MAHABBAH: Journal Religion and Education
Vol. 6 No. 2. (July 2025): 140-157
DOI: 10.47135/mahabbah.v6i2.42

Confronting Gender Violence through Hokmah Education: A Dialogue with Arendt's Banality of Evil and Proverbs 1

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Abstract

This research project aims to analyze Proverbs 1 through the lens of Hannah Arendt's theory of the banality of evil, as articulated in her report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, in order to contribute to the prevention of gender-based violence. Arendt's account of the trial emphasized Eichmann's failure to exercise three essential virtues in his official duties: thinking, judging, and acting. Similarly, this study argues that contemporary gender discrimination and violence often arise from a desire that perpetrators seek to gratify incrementally and insidiously. In incidents of gender - based violence, the perpetrators' intentions and actions --- characterized by moral negligence and a lack of reflection --- can be examined through the framework of the banality of evil. This paper also engages with two ancient Chinese philosophers, Mencius and Xunzi, to explore understandings of moral action in human life and to compare their perspectives with Arendt's. Mencius held that "human nature is good," whereas Xunzi proposed the "theory of natural evilness." However, these classical views on human nature fall short in analyzing the moral dimensions of gender - based violence, particularly as such violence is closely tied to the gratification of sexual desire. As Arendt demonstrates through Eichmann's case, evil often manifests not as monstrous intent but as thoughtlessness. In a similar way, sexual offenses occur in the absence of reflective thought by perpetrators, whose senseless actions bring suffering to their victims. Although their desires ought to be restrained, it is their failure to think and judge ethically that enables such gendered violence to occur. This research proposes hokmah (wisdom) education, as described in Proverbs 1 within Christian wisdom literature, as a foundation for promoting gender awareness in higher education. Hokmah education offers a paradigm shift in gender studies by highlighting the suppression of violent or destructive desires from a feminist perspective. This study also emphasizes the dialogue between Arendt's political philosophy and biblical texts, employing interdisciplinary methods. Through processes of thinking, judging, and acting grounded in religious reflection,

Article History:
Received: August 11, 2024
Accepted: July 16, 2025
Published: July 30, 2025

Keywords:
Hannah Arendt
The Banality of Evil
Proverbs 1
Mencius
Gender Violence,

human beings are guided to wisely submit to the divine --- who consistently upholds justice as a means of preventing gender-based violence. Arendt's theory of the banality of evil will be explored throughout the research process. This study will apply her concept to contemporary violence against women and examine its relevance in the context of hokmah education.

INTRODUCTION

I would like to begin with a question: *"How can we make a better world?"* A conceptual dialogue between *a priori* and *a posteriori* reasoning can help us discern whether human goodness is innate or shaped through moral education. Addressing women's issues is essential in building a better world, as women make up half of the global population. In order to gain momentum for moral justice in women's issues, one may begin by examining human nature. Two major theories in Asia can help us understand human nature in relation to morality. First, the theory of inherent human goodness encourages us to return to our natural state of goodness and to learn from it. Second, the theory that human beings are naturally inclined toward evil emphasizes the need for a strong educational framework to eliminate wrongdoing. Christian education recognizes human beings as creatures of God and calls them to follow the divine word. However, as Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) pointed out, human responses to moral issues often rely on justification without true reflection. This concern is also echoed in the biblical *hokmah* (wisdom) tradition, which presents the foundation of ultimate morality. This paper will present gender-related education through the lens of feminist biblical interpretation, exploring how moral perspectives and ethical formation intersect with women's issues.

The significant background of this paper originates from a tragic incident that occurred in Tainan in October 2020. This fatal crime prompted public reflection on the causes of sexual violence and the origin of the perpetrators' moral corruption. As Hannah Arendt analyzed in the case of Eichmann, she concluded with the concept of the "banality of evil": serious crimes are often committed by individuals who are thoughtless. This thoughtlessness can be seen in the depiction of the "simple ones" in Proverbs 1—those who lack the capacity for critical thinking, judgment, and moral action.

What is most striking about such perpetrators is that they do not feel the pain of their victims. Instead, they follow their own desires, which ultimately destroy the lives and minds of others. Such

destructive desires must be critically examined through the lens of *hokmah* education in the Christian tradition. In this tradition, the lusts of the flesh are not accepted within the fear of God.

Arendt's theory helps us understand the psychological and moral roots of such criminal behavior. To prevent violence in both society and religious contexts, an interdisciplinary approach that draws on both Arendt's philosophy and gender studies can deepen our understanding of gender-based violence and strengthen the field of gender studies. In particular, Arendt's theory is closely connected to political thought, as it seeks to explain human behavior within the framework of society—most notably in her study of totalitarianism.[1] Although criminal acts often occur in personal or private contexts, they reflect broader social and cultural atmospheres. In fact, feminist studies must challenge traditional political concepts, as conventional theories are no longer adequate for addressing contemporary social realities—especially when evaluated through specific rules and policies grounded in empirical evidence.[2]

This paper aims to explore the interdisciplinary connections between religious studies and gender studies by engaging with Arendt's theory and highlighting the importance of *hokmah* education through an exegetical study of Proverbs 1. The study seeks to contribute to three key areas: first, fostering dialogue between Asian philosophical traditions and a Western political thinker; second, emphasizing women's dignity as affirmed by God through righteousness and goodness in *hokmah* education; thrid, proposing gender education through biblical texts in higher education to help prevent sexual violence in society.

RESEARCH METHODS

To explore the relationship between education and human nature, the views of ancient Chinese philosophers Mencius (372–289 BCE) and Xunzi (c. 310–235 BCE) on the nature of good and evil are pivotal to the foundation of moral studies. Their insights lead me to revisit Hannah Arendt's theory of the "banality of evil" as a way to reflect on human conduct and spiritual growth. For religious individuals, banal opinions and thoughtless actions can be transformed through divine instruction, as spiritual and educational formation in God is a central virtue of faith. Therefore, Arendt's theory may be reinterpreted in light of the *hokmah* (wisdom) tradition found in Proverbs 1.

[1] Hannah Arendt, *The Origin of Totalitarianism* (Schocken Books, 1951).
[2] Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), 6-7.

DISCUSSION

Mencius' Goodness as Human Nature

Western philosophers have long explored the nature of humanity, and similarly, Confucian thinkers believed that people are born with inherent traits. Mencius, one of the prominent Confucian philosophers, taught his students that "[human nature] is good."[3]

The basic understanding of his philosophy originated to recognize what are the nature of human beings. For gender centered education, we need to understand people's characteristics as natural good or natural evil. Then, our approach for education will depend on the original characteristic of human.

The philosophers in the West have been interested in the natures of human beings, likewise according to Confucian philosophers, human was born with certain characteristics. In Chinese philosophy, *hsing* (human nature) was an essential topic to know human beings. Mencius, like the 'Nurture of Life' school, sees human nature as the key to realizing one's full potential. This includes both moral growth and longevity.[4] To achieve this, one must use the mind to discern and choose what nourishes life and avoid what is harmful. Mencius, a Confucian philosopher, taught his disciples that "human nature is good." [5] The foundation of his philosophy lies in recognizing the nature of human beings. Just as water naturally flows downward, human goodness is an innate characteristic.[6]

For gender-centered education, we need to consider whether human nature is inherently good or inherently evil. Our approach to gender education should be based on this fundamental understanding of human nature. If a man commits violence against a woman, the goal of education would be to help him rediscover and affirm the goodness within himself. However, this method may not be effective in cases where a person's behavior has been deeply shaped by family or societal experiences.

Mencius's idea that human nature is good means people tend to become good in a healthy environment. But this can seem circular if goodness is defined by the environment and the environment by the goodness it produces. Mencius also recognizes the goodness may not be

[3] "Mencius," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/#GoodHumaNatu
[4] A. C. Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature* (State University New York Press, 1990), 41.
[5] "Mencius," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/#GoodHumaNatu
[6] Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 44.

working in human life, so, even though the nature of human being is good. To become goodness is important during the bad implements. Human beings can have a good mind because it is originated in human nature.

Mencius's disciple Gongsun Chou asks him whether it is true that someone said human nature is neither inherently good nor inherently bad. Mencius answered that All humans possess innate moral feelings: compassion (benevolence), disdain (righteousness), respect (propriety), and approval/disapproval (wisdom or moral judgment).[7] Kwong-loi Shun summarizes Mencius's view that human nature is inherently good, as people possess emotional predispositions oriented toward goodness. Moral failure is not due to human nature itself but results from neglecting or damaging this moral potential rather than cultivating it properly in the right direction.[8]

In Mencius's philosophy, the feelings of approval and disapproval are rooted in wisdom, which, along with benevolence, righteousness, and propriety, arises from within rather than being externally imposed. In a dialogue with Gongduzi, Mencius explains the difference between great and petty people.[9] He emphasizes that while the senses can be misled by external things, the heart has the capacity for reflection. True greatness comes from cultivating this inner reflection. When one prioritizes what is truly important—the greater moral values—the lesser, external influences lose their power. Thus, becoming a great person is a matter of internal moral cultivation.

In addition, Mencius had a dialogue with King Hsüan of Ch'i and emphasized that a good man's characteristic is the ability to find joy in becoming a true king—especially in exercising authority. A true king will share in the people's joys and also be concerned with their suffering.[10] While Mencius accepted the legitimacy of ultimate authority, he also insisted that such authority must be grounded in the inherent goodness of human nature.

Regardless of a person's social status, there is no process to return to the original goodness of human nature. By arguing that Mencius overlooks the effort required to become a virtuous person.[11] In other words, in the theory of Mencius, there is no process to return the original goodness. In other words, it may be understood in the concept of repentance of Christian theories.

[7] "Mencius," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/#GoodHumaNatu
[8] "Mencius," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/#GoodHumaNatu
[9] "Mencius," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mencius/#GoodHumaNatu
[10] D. C. Lau, *Mencius: Translated with Introduction and Notes, Revised Edition* (Penguin Books, 2003),64, Book I, Part B, 4.
[11] Roger T. Ames, "Mencius and a Process Notion of Human Nature," *Mencius Contexts and Interpretations,* edited by Alan K.L. Chan (University of Hawai'i Press, 2002), 73.

"Within Christian discourse, the process of returning to one's good nature is understood as repentance. Repentance follows acts of immorality, as such actions are seen as contrary to the divine will. In Hebrew, שׁוּב (*shuv*) is usually translated as 'to repent.' It literally means to turn back from a path that departs from God's way. If human beings fear God as the highest wisdom, they may avoid mistakes or acts of immorality. Furthermore, there would be no need for repentance.

Our question is whether gender education can succeed through awakening the predisposed moral mind in human beings. Specifically, if we affirm that human nature is good, can we rehabilitate sexual predators with hope? Applying this concept of goodness to gender issues requires benevolence in practice. Importantly, Mencius emphasized that goodness refers to actions or individuals aligned with Heaven and the Way—not to Heaven or the Way themselves. This suggests that Nature is not inherently good, much like water's tendency to flow downward is not considered an independent act of goodness. [12]

Similarly, in Christianity, human beings can be agents who follow God's direction, but they are not God. Thus, the goodness within human nature must be guided by חוכמה (*hokmah,* wisdom) if we are to respond meaningfully to today's gender crises and contribute to a better world.

Xunzi's Natural Evilness

Unlike Mencius, Xunzi's insists on the natural evilness of human beings: "Human nature is bad. Its goodness comes from artifice. It is in the nature of humans to be born with a fondness for profit. . . . They are born with hates and dislikes. . . . That is why people will inevitably fall into conflict and struggle if they simply follow along with their nature and their dispositions."[13] The idea that human beings are naturally inclined toward evil helps us understand the origin of hatred and violence. In particular, it is difficult to explain the reasons for violent actions solely based on human reasoning. Xunzi also acknowledged the possibility of human goodness, however, it does not arise naturally but rather through artificial actions and cultivated attitudes.

Xunzi defines *hsing* as innate desires and faculties present at birth, which, if unmoderated, lead to harmful actions. His concept of *e* (bad) differs from a Western idea of "evil," focusing more on unrefined impulses.[14] Thus, Xunzi uses the metaphors of wood and metal: crooked wood needs shaping and effort to become straight, and blunt metal requires sharpening and grinding to become

[12] Graham, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, 67.
[13] Michael Puett and Christine Gross-Loh, translated, *Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi, Selected Passages from the Chinese Philosophers in Paths* (Simon & Schuster, 2016), 34.
[14] "Xunzi," https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/xunzi/#HumaNatuXing

sharp. In the same way, human beings can be improved through discipline, just as wood and metal are refined craftsmanship.[15] However, a tree can be naturally beautiful, even without a craftsman's shaping. In contrast, the shaping of human beings is considered an "artificial process." For human effort and self-discipline, rituals and propriety are essential. Xunzi insists that human nature is granted by Heaven. Since Heaven endows humans with their nature, sages use rituals and propriety to guide it, enabling people to learn and perfect themselves through effort.[16] Ritual is a common element in all religions. Xunzi also links human nature with ritual, particularly in the pursuit of goodness. This suggests that human hatred or violence can be transformed in the presence of the divine.

Furthermore, if human beings are born with an inherently evil nature, the pedagogy of education must focus on the removal of that evil. Sexual aggressors, for example, should be educated through methods that acknowledge this view of human nature, with the hope of building a better future. Addressing violence through education can be likened to a warfare strategy. Victims are often deceived by their predators. As Xunzi states, "All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when capable, we must seem incapable; when using our forces, we must seem inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near."[17] Gender-based violence often begins with deception, a strategy similar to warfare. The aggressor crafts a false sense of safety, luring the victim into a trap. Eventually, the violence takes hold, catching the victim off guard.

The prevention of gender-based violence requires attention to two dimensions: the aggressor's side and the victim's side. Xunzi's understanding of the inherent evil in human nature—even in the context of warfare strategy—emphasizes the importance of educating aggressors in self-cultivation to eliminate their violent tendencies. For victims, it is crucial to be aware of the deceptive strategies used by predators.

However, violent behavior is not easily explained, as we see in the contrasting theories of human nature from Mencius and Xunzi. Regardless of whether human nature is inherently good or evil, Hannah Arendt's concept of the 'banality of evil' illustrates how brutal actions can arise—

[15] Puett and Gross-Loh, *Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi,* 34.
[16] Puett and Gross-Loh, *Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi,* 34.
[17] Requoted from Li Zehou, *A History of Chinese Thoughts, Translated, with a Philosophical Introduction by Andrew Lambert* (Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2020), 80.

not from deep hatred, but from a failure to evaluate authority, a lack of critical thinking, and an absence of compassion for the suffering of others.

Hannah Arendt (1906-1975)'s Banality of Evil

Before discussing Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil," let me briefly introduce her major works to better understand her thoughts on evil. Arendt's reflection—"The sad truth of the matter is that most evil is done by people who never made up their minds to be or to do good or evil"[18]—invites deeper reflection on the origins of evil. She suggests that people may commit evil unconsciously, without deliberate intent. If this is the case, the focus shifts from the origins of human nature to the structures and habits that allow such unconscious participation in wrongdoing. Arendt engaged a wide range of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences. As a political philosopher, she critically examined the nature of dictatorship and totalitarianism—particularly shaped by her experience fleeing Nazi persecution.

As mentioned in the introduction, her first major work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, [19] responds to the horrors of her time, including Nazi atrocities against Jews and Stalinist repression in the Soviet Union. She argued that these regimes were not merely extreme forms of tyranny but represented a new kind of government rooted in terror and ideological falsehoods.[20] Arendt's philosophical insights invite us to understand totalitarianism as a form of political evil that manifests in the public sphere. European populations became vulnerable to totalitarianism due to deep-rooted societal problems that eroded the public realm, weakening its function as a space for liberty, freedom, and political engagement.[21] Arendt might have continued to focus solely on political evil in the public realm if she had not encountered the case of Adolf Eichmann.

Hannah Arendt's world-famous book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, [22] is both a study and a reflection on the trial of Adolf Eichmann's trial, his testimony at the Jerusalem District Court in Jerusalem between April and December of 1961. Adolf Eichmann (1906–1962), a high-ranking Nazi official, was accused of crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. Appointed by SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich,[23] Eichmann was responsible for managing the logistics of deporting Jews to ghettos and transporting them to

[18] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (Harcourt, 1978), 180.
[19] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Schocken Books, 1951).
[20] "Hannah Arendt," https://iep.utm.edu/hannah-arendt/#H6
[21] "Hannah Arendt," https://iep.utm.edu/hannah-arendt/#H6
[22] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Penguin Books, 2006).
[23] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* 36.

extermination camps during World War II. His role was central to the implementation of the Holocaust, particularly in organizing Jewish emigration and deportation. After the war, Eichmann fled Germany and escaped to Argentina, but he was captured by the Israeli Mossad in 1960. He was found guilty of war crimes and executed in 1962. [24]

Arendt's report explores how individuals justify their actions—whether good or evil. She highlights that the violence of the Holocaust was carried out not only by leaders but also by ordinary people—our neighbors, so to speak. She observed that although Eichmann's actions were monstrous, he did not appear as a demon, but as an ordinary person.[25] That is why, she argues, evil is banal.

Eichmann repeatedly pleaded not guilty during his trial. He claimed that he was simply following orders from the Nazi regime. He told the court that he had to obey the Führer's commands because he was employed as a functionary within the Security Service (SS). He argued that failing to carry out his assigned duties would have caused serious problems. Eichmann's desire to perform his job routinely and efficiently overrode any moral consideration or sense of justice toward the Jews. His diligent efforts directly violated Jewish life and contributed to the collapse of society's moral conscience. Although he claimed to be working merely for the sake of his family, he showed no awareness or sensitivity to the moral weight of good and evil during the Holocaust. Yet his definition of responsibility was limited to a narrow view of family that excluded the humanity of others, particularly the Jews.

Eichmann's case prompts us to reconsider what it means to build a better world. If our leaders are evildoers, can we truly separate ourselves from their actions? Eichmann's thinking and behavior reflected the prevailing ideology of his time. The fact that he changed his name while living as a fugitive suggests a clear awareness of public judgment and historical accountability. Yet aligning with the dominant trend of an era cannot justify his actions—his choices cost countless lives. Not everyone joined the SS to promote their careers. Notably, Hannah Arendt—born in the same year as Eichmann—was forced to flee the Gurs internment camp with nothing but a toothbrush, simply to save her life.[26]

Arendt examined the underlying structure of Eichmann's thoughts and behavior. Her report

[24] "Adolf Eichmann," https://www.britannica.com/biography/Adolf-Eichmann
[25] Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* 54-55.
[26] "Hannah Arendt on Fleeing from the Internment Camp," https://en.we-refugees-archive.org/archive/hannah-arendt-on-fleeing-from-the-internment-camp/

on the trial highlighted his failure to exercise three essential virtues in his role: thinking, judgment, and responsible action. She described Eichmann as an ordinary bureaucrat whose unthinking obedience enabled genocide. His actions were driven by a lack of critical judgment, making evil appear "banal" as he carried out atrocities without reflecting on their human impact.[27] We reconsider her conclusion of the report, the banality of evil, in order to challenge gender-based violence and hopefully to prevent it in our daily life.

Likewise, I argue that today's gender discrimination and violence often emerge from a desire that perpetrators seek to gratify through imperceptible degrees. In such cases, we must examine the perpetrators' intentions and actions in light of the concept of the "banality of evil." When seemingly nonthreatening actions accumulate without critical thinking, moral judgment, or righteous resistance, they can lead to disastrous consequences for innocent victims.

Can we educate potential "Eichmanns"—those who act without reflection—so that they develop not only basic reasoning but also inclusive and diverse perspectives, particularly regarding the prevention of gender-based violence? Sexual violence, in particular, can sometimes be masked by a misguided desire for personal happiness. In such cases, individuals are often unable to recognize their own moral blindness. Religion can help people reflect more deeply on their beliefs and assumptions. In the Old Testament tradition, *hokmah* challenges people's minds and transforms their actions from evil to good.

The highest wisdom in the *hokmah* education of Christianity is the fear of God. Human beings develop knowledge and science from ancient times to today, as we can read from the wisdom literature. Human rights violation including sexual violence has been reported through most of human history. The research argues that Eichmann's thoughtless crime was based on the reliance on the absolute power or knowledge in human authority.

Hokmah **Education in Proverbs 1: From Self-Desire to the Fear of the Lord**

The *hokmah* education found in Christian wisdom literature can serve as foundation for promoting gender awareness in higher education. It introduces a paradigm shift in gender studies by emphasizing the suppression of violent or destructive desires. In Christian hokmah education, the highest form of wisdom is the fear of God. From ancient times to the present, human beings have pursued knowledge and science, as reflected in wisdom literature. Despite this, violations of human rights—including sexual violence—have persisted throughout much of human history.

[27] "Hannah Arendt," https://iep.utm.edu/hannah-arendt/#H6

Let us begin with the concept of wisdom and education in the ancient Greek philosophical tradition. In Greek thought, wisdom is regarded as an *arête* (virtue) essential for achieving true *eudaimonia* (happiness). Plato and Aristotle viewed humans as not inherently good, but as capable of becoming good through habituation, developing a "second nature" shaped by the practice of virtue. [28] The Greek tradition reflects deeply on the nature of human beings, understanding wisdom as a foundational virtue and a key to human flourishing.

However, in the Hebrew tradition, the foundation of *hokmah* lies in the presence of God, rather than in human nature or virtue. As Proverbs 1:7 states, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction" (all biblical quotations are from the NRSV). We can learn the meaning of *hokmah* from Proverbs, as it is part of the wisdom literature in the Christian tradition. Human beings' limitations and imperfections are revealed through knowledge and wisdom. Martin Luther emphasized human imperfection in the *Ninety-Five Theses* (1517), particularly in articles 5 and 6, which assert that even the pope cannot remit sin despite his high position.[29] Furthermore, the fear of God is closely connected to education; wisdom must come from God and can be taught.

When individuals commit gender-based violence, they often conceal their actions and view themselves in isolation, hidden from the gaze of others. Such thinking lacks the awareness of God's presence and reflects the banality of evil through unexamined, routine acts of violence. Emphasizing God's word in daily life provides moral and spiritual guidance, enabling individuals to discern their responsibilities even amid the routine and banality of everyday existence.

Verses 1-7: Wisdom brings life.

Proverbs 1 consists of three parts: the prologue (vv. 1–7), wisdom for young people (vv. 8–19), and the call of wisdom (vv. 20–32). The golden rule of wisdom—the fear of the Lord—is the conclusion of the prologue and serves as one of the major and foundational themes of Proverbs. What does "the fear of the Lord" mean in verse 7? Verses 2–6 guide us to reflect on its meaning. This verse presents the key message of wisdom literature and the central purpose of the book. These verses show that the editors emphasize true wisdom, grounded in religious tradition, as the

[28] Darin H. David and Paul J. Wadell, "Educating Lives for Christian Wisdom," *International Journal of Christianity & Education*, 2016 Vol 20 (2), 92.
[29] "The Project Gutenberg eBook of Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences," https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/274/pg274-images.html

path to life—a life full of purpose, vitality, and spiritual depth.[30] The fear of the Lord must be understood in connection with life. Life can be meaningful in daily matters, but it must also be understood as living in resistance to death. Gender-based violence deprives women of life. A wise person must fear the Lord, who is the giver and sustainer of all life.

The subtitle in verse 1, "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel," may serve as the title for both the Book of Proverbs as a whole and for chapter 1 specifically. It also suggests Solomon as the author of the proverbs. However, most scholars agree that the authorship and dating of the text are from a period much later than Solomon's reign (966–926 B.C.E.).[31] Solomon, as an idealized figure representing royal authority and wisdom in ancient Israel, is likely invoked to support a royalist ideology.[32] Such a context may also suggest the involvement of ancient scribal schools in shaping an educational society.[33] Verses 2–6 outline the purpose of the book: to impart wisdom, instruction, and understanding through learning, gaining, teaching, hearing, and interpreting. Before introducing the fear of the Lord in verse 7, these educational formats clearly reveal the reasons for reading Proverbs—promoting moral insight, justice, prudence, and deeper discernment.

In particular, verse 3 presents the purpose of gaining instruction in wisdom: righteousness, justice, and equity. These are essential virtues in any society—across time and cultures, whether East or West. If wisdom truly includes justice, then gender-based violence cannot be ignored or tolerated. It must be addressed not merely as a violation of human rights, but as a failure of wisdom itself. A society guided by true wisdom must uphold justice for all, especially for those who are vulnerable.

In verse 4, we learn who can be taught: the simple and the young. The Hebrew word for "simple" is *pethiy*, which can mean foolish or naïve. A *pethiy* can be trained by wise teachers or influenced by evil.[34] The simple person is often more vulnerable to being shaped by others' decisions rather than acting from their own discernment. Hannah Arendt highlights how

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[30] Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Canticles, Ecclesiastes, and Esther,* The Form of the Old Testament Literature, Vol. XIII (William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 53.
[31] For discussions on the dating of Proverbs 1–9, refer to the work of Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Yale Bible, Vol. 18 A (Yale University Press, 2000), 48-49.
[32] Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 56-58.
[33] Jenry E. C. Mandey and Pujiastuti E. Sindoro, "Terminology of Didactic Wisdom in the Ancient Israelite Scribal Schools as Presented in Proverbs 1:1-7," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46 (1) a3271.https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v46i1.3271.
[34] Francis Brown, S. R. Drivers and Charles A. Brigges, "פְּתִי," *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford University Press, 1978), 834.

suchunconscious decision-making enables the work of evil in the world. When individuals fail to think critically or morally, they become instruments of harm—often without full awareness of the consequences.

I previously referred to the banality of the predators—those who pursue their own desires under the illusion of goodness or personal fulfillment. Their actions are often simplistic, driven by unchecked desire and self-interest, rather than moral discernment. This reflects what Arendt called the "banality of evil"—the idea that evil is not always monstrous in appearance, but can emerge from thoughtless, routine, or socially accepted behavior.

Gender violence, in this context, is perpetuated not only through explicit cruelty but also through simplistic actions rooted in ignorance, entitlement, and indifference to others' suffering. Proverbs calls for a wisdom that resists such superficiality—a discernment that promotes justice, protects life, and upholds the dignity of all, especially women. Like Eichmann, sexual aggressors often lack awareness of others' feelings; instead, they simply act according to their own desires, without moral reflection or empathy.

Verses 8-19: Wisdom warns, sinners wait to lure.

In Proverbs 1:8–19, young people are urged to listen to their parents, whose instruction and teaching are described as "a fair garland for your head and pendants for your neck" (v. 9). These ornaments symbolize the remembrance of the law of the Lord.[35] Keeping the law is closely tied to following parental guidance, which is portrayed as a source of moral and spiritual treasure. The call to heed one's parents reflects their authority, as well as their role in offering both promises and warning.[36] Wisdom and virtuous living are passed down through family education, forming a moral foundation for the youth.

However, sons and daughters are easily influenced by their peers. Sinners—often acquaintances—entice the young with soft and seductive language, saying, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us wantonly ambush the innocent" (v. 11). If they follow such paths, Sheol awaits to swallow them alive (v. 12a). In a modern context, such corrupting influences may be likened to the Nazi Party, which used persuasive and deceptive rhetoric to lead people into destruction. The Nazis' deceptive leadership misled people and ultimately drove them toward destruction—what Proverbs refers to as "the Pit" (cf. v. 12). A more contemporary interpretation

[35] Fox, *Proverbs 1-9,* 84.
[36] Roland Murphy, *Proverbs*, Word Biblical Commentary, 22 (Thomas Nelson, 1998), 11.

of this passage can draw insight from the experiences of Tiv Christian youth in Nigeria.[37] For many young people, the "sinners" are often peers who influence them toward criminal behavior. Therefore, there is a strong need to develop church programs that provide both practical and biblical support to guide the youth. Verses 11–12 serve as a reminder that evildoers lie in wait, enticing others into violence and deadly crimes—often without giving them space for sound judgment or critical thinking.

In addition, verses 15–16 warn young people not to walk in the ways of sinners or follow in their paths, lest they hurry to shed blood. These metaphorical expressions illustrate how evil leads to violence—similar to a tragic incident that occurred on campus last year. Verse 18 states, "Yet they lie in wait—to kill themselves! They set an ambush—for their own lives!" Evil, in this context, is portrayed as self-destructive. Young people must avoid associating with those who pursue violence, as such companionship ultimately leads to their own downfall. In aligning themselves with evildoers, youth risk losing their own lives.

In the case of Eichmann, he was eventually executed, even though he had fled from Germany to Argentina. Had he refused to follow the Nazi Party's orders in earlier years, his life may have been more difficult, but he might have avoided a life sentence—or even execution. A banal life, when guided by critical thinking and God's wisdom, can lead to a morally sound and meaningful existence, rather than blindly following human authority. In the same way, today's younger generation must reflect on their actions and choose to follow God's wisdom instead of acting on harmful desires—particularly in the context of gender-based violence.

Verse 20-33: Listen to the lady wisdom.

In verses 20–33, wisdom is personified as a sage. She cries out in the streets and raises her voice in the public squares. As a female teacher and sage, wisdom speaks at the busiest intersections and at the entrances of the city (v. 21)—places that draw the maximum public attention. These settings emphasize the need to bring gender issues into public discourse. The portrayal of wisdom as a woman invites a feminist interpretation, connecting her to ancient Near Eastern traditions of female wisdom deities, such as the Sumerian Nisaba, the Egyptian Ma'at, or

[37] Uroko, F.C. & Enobong, S., 2021, '"I loved to be included" (Proverbs 1:8–19): The church and Tiv Christian youth development', *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies* 77(4), a6532. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6532

possibly a Canaanite fertility goddess derived from the Sumerian Inanna or the Semitic Ishtar.[38] Additionally, this imagery reflects the honored roles of women as wives and mothers in ancient societies. Lady Wisdom's voice must be heard in public spaces today, especially in discussions concerning justice, gender, and moral responsibility.

In particular, the voice is heard in the street, the open square, busy corners, and at the city gates—demonstrating the public visibility and importance of the message. In ancient Israel, the city gate was a central place where people negotiated legal matters, conducted business, discussed politics, engaged in mockery, and heard prophetic announcements.[39] What clearly unites these locations is their function as spaces for gathering and communal interaction. Women's voices must be heard clearly, especially in cases of sexual violence. However, the legal process should be approached with wisdom and sensitivity in public. To seek wisdom means not only to pursue justice but also to ensure that survivors are not retraumatized through testimony or investigation. Without proper emotional support and healing, these processes may reopen wounds. Furthermore, public rumors and social stigma can cause a second wave of violence. Therefore, to seek wisdom is to balance justice with compassion, safeguarding the dignity and well-being of those who have suffered.

Wisdom continues to awaken the simple, saying, "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" (v. 22). *Hokmah* offers to pour out her thoughts and speak her words to them. However, when serious issues such as sexual violence or the Holocaust are treated with simplicity or thoughtlessness, they reveal a profound lack of respect for life. The simple ones reject the voice of *hokmah*—they refuse her counsel and ignore her reproof (vv. 24–25). Eventually, they may experience deep regret. *Hokmah* sets a time limit for her guidance. When her voice is ignored, disaster follows. As a result, *hokmah* will laugh at their calamity and mock when panic strikes them (vv. 25–26).

In verse 28, we see *hokmah*'s firm refusal to respond: "Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but will not find me." The reason for this silence is clear: "because they did not choose the fear of the Lord" (v. 29b). As in verse 7, verse 29 emphasizes that the fear of God is the foundation of a wise life. Cain, for example, lacked this

[38] Carole R. Fontaine, "Proverbs," *Women's Bible Commentary* Expanded Edition, Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, editors (Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 153.
[39] Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: An Israelites Goddess Redefined* (The Pilgrim Press, 1986), 25-26.

knowledge and failed to understand God's will. He reasoned simply: if Abel is gone, God may accept my offering, since no one else can make one. However, Cain did not fear God, who then cursed him, saying, "When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (Genesis 4:12). God did not respond to Cain's actions but instead heard only the cry of Abel's blood from the ground. Cain became the first murderer in history. His actions harmed not only his brother but also his family. His mother became both the mother of the first victim and the first murderer. Evil acts brought tragedy into the first family. Their story is anything but banal.

Those who listen to *hokmah* will live in safety and ease, without fear of disaster (v. 33). The "fear of the Lord" does not mean being terrified of God; rather, it represents moral wisdom that leads to a joyful and fulfilling life. Both Eichmann and sexual offenders followed the desires of their own hearts and became consumed by their own schemes. As the text warns, "For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them" (v. 32).

CONCLUSION

This paper aims to analyze the concept of the *banality of evil*, as theorized by Hannah Arendt, in dialogue with theological perspectives, in order to address and prevent gender-based violence today. Arendt's theory has been widely appreciated, as it reveals that evil does not always appear in the form of a terrifying monster. Instead, evil can be ordinary. It is banal. Its danger lies in its simplicity and normality—evil often operates through thoughtless, everyday actions rather than overt monstrosity.

To understand violence, we must examine human nature. In particular, ancient Asian philosophers offer valuable insights. Their arguments prompt us to explore whether human beings are inherently good or evil. Mencius argues for the inherent goodness of human nature, while Xunzi asserts that human nature is naturally inclined toward evil. Both philosophers reflect on the potential for goodness in humanity and emphasize the role of education in cultivating a better life. However, their theories do not fully address the influence of collective human behavior—specifically, how individuals may easily conform to the prevailing spirit of the times, even under corrupt or evil leadership. In the case of gender-based violence, which this paper seeks to highlight, these classical theories benefit from being examined alongside Arendt's theory of the banality of evil. Her perspective helps illuminate how ordinary people can participate in harmful systems through thoughtlessness, rather than intentional cruelty.

If contemporary education follows a totalitarian model—like that of the Nazi regime—it conditions people to pledge loyalty and blindly follow orders in the name of peace and security. This kind of obedience contributed to the Holocaust, carried out not only by leaders but also by countless ordinary individuals—

many "Eichmanns," as Arendt would say. Her analysis of the banality of evil reveals how human beings can act on self-interest and desire without ethical reflection or altruism.

If we only pursue our own desires and personal happiness, we become vulnerable to living an "evil" life in banal, everyday situations. In Proverbs 1, *hokmah* cries out to the simple, urging them to become wise. The simple must choose the fear of the Lord in order to preserve life in God. In Proverbs, *hokmah* brings life, while *Sheol*—representing the power of evil—appears under a familiar and ordinary disguise. Yet Lady Wisdom calls people to resist such everyday evils. *Hokmah* education encourages young people to practice righteousness, justice, and equity as a way to prevent sexual violence and to address gender issues with moral clarity. Arendt's emphasis on the capacity to think, to critically judge, and to act ethically serves as a crucial framework for evaluating moral responsibility in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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