

## R E V I E W S   &   R E P O R T S

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Philip Zimbardo. *The Lucifer Effect*, New York: Random House 2007, pp 576.  
Polish translation: Anna Cybulko, Joanna Kowalczywska, Józef Radzicki, Marcin Zieliński, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2008, pp. 486.

During the Nuremberg Trials, only the most prominent military men and government officials were prosecuted for the crimes of the Third Reich; however, these were average German citizens, numerous military subordinates and lower-rank officials that conscientiously introduced the plans of the architects of evil. The commonly accepted practice of explaining the behavior of those people and thus suspending their personal responsibility was justified by external factors such as ideology and orders. This simple justification raised and still raises doubts and sometimes even indignation. Can such an argument for their defense endure when confronted with the heinousness of the facts? Since the Nuremberg Trials and the fall of communism, it has been a rather unpopular statement. We still ask with certain doubt: how can a normal, civilized man, in carrying out orders, commit such evils? How can we even try to explain his behavior and justify him?

Nowadays, an attempt to popularize a theory that refers again to external instead of subjective attributes of evil requires a lot of courage. Why does a psychologist engage in it? And does it mean an attempt to take the responsibility for disgraceful deeds away from the subject? How do good people turn evil? Is it possible to face the toxic pressure? And finally, where lies the secret of heroism? These are questions answered by Prof. Philip Zimbardo in his book *Lucifer Effect*. The study, published in Autumn 2008 as a part of the series *The Library of the Contemporary Psychology*, consists of almost five hundred pages divided into sixteen chapters which can be presented in six thematic parts.

The first part—*Psychology of Evil: Situated Character Transformations* introduces the problem of the transformation of good into evil and the idea of situational factors modifying human behavior. The chapter presents the traditional dichotomy of the essentialist and the accumulative approach in accounting for pathological behaviors. The former centers on evil as an inherent and necessary feature of the character of some individuals and the latter assumes that the man's capability for wrongdoing emerges as a consequence of the accumulation of the specific experiences, which create negative characteristics. After the presentation of the traditional model, Zimbardo

proposes adopting a broader perspective comprising three approaches: dispositional, situational and systemic. While the first position emphasizes the role of internal characteristics of an individual the next two focus on the external factors. The character of the situational and, more generally, systemic factors that create the conditions for evil to flourish, is shown in the example of crimes committed in different parts of the world and under varying circumstances.

The second part—the next eight chapters—constitutes an extensive and detailed presentation of the Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE). This part reveals the purpose of the experiment and its various inspirations, among which were contemporary conceptions of antisocial behavior and studies on its causes, as well as research on the way people adapt to the social roles of policemen, warders and prisoners. The main aim of the study was generally to distinguish between what people contribute to the prison situation and from how the situation itself changes those who enter it, and more specifically, to answer the question of the factors that influence and shape the prison warder.

Even though the conditions of the experiment, originally planned for 14 days, did not equal those of the real penitentiary, the prisoners still experienced great stress caused by numerous factors such as obvious lack of freedom and harsh treatment but also constant exhaustion. Woken up in the middle of the night, they were forced to perform a routine countdowns which the warders would, with time, make more difficult. Prisoners were also arbitrarily punished usually with gradually intensified physical exercises. As the experiment continued, the detainees were losing hope for any successful resistance to the warders' behavior. and even for the punctual end of the whole experiment or just for the possibility of being awarded a ticket of leave. Such hard conditions led eventually to the release of the one of the participants after only 36 hours due to the stress overload and emotional instability. Another participant was withdrawn by the SPE director after 72 hours of imprisonment. Eventually, the situation deteriorated too much and the experiment was ended on the fifth day.

The third part of the book, i.e. chapter ten and eleven, analyzes the importance and the message of the SPE as well as its ethical aspects. The whole undertaking concluded more surprisingly than initially expected and led to the recognition of the strength of the situational factors and the numerous effects of their toxic influence upon the human behavior. Zimbardo uses a comparison of the descent into hell to describe the participant's descent to the basement mock-prison. But what is this hell built of? From the very first day the warders, but also the prisoners, quickly began to internalize the assigned roles together with their specific requirements, aims and systems of value. The former, who were normal young students, turned into insensible, hostile and brutal warders to aggressively dominate their peers during eight-hour shifts spent in the experimental penitentiary. For this purpose, they efficiently used the available means, mostly different forms of punishment, for influencing the behavior and maintaining power. However, other, additional mechanisms were observed on

the part of the prison guardians. The use of the uniforms and mirror glasses strengthened the sense of anonymity and de-individuation. The requirements of the role, relatively high with respect to the reward, triggered the cognitive dissonance and the rationalization of dubious conduct. They were further enhanced by the presence of other warders and the pressure of social acceptance. Progressive changes in the perception of detainees led to their dehumanization and the weakening of the emotional response to their suffering, a so-called detached concern.

Severe conditions of the experiment had a great impact on prisoners who, among other effects, suffered the symptoms of stress overload, such as the loss of spatial and temporal orientation. The prisoners quickly forgot that their participation in the study was voluntary and that at any time they could be released on their demand. Interestingly, the volunteer student, who replaced the first withdrawn prisoner, during his first day under the conditions of the SPE internalized the role so strongly that his special task as a confidential informer to the researchers lost for him its initial importance. When the prisoners entered the assigned roles they established a collective identity centered around the antipathy towards the warders. In a few days, everyone gradually concentrated more on his own survival and the possibility of gaining at least minimal advantage. This lack of integration amongst detainees weakened them individually and as a group.

It must finally be added that none of the dispositional factors and participants' personalities could account for the drastic internal changes occurring during the whole experiment. On the basis of the recounted findings, Zimbardo forms a general concept of the situational factor and the broader, systemic attribution. He writes that most of us can undergo a major character change when we engage in a tangle of situational influences. Our image of what we would do in the moment of such a test, can only to a very limited extent resemble who we will become and what we are able to do when we find ourselves in the net of real situational interactions. In this context, he notices the value of the method of attributional magnanimity, which postulates to concentrate, in the process of explaining one's behavior, primarily on the analysis of the situation and circumstances and not on dispositional attributions. Where then lies the strength of the systemic factor identified with the political program and ideology? According to the author, it provides a "higher authority" which legitimizes various impersonations, the introduction of new rules and undertaking actions that would normally be restricted by already existing laws, moral norms and ethics.

The fourth part comprises two chapters devoted to social dynamics. It discusses mostly classical studies of social psychology which confirm the importance of the situational factors. The review embraces the studies of group influence and social modeling, S. Asch's experiments on conformism and S. Milgram's research on obedience of authority, together with their modifications and replications as well as various references to different studies and facts from contemporary history. In this part of the book Zimbardo presents research on anonymity and de-individuation, A. Bandura's

studies of the effects of de-humanization and moral disengagement. Finally, he describes the problem of the evil of inaction and the phenomenon of the diffusion of responsibility, supporting the account with studies carried by J. Darley and B. Latane and providing researchers' conclusions and guidelines which are to help in avoiding the traps of discussed mechanisms.

The next two chapters constitute a part devoted to the drama of Abu Ghraib. They present a detailed reconstruction of the pathological behavior that took place in the Iraqi prison controlled by the Americans. We learn how brutal and cruel the conduct of the American officers had been who had kept order in the premise only for few months before the shocking facts were revealed. These events gain special importance as their course and nature clearly reflects the situation present during the SPE. It is not surprising then that professor Zimbardo, when called as an expert witness for defense of one of the warders, agreed to testify during the trial. Further on in this part of the book, we learn about the configuration of circumstances accompanying the growing Abu Ghraib pathology. Then, relying on detailed reports, the author provides arguments confirming the role of the situational and systemic attributions as leading to the outbreak of evil in this Iraqi prison. He gives numerous examples of incidents of the abuse of the prisoners in which American soldiers and secret service agents took part during the war in Iraq and the so-called war on terror.

The closing chapter of the book indicates the possibility of resisting the destructive influence and situation and then it proceeds to the idea of heroism. Is a man capable of opposing such toxic circumstances? Certainly, the monograph lecture provides knowledge concerning the dangers that should be avoided. The author, however, takes a step forward and proposes a body of techniques, enabling the reader to actively oppose the evil influences of the society. Those methods comprise different ways of thinking and acting which are supposed to create a particular kind of style of individuals functioning among others and in various social situations. The proposed techniques promote constant alertness, awareness of the situation and a specific system of evaluation. The ten-point program of resistance extended by the source guide is worth thorough personal analysis. Zimbardo concludes with a short presentation of the idea of heroism flourishing aground positive psychology. He proposes the conceptualization, definition and typology of heroism and draws an interesting, multi-dimensional model. The closing message of this extensive monograph has a positive character and embraces an appeal for courage. The author wishes to instill in the reader the promoted thesis that being a hero is definitely within his/her capabilities.

In conclusion, the monography is extensive, it relates to rich sources and presents a convincing alternative for the dispositional approach in accounting for pathological behavior. But does it allow for taking responsibility away from the subject? This is not the case. The person is responsible for himself/herself, he/she is guilty and feels guilty for committing evil despite the fact that while the social factors were at work, his/her behavior was regulated by different rules, the rules of social dynamics; and the

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created situation can propel evil. What may be surprising is the fact that knowledge of social psychology is scarcely present outside the field of psychology. That is why a psychologist engages in it.

Kurt Lewin, since 1937, claimed that it is impossible to understand human behavior without the broader context of the whole situation. Zimbardo seems to develop this idea and in this book added an important, systemic factor to Lewin's equation, stating that behavior is a function of the person and his or her environment. Situational factors, as well as systemic, create in time the dynamics that is an invisible but powerful social force, often a toxic one, overwhelming the actor and leaving no place for free decisions. Such a broader context is crucial in answering question as to how good people turn evil. It is also impossible to judge human behavior without the broader context. And it should be clear that somebody takes responsibility much more than the guilty subject. Situational and more generally, systemic circumstances, its directors, should be seriously judged and after this is done, there is time to look at individual responsibility.

At the beginning of new millennium, the problem of evil requires inspection once again. Still remains for us the often unanswered question of the causes of bestiality, plentiful crimes and abuse, especially those during the twentieth century. Even though notions, such as the corrupt or crime-breeding regime and war machine, function in common awareness, there is still no coherent and comprehensive theory that would link the facts and explain the phenomena at the level of psychology. Philip Zimbardo presents such a theory and proposes certain countermeasures. It can only be hoped that his conception will clearly establish psychology's voice concerned with the drama of the individual's pathology in the common awareness.

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