



“Operation Finale”: The Movie and the Lessons of Adolf Eichmann

Operation Finale, with Ben Kingsley starring as “architect of the Final Solution” Adolf Eichmann, dramatizes the capture by the Israeli Mossad (secret national intelligence agency) of the highest-ranking Nazi who escaped to Argentina, and his subsequent trial and execution in Israel.

The movie demonstrates Lord Acton’s famous dictum that power tends to corrupt (whether that was director Chris Weitz’s intention), and that far too many human beings given the opportunity to do truly evil things will do so. Conversely, there are no doubt many human beings who are fortunately never given that opportunity, and are thus regarded as just ordinary men and women doing ordinary things.

Imagine Eichmann’s fellow Nazi leader Josef Mengele, “The Angel of Death.” Were it not for the Nazi movement, he might have lived out his life as a respected country doctor in Germany. As it was, he ended his days as an abortionist in South America after his cruel medical experiments in the service of Adolf Hitler.

In the movie, it is 15 years after World War II when a man brings information to the Israeli Mossad that Eichmann is living in Argentina. As the movie portrays it, a young Jewish woman, Sylvia Hermann (played by Haley Lu Richardson), meets a young German named Klaus Eichmann (Joe Alwyn) in a Buenos Aires movie theater. Eichmann does not realize that Sylvia is Jewish, but rather thinks she is just another German expatriate in the South American country, and they develop something of a brief romance.

She soon discovers that his father is the infamous Adolf Eichmann, and she reports her finding to the Mossad. Klaus takes Sylvia to a secret Nazi meeting, which is filled with anti-Semitic rantings. When he realizes that she is Jewish, he wants nothing more to do with her. Ironically, his father, who is posing in South America as Ricardo Clement, chastises him for being mean to the girl.

This is not the only example in the film that Eichmann was not just the monster who was a leader in the Holocaust, but also a human being with feelings, and even capable of kindness. Another scene shows Eichmann and a younger son watching trains go by his modest house. After he is captured, he has one request (which is eventually honored) — to see his wife one more time before he is executed.

But the capture and legal execution of Eichmann, after a trial in Israel, is considered by the highest levels of the Israeli government extremely important to the people of Israel, and to Jews across the globe. Later in the movie, Eichmann, without being told of this, grasps this reality, but he dismisses the





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idea that his lone death could atone for the deaths of six million Jews.

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion (played by Simon Russell Beale) told the Mossad agents the importance of their mission of bringing Eichmann back alive, without simply putting a bullet in his head. They will prevent the world from allowing Eichmann and the evil he represents from drifting off into obscurity. “If you succeed,” said the prime minister, “for the first time in our history we will judge our executioner, and we will warn off any who wish to follow his example.... For the sake of our people, please do not fail.”

The movie gives us a hint of the secret operations of agencies such as the Mossad. The agents leave Israel at different times, for different destinations. They then leave again from those destinations for Buenos Aires, where they link up once again. The agents give no indication in public that they know each other, using the surreptitious passing of notes in restaurants, for example, to communicate.

They discover that Eichmann is working as a foreman at a nearby Mercedes plant, and travels to and from the plant by bus. Eichmann is captured by one of the agents, Peter Malkin (Oscar Isaac), while Eichmann is walking back to his house. At first, Eichmann tells the agents that they have the wrong man, maintaining his Ricardo Clement alias, insisting that he is a Jew from Palestine. But finally, he admits that he is indeed Adolf Eichmann.

Eichmann argues that since he is a citizen of Argentina and his alleged crimes took place in Germany, Israel is not the proper venue for a trial. The agents, naturally, are unmoved by his legal reasoning. He then tries to convince his captors that he actually saved many Jews from death.

When told that the Nazis treated the Jews like animals, Eichmann retorts, “We’re all animals — Jews, Germans, everyone.” Without probably intending to, this touches on an important part of Nazi ideology. They were enamored with Darwinian evolution, believing that some humans (such as the Germans) were farther along in the evolutionary chain than others (such as Jews and Gypsies).

Eichmann is even portrayed as making a joke about such Nazi beliefs, telling Malkin that he and other Nazis often made jokes that the ideal Nazi was as “tall as Goebels, as slim as Goring, and as blonde as Hitler.”

A dramatic escape from an airport has overtones of the famous scene in *Casablanca*, where Rick (played by Humphrey Bogart) willingly gives up the beautiful Ilsa (played by Ingrid Bergman) for the greater cause of fighting Hitler’s National Socialism. Only this time, this is a true story, with Malkin taking on the role of Rick.

All in all, the movie makes an important point. Far too often, evil is trivialized in today’s world by picturing villains as though they are comic book characters. Eichmann played an important role in one of history’s most evil events, yet we find it hard to imagine that such evil can be perpetrated by human beings who appear to be good family men.

The lesson is clear. As Thomas Jefferson said, “In questions of power, then, let no more be heard of confidence in man, but bind him down by the chains of the Constitution.” Because human beings are far too often capable of such evil as Hitler and Eichmann, we must have limits on the power of government.

Image: Screenshot of [the official website of Operation Finale](#)



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