

Honors 290: Philosophy and the Holocaust

1250-1500 words

DUE SUNDAY, December 20 by 11:00 PM (electronically, or at my house: 149 Prospect St., Cambridge, near Broadway) [.1 off for first 24-hour period late, .3 if up to 48 hours late. Assignment not accepted after Tuesday 11:00 PM.]

ANSWER **ONE** OF THE FOLLOWING 2 QUESTIONS, ADDRESSING EVERY PART OF THE QUESTION

1. “Why did the Holocaust happen?” is a question we have been trying to answer throughout the course. Our recent readings from Vetlesen and Bauman can be seen as (among other things) attempting to answer that question.

(a) We can look at Vetlesen as trying to explain Arendt’s answer to the question, “What state of mind did Eichmann possess that accounted for his participation in the Holocaust?” After answering this question, Vetlesen then offers a different explanation of Eichmann’s state of mind that he thinks is more philosophically and morally accurate than Arendt’s explanation. *Explain these two parts of Vetlesen’s view.*

(b) Explain Bauman’s “social” explanation of the Holocaust. Just give the basic outlines of it. You don’t have to give every detail. Bring out how Bauman’s view differs from Vetlesen’s.

(c) briefly discuss the question whether Vetlesen’s view is *contradictory* to Bauman’s, or whether they can be seen as *complementary*—that is, whether they could both be true, but using different approaches to the Holocaust that could both be true.

OR

2. Write an essay giving your own reflections arising from our course, about what enabled or prompted perpetrators to carry out the Holocaust, and other Germans to allow it to happen. In your essay make some reference to *at least 3* of the following authors or figures: Vetlesen, Eichmann, Himmler (as discussed in “The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn” and in Vetlesen), Bauman, Goldhagen, Koonz. You may also bring in any other authors or figures from the course.

Give evidence or argumentation for the view or views that you take (but you do not have to come up with, or even try to come up with, a totally definitive point of view).