

# Björklunden Zoom Seminars

APRIL 4 - MAY 2, 2024



## Is Evil really Banal?: Hannah Arendt and the Question of Genocide

### Course Description

*\*Class held online every Thursday, 2-3:30pm*

The current war in the Middle East has raised anew the urgent question of genocide. But what does the word “genocide” mean? When did it first appear, historically? This seminar will address these questions through a close reading of Hannah Arendt’s brilliant and controversial book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

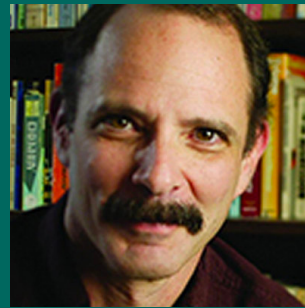
In 1963, Arendt, a German-Jewish philosopher and political theorist, published an account of the trial of Adolph Eichmann, a Nazi S.S. officer who helped organize the Holocaust. Arendt, who attended the trial, argued that Eichmann was not a sadistic monster so much as a bureaucrat, who embodied what she famously called the “banality of evil.” Arendt’s book has since become a touchstone for any discussion of the Holocaust.

What, she asks, was the nature of the Nazi genocide? Of what was a man like Eichmann guilty, exactly? What kind of evil did he represent and how did it relate to genocidal mass murder?

**Course reading:** Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin, 2006)

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## Instructor



### Paul Cohen

Cohen is a professor emeritus in history and Patricia Hamar Boldt professor of liberal studies at Lawrence University, where he taught for 37 years. He specializes in Modern European history but has also taught courses on film and history. Between 1996 and 1998, he was Director of Lawrence’s Freshman Studies Program (currently ‘First Year Studies’), which introduces students to the liberal arts. He helped oversee that program’s transition from its great-works-of-the-West origins in 1945 to its current multi-civilizational and multidisciplinary orientation. While he is the author of two books on the intellectual history of modern France, Professor Cohen considers himself first and foremost a teacher. In 1999, Lawrence awarded him with the Lawrence University Freshman Studies Award, and in 2008 with the Lawrence University Excellence in Teaching Award. “Teaching,” he writes, “has amounted to a calling more than an occupation for me. Being a spur to student growth has been the greatest joy of my career. That, I like to think, more so than the mastery of a field of study or the preparation for a career, is what characterizes a Lawrence education at its best.”