

XXI: Psychology: Obedience to Authority:

Shift from Obeying Authority as a Virtue to Obeying Authority as a Vice

Q: Does one Obey Authority when it conflicts with Conscience?

A: Plato, Sophocles, Dante, Jesus, Shakespeare, Voltaire, Thoreau all say NO! Hobbes is the first to ever suggest that we do, but he gives individuals no sense of responsibility.

A: Since the Holocaust, the only truthful answer is YES.

Results:

65% went to 450 Volts (and this is hitting it three times)

No one stopped before 300 Volts (Extreme Intensity Shock, Agonizing Scream)

When the Experimenter administered the shocks, 93% went to 450 Volts.

Explanation:

1. Sadism? Monsters? No (Arendt)
2. Sense of Obligation overrides conscience
3. Perverse proof of Newton's First Law of Inertia
4. Murder is a prohibition in the Moral and Social order, but NOT in the Psychic or Instinctual Order.

So Why Obey?

1. Binding factors
 - a. Authority
 - b. Conviviality
 - c. Commitment to project
 - d. Awkward to Withdraw
2. Continual Adjustments/Rationalizations to reduce anxiety
 - a. Absorbed into the details of the mechanism—loss of context
 - b. Shift Responsibility to the Experimenter
3. No loss of Moral Center because actions are not moral responses, but responses to obedience.
 - a. Pride in how they did the job, not what they were doing
4. Drunk Excuse (Counteranthropomorphism)
Strip the human attributes from human systems. Dissociation.
 - a. Actions have No meaning
 - b. Actions have no Purpose
 - c. We are slaves to our own rules
5. Greater Good: benefit to society, to mankind
 - a. Trust and confidence in Authority
 - b. Act becomes secondary to its context
 - c. Victim's importance in the experiment
6. Rape Excuse (Devaluation of the Victim)
 - a. Victim deserves this treatment

Conclusions/Evaluations

1. It's easy to divorce beliefs from actions through technology. Without moral actions, morals themselves are irrelevant. This is how so many tyrannies are so successful.
 - a. Technology divorces belief from actions because there is no longer any intimate connection between the action and the result. Shift from hanging to firing squad or electric chair.
Proof: Himmler and Eichmann were both sickened when they toured KL's

Problems with Milgram:

1. Murder is not what he tests, but pain
2. Only males were tested
3. Both moral reasons and not-moral reasons (e.g. benefit to society is moral)
4. 2b and 5b contradict each other (act obscures context, context supercedes act)
5. Victim was not devalued or dehumanized prior to experiment. In fact, they have more value 5 and 6 contradict each other.
6. Assumption that Obedience is a behavior
7. More?

Zimbardo:

Our roles (our job, our function) determine our behavior, not the other way around.