, but in 1941, when he was the right hand man for Reinhard Heydrich and coordinated the SS genocidal machine, he was indeed an evil monster determined to destroy the innocent. Lozowick maintains that a careful examination of the evidence, some of which has only come to light in the past decade, shows that Eichmann and the other dedicated Nazis who orchestrated the Holocaust were in fact exceptional and not at all like other people. They were radical ideologues pursuing an anti-Semitic agenda with a passion tempered only by political, legal, and social constraints that were progressively loosened as Hitler consolidated and extended his totalitarian leadership and its control over Germany and occupation.

In a study reminiscent of that focused on the perpetrators of other genocides, Lozowick bases his conclusion on an abundance of evidence, including secret reports and correspondence, and makes a compelling case that the banality of evil as described by Arendt was not a factor in the Holocaust. The content, origin, and movement both reveal an important role for political leaders and bureaucracy in implementing the Nazi's anti-Semitic policies. The banality of evil is revealed here by the revelation of the role of everyday bureaucrats. The implications of this new understanding of the Holocaust are significant.

This does not mean that Lozowick himself in the camp created a kind of "banal" view of the Holocaust. He shows that Hitler and his followers did not act without a series of pre-planned, coordinated plans and tactics used to achieve their goal of a "Jewish free state". Hitler and his followers used a series of "smoking guns" and "functionalism" to banish all Jews from the rest of Nazi-controlled Europe. The Holocaust resulted from a dialogue between the political leaders and the bureaucrats who carried out the mass murder. In other words, the ideologues, ideological, but their
extended his totalitarian regime. Once these constraints were removed under the cover of total war, the Nazi leadership and its core followers moved quickly to realize their goal of a Jew-free Europe.

In a study reminiscent of Raul Hilberg's research that focuses on the documents generated and circulated by the perpetrators of genocide, Lozowick bases his conclusions on an extensive examination of reports and correspondence among Nazi officials in Germany and occupied France, Holland and Hungary. The content, origin, routing, and destination of documents both reveal and obscure the roles played by the political leaders and bureaucrats in the formulation and implementation of the Holocaust. While direct orders and "smoking guns" are rarely found, the documents do reveal a lot about the security police and their attitudes toward their work and their victims. They consistently pursued their victims with both vigor and disdain. From the 1930s onwards, the "desktop murderers" studied by Lozowick acted within the framework of a unified bureaucratic police system for all of the Third Reich that increasingly was able to act without concern for legal constraints or citizens' rights. Perhaps even more importantly, they were successful in absorbing more members into the system and expanding their influence, both horizontally and vertically.

This does not mean, however, that Lozowick places himself in the camp of those who take an "intentionalist" view of the Holocaust. That is, he does not argue that Hitler and his followers envisioned the Holocaust in specific terms well in advance and then carried out a series of pre-planned steps that led to the gas chambers and crematoria. Nor is Lozowick advocating "functionalism," the view that the Holocaust was driven largely by impersonal organizational and policy dynamics. Instead, he concludes from his careful analysis of reports and other documents that while the Holocaust resulted from the consistent and hateful intent to banish all Jews from Germany and then from the rest of Nazi-controlled Europe, the specific strategies and tactics used to accomplish a Jew-free Germany and Europe were identified and implemented in an ongoing dialogue between the top leadership and operatives in the field. In other words, the perpetrators' motives were ideological, but their tactics pragmatic.

Lozowick finds throughout this process a core of dedicated Nazis that enthusiastically carried out the most radical available anti-Jewish policies; from persecution, to discrimination, forced emigration, officially sanctioned larceny and pogroms, forced deportations, ghettoization, and finally mass murder. The documents show that, rather than operating from a grand scheme or plan, leaders and followers sought out, debated, and experimented with new approaches to the "Jewish problem" and the goal of achieving a racially pure nation in response to evolving circumstances, problems, and opportunities. It wasn't necessary to envision mass murder in the 1930s to be able to make it official policy in the 1940s. What was necessary was the consistent presence and determined efforts of Eichmann and his accomplices.

Lozowick does not see Eichmann and other Nazi leaders as representative of ordinary Germans as in Goldhagen's (1996) assertion of a culturally based "eliminationist" anti-Semitism. Nor are they representative of "ordinary men" as in Christopher Browning's (1992) explanation of perpetrator behavior as conditioned by more universal social and organizational dynamics. Instead, he found that "The more I came to know these bureaucrats the less familiar they became" (7). These "desktop murderers" were all young, male, Christian, and nationalist minded Germans who had voluntarily joined the Nazi party and the SS long before it was fashionable or convenient to do so. In contrast to Arendt, who concluded that Eichmann "...never realized what he was doing," Lozowick argues
that Eichmann and his accomplices were "...a group of people completely aware of what they were doing, with high ideological motivation, of high initiative and dexterity. (8)" They hated Jews and thought that getting rid of them would be good for Germany. They understood that their anti-Semitic actions were unacceptable except within the racist value system of the Third Reich. They were motivated evildoers, not banal functionaries.

In another recent study, Michael Mann (2000) shows that the Holocaust was indeed perpetrated by a core population of dedicated Nazis, but not only by them.

These "real Nazis" operated amid a much broader range of perpetrators, many of whom were likely to be rather more ordinary... Among the lower administrators in the transport and other agencies smoothing the flow of victims, we would doubtless find many Germans with virtually no prior history of Nazism or violence, exhibiting the whole range of prejudices, equivocations, and moral evasions that studies have suggested characterized the German population as a whole. Germans turned a blind eye, thought about matters of more personal concern, cared nothing for disliked Jews, and facilitated the trajectory of the victims, with practiced and entirely normal human moral weakness. (Mann, 2000:357)

A key question, therefore, is: How did this much larger population of ordinary Germans come to be involved in the Holocaust? Lozowick rejects the "slippery slope" metaphor and argues that the hard core Nazis pulled others into their realm of anti-Semitism rather like expert alpinists helping others to climb to new heights of evil (278). While Eichmann and his associates climbed higher than others—and continued killing Jews right up to the end of the war—they nevertheless led many others to heights of evildoing that they would not have accomplished otherwise. This metaphor suggests that the evil of the Nazis was both seductive and powerful, masked not by banality but by visions of grandeur and superiority. As Lozowick puts it, "The word evil fits them in its full awesome sense" (275).

In effect, Lozowick rejects the "greatness" thesis that Albert H. Bernstein defends in his "greatness," that it is characterized by the move to illegitimacy, and to the point of view.

It is indeed my own conviction that the word "great" is characterized by thought-defying judgments and to the point of view.

As Bernstein, 2002:2:

Even Lozowick and his colleagues in their study of the 1930s, in "whitewashing" (37). While her and intelligent, Eichmann was necessary for the line that came to define the Nazis and those of the Nazi who reached some great height in their total moral collapse, to recognize or understand their actions.

While his study provides a deeper understanding of evil, mainly because he is the full spectrum of Arendt's understanding of evil. By making their victims to legitimize, pursue a story of mass murder while...
...a group of... they were doing, with... initiative and de
eascertainment that getting rid of the Jews was... They understood... unacceptable except... the Third Reich. They... functions.

Michael Mann (2000) indeed perpetrated by... Nazis, but not only by... and a much broader... were likely to be... or administrators... agencies smoothing... and doubtless find... prior history of... the whole range of... moral evasions that... eliminated the German... turned a blind eye,... personal concern, and... and facilitated... practiced and... weakness. (Mann, 2000)

How did this much... Germans come to be... Lozowick rejects the... the hard core... of anti-Semitism... others to climb... the Third Reich. They... and continued... the war—they... never... evildoing that they... wise. This metaphor... was both seductive... but by visions... Lozowick puts it, “The... same sense” (275).

In effect, Lozowick ends up advocating the “satanic... thesis that Arendt found so objectionable. Arendt rejected the notion that there was any dimension of greatness, accomplishment or achievement in the act of genocide. For Arendt, evil lacks depth and is characterized by the inability to make independent judgments and to think from or appreciate the other’s point of view.

It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never “radical,” that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimensions. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is “thought defying,”... because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment... in perpetrator behavior in the Holocaust... and feelings: “... it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think” (Arendt, 1971:417). Indeed, this is what was necessary for the sustained effort of mass murder that came to define the Holocaust. Eichmann’s actions, and those of the Nazis in general, are not the result of reaching some great heights of evil, but rather reflect... skills to the surface level of understanding, studiously avoiding the depths of human experience and feeling: “... it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think” (Arendt, 1971:417).

Even Lozowick points out that while Eichmann... his colleagues in the SS studied Jewry intensively during the 1930s, in the end “They understood nothing” (37). While he may have been cunning, ambitious, and intelligent, Eichmann limited the application of his skills to the surface level of understanding, studiously avoiding the depths of human experience and feeling: “... it was not stupidity but a curious, quite authentic inability to think” (Arendt, 1971:417). Indeed, this is what was necessary for the sustained effort of mass murder that came to define the Holocaust. Eichmann’s actions, and those of the Nazis in general, are not the result of reaching some great heights of evil, but rather reflect... their total moral collapse, a nearly complete failure to recognize or understand the full and tragic implications of their actions.

While his study provides considerable insight into the workings of the Nazi police bureaucracy, Lozowick ultimately fails to make his case against the banality of evil, mainly... full spectrum of Arendt’s thought on evil and the Holocaust. Overlooked by Lozowick and central to Arendt’s understanding of evil is the concept of “superfluousness.” By making their victims superfluous, the Nazis were able to legitimize, pursue and sustain a prolonged campaign of mass murder while masking its moral implications.

The concentration and death camps became the final stage in the process of “making human beings as human beings superfluous,” of destroying any vestige of human individuality and spontaneity (Bernstein, 2002: 210-211). The Nazis not only killed their victims, they... those who died in the camps, utterly without the most basic necessities of human dignity and existence.2

The banality of evil was symptomatic of this process whereby the perpetrators destroyed and then disposed of their victims as objects in a manner that closely resembled “normal” administrative procedures (Adams and Balfour, 1998). This was not the only method of mass murder in the Holocaust, but it was the method that sets it apart from other such events and challenges our faith in modern political/administrative institutions and processes. Administrative evil is masked, in part, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment... in perpetrator behavior in the Holocaust... and throughout human history. These are all motivations that can be associated with criminal behavior. But the Holocaust is not a matter of the
commission of mere crimes. Crimes are already defined by an existing legal order and can be identified and punished. But as Richard Rubenstein (1975:87) pointed out, “One of the most difficult conclusions to which we have come... is that the Nazis committed no crime at Auschwitz since no law or political order protected those who were condemned to statelessness and then to the camps.” No crime was committed because, for the perpetrators (and even bystanders), the victims were not regarded as people. And, most of the perpetrators were never brought to justice.

The banality of evil refers to perpetrating evil while operating at a surface level of consciousness and morality, failing to recognize and admit to the full implications of one’s actions. Seeing Eichmann as banal does not mean accepting his defense of just following orders or being a mere cog in a larger system. Eichmann and others like him would never become superfluous as long as there was a massive population of “surplus people” to be enslaved and dehumanized (Rubenstein, 1975).

Conventional conceptions of evil or wrongdoing were unable to comprehend or explain the Holocaust, which tempts us to view it in terms of some sort of satanic greatness. This is the problem that Arendt wrestled with, which the banality of evil helps to explain but also leaves us wondering what can be done about it, since the same procedures that created and ran the concentration and death camps are part and parcel of every modern organization. Eichmann was both exceptional and banal. Exceptional in that he was at the center of the circle of perpetrators, and banal in that he wore the mask of administrative evil, embodying the persona of the desk murderer that so many others could comfortably adopt. What frustrates Lozowick and all who would seek justice for the victims is that the motives of the perpetrators were murky, superficial, and uninspiring. There is no greatness, only waste and loss. They did not reach dizzying heights. They only set the bar low enough so that many could pretend that they did so at the expense of the innocent.

Notes
1. Consider the similarities between Eichmann’s mentality and what has been termed as Hitler’s ‘pigeon-hole’ mind. He read voraciously but for confirmation of already existing biases and beliefs with an inability to subject his or others ideas to systematic or logical critique. The Nazi ideology can be seen as an outgrowth of Hitler’s and his followers’ desire to eliminate all difference and ambiguity, to institutionalize shallowness and uniformity (see, for example, Kershaw, 1998).

References
due to the position and the Nazi policy of mass murder and extermination, which were part of the Nazi regime and banal, and probably most will never become aware of the reality of this process well enough to understand it. The society of conquered Slavs in Auschwitz was that the society of the victims is that the victims are so many others who might have frustrated Lozowick (1998). The only waste and loss. They only set the stage and pretend that they are innocent.

Eichmann's mental process is that Hitler's 'pigeon-hole' confirmation of already well-known abilities is to subject his mass murder regime to a legal critique. The Nazi regime of Hitler's and his subordinates' uniformity and ambiguity, which frustrates Lozowick's (1998) uniformity (see, for

2. See also Rubenstein (1975) and the concept of "surplus populations."

3. The situation is somewhat different today thanks to the efforts of Raphael Lemkin and others to define the crime of genocide and to create international law and the means of enforcing it (see, for example, Powers, 2002).

References


