ABSTRACT

Social psychology of Nazism: Conformism, Obedience and Abuse of Power

Thesis *Social Psychology of Nazism: Conformism, Obedience and Abuse of Power* deals with a human behaviour at the time of Nazism. Since the end of the Second World War, we have been trying to find an explanation of our actions at the time. How could we have participated in torturing and killing so many innocent people? And could we commit something similar again?

The horrific nature of the above-mentioned human action is exemplified in the first chapter of this thesis by the story of ordinary men of the Reserve Police Battalion 101. In 1942, at the orders of their superiors these very ordinary German citizens executed 1500 Jewish inhabitants of the Polish village of Józefów.

In the following chapters, three important socio-psychological experiments of the second half of the 20th century are analyzed to elucidate the natural tendencies of human behaviour that are critical to a person's ability to act as mentioned above. Firstly, the Solomon E. Asch experiment, which investigates conformism and helps us to understand why we are able to commit evil or not to intervene against it under social pressure. Stanley Milgram's experiment on obedience follows. Milgram indicates how it is easy for most people to obey the authority and follow their orders that would be considered as immoral by the same persons in other circumstances. The last of these researches is the Stanford Prison Experiment realized by Philip G. Zimbardo, which indicates how ordinary people become perpetrators of evil just because they are given the role of exercising power over others.

The findings from the above-mentioned experiments are used in the last chapter of this thesis to explain the behaviour of ordinary people at the time of Nazism. This chapter also contains a brief critique of the self-reflection of society after the Second World War with regard to the areas in which the society responds to the above-mentioned findings and in which it overlooks them.