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Stanley Milgram's Experiments and the Saving of the Possibility of Disobedience

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Abstract: Milgram's experiments have exposed the bitter truth that, against their moral standards, the great majority of subjects actually obey malevolent authorities and are ready to cause great suffering, even death, to innocent victims. The reason for such unexpected and shocking behavior can be perfectly explained in the light of panenmentalist philosophy, according to which individual pure possibilities and their relations are as real as actualities and, normally, persons are free to choose between alternative pure possibilities in whatsoever circumstances. Whenever persons ignore the singular individuality of other people, such persons can cause most evil, entirely immoral deeds, to the others simply because impersonal authorities order them to do so. Hence, panenmentalism reveals the philosophical conditions upon which obedience or defiance to malevolent authority is possible.

Keywords: Milgram's Experiments, Panenmentalism, Obedience, Defiance, Malevolent Authority, Don Mixon, Conscience, Deception, Nazis

Stanley Milgram's famous experiments have demonstrated that a great majority of subjects—about two thirds of them—may obey even the cruelest and immoral orders whose origin is impersonal authorities. As Milgram states:

Subjects have learned from childhood that it is a fundamental breach of moral conduct to hurt another person against his will. Yet, 26 subjects [out of 40] abandon this tenet in following the instructions of an authority who has no special powers to enforce his commands. To disobey would bring no material loss to the subject; no punishment would ensue. It is clear from the remarks and outward behavior of many participants that in punishing the victim they are often acting against their own values. Subjects often expressed deep disapproval of [electro] shocking a man in the face of his objections and others denounced it as stupid and senseless. Yet the majority complied with the experimental commands. (Milgram, 1963, p: 376)

Subjects would obey authority to a greater extent than we had supposed. (Milgram, 1965, p: 61)

A reader's initial reaction to the experiment may be to wonder why anyone in his right mind would administer even the first shocks. Would he don't simply refuse and walk out of the laboratory? But the fact is that no one ever does. (Milgram, 1974a, pp: 4-5)

To focus only on the Nazis, however despicable their deeds and to view only highly publicized atrocities as being relevant to these studies is to miss the point entirely. For the studies are principally concerned with the ordinary and routine destruction carried out by everyday people following orders. . . . The dilemma posed by the conflict between conscience and authority inheres in the very nature of society and would be with us even if Nazi Germany had never existed. . . . the demands of democratically installed authority may also come into conflict with conscience. (Milgram, 1974a, p: 178)

A substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority. (op. cit., p: 189)

Because the experiments and the debate around them are so famous, this study will not present them again. The author of this paper takes it for granted that the learned readers are sufficiently familiar with Milgram's publications about these experiments. It should be mentioned that Milgram's experiments are based upon a deception of the subjects involved in it. They were deceived to believe that they were really administering electroshocks to the victims involved, which was not the fact at all. This, to refer at least to one example, raised some severe criticism (see Mixon, 1972 and 1989).¹ Nevertheless, the electroshocks that the subjects—the "teachers"²—experienced at the beginning of the experiments (to show them what it feels like to receive the electroshocks that they would administer the victims) were quite real. Why should they not assume that because these shocks were real, then the shocks that they administer the victims—the learners—were equally real and even more painful? Hence, the deception in question has not altered the *real* psychological state and situation that the experiments meant to study.

Mixon carried out an alternative of a fully staged and equipped version of Milgram's experiments: "This . . . version of the Obedience study resembles in some ways a stage play performance in which one of the actors improvises" (op. cit., p: 148; and see Milgram, 1974a, pp: 198–199 as to his experiments). Although such a

staged version, too, cannot reflect or represent genuine a real situation as it is, still, as the little performance—*The Murder of Gonzago*—in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act 3, Scene 2, entitled "The Mousetrap") demonstrates, a staged version can serve as a good enough means to reveal the hidden truth in the mind of the subjects involved (cf. Milgram, 1974a, p: 198). In contrast, Mixon did not hide or deny the humane and moral approach of Milgram as a distinguished social psychologist. Mixon is quite right in concluding that "it is clear when reading Milgram's study that he wanted his subjects to disobey, that he valued the act of saying no to someone issuing an inhumane command and that he considered those who obeyed immoral" (op. cit., p: 151).

Most interestingly, in Mixon's alternative acting experiments, with the exception of one participant, "the behavior of all naive actors deviated in no respect from the behavior reported for Milgram's deceived subjects" (ibid.). Indeed, the results are very much the same. Thus, Mixon's experiments, too, challenge us with the same philosophical question: what may cause quite ordinary human beings to behave in such an immoral way?

Among Milgram's critics, it was Mixon who was especially attentive to philosophical arguments challenging Milgram's conclusions (for instance, Mixon, 1989, pp: xiv–xv, referring to the philosophical critique by Patten, 1977). Furthermore and more importantly, to the extent that possibilism is concerned—namely the metaphysical approach according to which not only actualities but pure possibilities, too, do exist—Mixon rightly ascribed an opposite approaches—actualism and determinism—to B. F. Skinner's behaviorism (Mixon, 1989, p: 3) and by application to Milgram's social psychology. Pure, mere possibility is a possibility whose existence does not depend on any actuality, empirical reality, factual circumstances, space, time and causality (for instance, pure mathematical objects, such as figures and numbers, are fine examples of pure possibilities; another example is that of values and norms, which are independent on actualities—in any case in which the "ought" is independent on the "is"). Actualism excludes pure possibilities, whereas panenmentalism, a special and novel kind of possibilism, fully accepts them. Against this background, the author of this paper does not think that Mixon's criticism, both philosophically and empirically, did justice to Milgram's research, especially to the extent that Mixon wrongly ascribed determinism to Milgram's study (Mixon, 1989, p: 3). As the reader will realize, Milgram's indeterminism is consistent and, according to this view, we enjoy a freedom of choice. At this point, Mixon was certainly wrong about Milgram's approach. In what follows, this paper will relate Milgram's study to tacit panenmental assumptions.

¹ Mixon challenges Milgram's experiments as follows: "Milgram attempted by deception to make his subject believe that he was taking part in a learning experiment and that the consequences of the shocks he was delivering were real" (op. cit., p: 149). Mixon raised "the possibility that Milgram's subjects might also have assumed that safety precautions were in effect; if such be the case then Milgram's judgment that obedient subjects behaved in a 'shockingly immoral' fashion must be reappraised" (op. cit., p: 156). He also argued that "since an experimenter cannot legitimately order a subject to actually harm another, legitimate destructive obedience cannot be studied in the context of normal experimenter commands in the conventional experiment" (Mixon, 1972, p: 175) and, finally, "not only was the research design built on an elaborate deception—a series of lies if you like—but many of the subjects in it had shown alarming signs of emotional disturbance. In other words many were led by lies to experience something extremely disturbing. Could the findings possibly justify the lying and the suffering?" (Mixon, 1989, p: x).

² From now on, when referring to Milgram's experiments, this paper uses the words, *teachers* for the persons who administered the electroshocks and *learner* for the person who was supposed to suffer the shocks, without inverted commas.

This paper attempts to make Milgram's results and conclusions more understandable on a purely philosophical basis. Thus, it does not challenge his results and conclusions but take his words for them. This study finds his arguments, based on a veridical empirical basis, valid and sound.³ The author of this paper is not an experimentalist psychologist, sociologist, or anthropologist. The author's viewpoint is simply philosophical and because almost any domain in our life and knowledge is based upon some philosophical assumptions, most of which are implicit or totally unconscious, it is vital to expose these assumptions and to examine them in detail and as explicitly as possible.

In praise of Milgram, he was well aware of the *philosophical* significance or reflection of his experiments: "The inquiry bears an important relation to philosophic analyses of obedience and authority (Arendt, Friedrich and Weber)" (Milgram, 1963, p: 372).⁴ In fact, Milgram's experiments imply some basic philosophical problems, such as: (1) The nature of our choices and responsibility of them; (2) Why do people habitually intend to obey what appears to them as an authority? (3) To what extent are we free to disobey an authority? (4) Even if our decisions are inescapably determined by some causes (on the basis of our education and upbringing), to what extent are we free to choose and to

³ For a recent appraisal of "the Milgram Paradigm" after 35 years, Blass, 1999.

⁴ Cf. 1965, p: 57, the first paragraph; Milgram, 1974a, pp: xi–xii: mentioning the philosophical problems of freedom and p: 2. The following passage bears a clear philosophical tenor: Milgram's attempts at "carefully constructing a situation that captures the *essence* of obedience—that is, a situation in which a person gives himself over to authority and no longer views himself as the *efficient cause of his own actions*" (Milgram, 1974a, p: xii; my italics). The italicized terms are primarily philosophical. See also: "Many of the subjects felt, at the philosophical level of values, that they ought not to go on, but they were unable to translate this conviction into action" (Milgram, 1974b, p: 568). Issue 3 of *Metaphilosophy* 1983 devoted some space to a philosophical exchange between Milgram and Morelli over Milgram's experiments. See Morelli, 1983 and Milgram, 1983. Milgram's answer is much more convincing, both scientifically and philosophically, than Morelli's criticism. Morelli made various philosophical distinctions most of which, it appears, made no difference concerning the issue under discussion. For another philosophical treatment of Milgram's experiments see Patten, 1977, which, sadly, appears to be misleading and useless in challenging Milgram's approach and conclusions.

be responsible for our choices? All these are extremely vital philosophical questions and should be treated as such.

Note that in Milgram, 1965, the philosophical tenor is more explicit. For instance, Milgram puts the problem, with which his obedience experiments deal as follows: "If X tells Y to hurt Z , under what conditions will Y carry out the command of X and under what conditions will he refuse?" (Milgram, 1965, p: 57). In other words, this is an implicit or shorthand phrase for "for all X , Y and Z , whenever X tells Y to hurt Z , under what conditions will Y carry out the command of X and under what conditions will he defy it". In this phrase, "all" signifies a *universal quantifier* (\forall). This universal quantified phrase is typically philosophical, because the conditions under discussion are not only actual, which yield to the empirical and experimental observation, but *also purely possible*, which yield to our imagination and philosophical consideration and not to empirical facts and inductive reasoning. The language and terms of Milgram's paper of 1965 clearly have a philosophical tenor (see especially footnote 4 on p. 58, which is a purely philosophical analysis of the paper's terminology).

The author of this paper is not at all sure that what Hannah Arendt, the famous social philosopher and journalist, named "the banality of evil" can help us very much to philosophically clarify Milgram's alarming experimental results. Because we all are routinely subject to bureaucratic ruthlessness all over the world, the banality of evil is not sufficient to explain the results and conclusions of Milgram's experiments about human obedience to authority. Many of us are victims of ruthless bureaucratic authorities, a fact that may make us revolt against and even fight it. This worldwide prevalent human state cannot explain the obedience to authority in the way that Milgram's experiments demonstrated. Such ruthlessness provokes subjects to doubt, revolt and defy the authority in question. They must be aware of their right and duty to transfer such defiance from such cases to their own life in which they should *defy* an authority in any case of ruthlessness or immoral orders. Such ruthlessness may teach its victims to disobey in such cases. We thus need for more and different explanations, philosophical in nature, of the phenomenon of the obedience to a malevolent authority.

The problem of choice, the question of determinism, the aim and function of closing up of pure possibilities contrary to opening them up are some of the focal points that a novel possibilist metaphysics—panenmentalism—whose author is Amihud Gilead, has discussed widely and profoundly.⁵ Metaphysics is a fundamental, first, or

⁵ Gilead, 1999; 2003; 2005a; 2009; 2010; and 2011; for some applications of the philosophy of science that this

prior kind of philosophy serving as a basis for all philosophical fields, to begin with ontology and epistemology. Panenmentalism is a metaphysics of individual pure possibilities and their relationality (namely, the necessary relations between these possibilities). Philosophers are used to assuming and referring to possible *worlds* (which is a most problematical term though extremely prevalent among philosophers, especially those of language and modal logic). Instead, panenmentalism refers to and treats *individual* pure possibilities and their relationality.

Especially relevant to our issue are the panenmentalist treatments of cruelty (Gilead, 2015c) and the significance of life (Gilead, 2016). These treatments are based on the panenmentalist conception of personality as a singular psychical pure possibility and not as an actuality only (namely, only as a body).

Panenmentalism assumes psychical determinism, namely, it assumes that everything in our mind is necessary and never contingent, for each entity or distinction in our mind has meaning and significance.⁶ Since mental reality consists of psychical pure possibilities and not of physical actualities⁷, then free choice of pure possibilities is certainly possible side by side to psychical determinism (see especially Gilead, 2005a). In contrast, an actualist view—according to which nothing but the actual exists—as this view is also deterministic (e.g., Spinoza's philosophy), it is not compatible with free choice and with free will. As panenmentalism defends the possibilities of free will and free choice, moral responsibility gains a strong support

theory conveys to natural sciences, see Gilead, 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2015a; 2015b; and 2016.

⁶ In this way, panenmentalism adopts an assumption that Freud explicitly made. See Freud, 1901, pp: 242 and 253 and Freud, 1910, pp: 38 and 52. Freud was a compatibilist, namely, according to his psychoanalytic theory, free choice and psychical determinism are compatible. On different grounds, panenmentalism is compatibilist too. Moreover, it assumes libertarian, yet motivated, free will (see Gilead, 2003, pp: 131–156 and Gilead, 2005a).

⁷ For this reason, there are irreducible differences between mind and body, as each has the properties that the other could not have (for instance, the body has spatiotemporal properties that the mind could not have). Hence, panenmentalism rejects any reductionistic physicalist approach. As long as our choice is between pure possibilities, the unchosen possibilities are no less real than the chosen, actual possibility. This means that we could always choose otherwise and that, in principle, our choice is free.

from panenmentalism, according to which the possibilities that we did not choose are no less real than the ones we did. Thus, we normally enjoy a real free choice between real possibilities.

This paper will try to show how Milgram's study of the obedience to authority, however malevolent or ruthless the authority may be, can be clearly based upon panenmentalist grounds. The same holds true for understanding and explaining defying of such an authority on panenmentalist grounds.

From a panenmentalist viewpoint, cruelty rests upon the denial of the singular individuality of its victim (Gilead, 2015c). This singularity has an absolute value. Each person, each human being, is a singular psychical subject who is different from any other such subject and whose inner, psychical reality is accessible only to him or to her. Cruelty ignores and despises this individuality.

As for Milgram's obedience study, it is not only the singular individuality of the victim (the learner) that is denied or ignored; it is also that of the authority (the experimenter) and that of the teacher as well.

Bearing this in mind, consider the following passages:

Another psychological force at work in this situation [in which the experiments took place] may be termed “counter-anthropomorphism”. . . . [which means] attributing an impersonal quality to forces that are essentially human in origin and maintenance. Some people treat systems of human origin as if they existed above and beyond any human agent, beyond the control of whim or human feeling. The human element behind agencies and institutions is denied. Thus, when the experimenter says, “The experiment *requires* that you continue”, the subject feels this to be an imperative that goes beyond any merely human command. He does not ask the seemingly obvious question, “Whose experiment? Why should the designer be served while the victim suffers?” The wishes of a man—the malevolent designer of the experiment—have become part of a schema which exerts on the subject's mind a force that transcends the personal . . . “The experiment” had acquired an impersonal momentum of its own. (Milgram, 1975, pp: 8-9)

There is a fragmentation⁸ of the total human act; no one man decides to carry out the evil

⁸ Fragmentation plays a crucial role in the behavior of the subjects who showed signs of remorse and conflicts but, nevertheless, continue to obey the experimenter

act and is confronted with its consequences. The person who assumes full responsibility for the act has evaporated. Perhaps this is the most common characteristic of socially organized evil in modern society. . . . There was a time, perhaps, when men were able to give a fully human response to any situation because they were fully absorbed in it as human beings. (op. cit., p: 11)

The . . . inhumane actions performed by ordinary Americans in the Vietnamese conflict . . . do not appear as impersonal historical events but rather as actions carried out by men just like ourselves who have been transformed by authority and thus have relinquished all sense of individual responsibility for their actions. (op. cit., p: 180)

Finally and most important:

Something far more dangerous is revealed: the capacity for man to abandon his humanity, indeed, the *individuality* that he does so, as he merges his *unique* [in panenmentalist terms, singular] *personality* into larger institutional structures. . . . Each *individual* possesses a conscience which to a greater or lesser degree serves to restrain the unimpeded flow of impulses destructive to others. But when he merges his *person* into an *organizational structure*, a new creature replaces autonomous man, unhindered by the limitation of *individual morality*, freed of human inhibition, mindful only of the sanctions of authority. (op. cit., p: 188; my italics)

Indeed, what is so typical of Milgram's obedience experiments is that there is an authority, represented by an experimenter whose name and identity are irrelevant, as well as a teacher and a learner whose individuality does not really matter (though Milgram, 1974a analyzed some cases of individual teachers⁹). In his reports, most

until the end of the experiment. For instance: "Mrs. Rosenblum is a person whose psychic life lacks integration. She has not been able to find life's purposes consistent with her needs for esteem and success. Her goals, thinking and emotions are fragmented. . . . she failed to mobilize the psychic sources needed to translate her compassion for the learner into the disobedient act. Her feelings, goals and thoughts were too diverse and unintegrated" (Milgram, 1974a, p: 84).

⁹ Despite Milgram's acknowledged aim to discover situational conditions of obedience and defiance, "the

of these subjects and victims, teachers and learners, are *abstracted from their individual personality*, let alone from their singular individuality, but the circumstances, in which the experiments occurred, are highlighted.

This treatment by Milgram is not accidental—as an experimental psychologist, he had the conventional habit to abstract from the individual differences of the subjects and to make statistical generalizations. Furthermore, as Milgram assumes, "in certain circumstances it is not so much the kind of person a man is, as the kind of situation in which he is placed, that determines his actions" (Milgram, 1965, p: 72) and "the individual, upon entering the laboratory, becomes integrated into a

conviction that obedient subjects were behaving in an immoral fashion has focused attention on *individual morality*. . . . Individual conscience should somehow be able to triumph in situations where in an authority tells a person 'to act harshly and inhumanely against another man'" (Milgram, 1964, p: 852, my italics). Cf. Milgram, 1974a, pp: xi-xii and 44-55, analyzing the individual subjects and their experiences: "We need to focus on the individuals who took part in the study not only because this provides a personal dimension to the experiment but also because the quality of each person's experience gives us clues to the nature of the process of obedience" (op. cit., p: 44).

Considering an alternative kind of obedience experiment, Mixon claims: "however much I would welcome a world of men and women with conscience enough to resist and wisdom enough to recognize inhumane commands, I feel committed to discovering how to specify conditions in which even the weak and foolish cannot threaten the world with their destructive obedience" (Mixon, 1972, p: 172). Thus, Mixon's alternative to Milgram's experiments ignores personal differences: "An All and None procedure can discover and specify the situationally dependent conditions in which people, no matter what their personal characteristics, will as a rule obey or defy destructive commands" (Mixon, 1972, p: 175; my italics). Nevertheless, if individual conscience and resistance really matter, there are no specific conditions in which any subject may defy or obey an authority. Individual conscience means that it is in our hands to disobey even under the most difficult and harsh circumstances. In contrast, it is the assumption of torturers that any human being must be broken under a "competent" interrogation and pressure, psychological or physical. There are quite enough examples to demonstrate that these agents are quite wrong. Although many victims have been broken under torture, even not a few, quite ill and physically wrecked persons, have shown resistance to the harshest and most ruthless tortures.

situation that carries its own momentum" (op. cit., p: 73). Milgram's experiments are generally not explorations in the field of personality that is devoted to the research of the "motives engaged when the subject obeys the experimenter's commands" (ibid.). Instead, his experiments "examine the *situational variables responsible for the elicitation of obedience*" (ibid.; my italics). And Milgram emphasizes:

... whatever the motives involved . . . action may be studied as a direct function of the situation in which it occurs. This has been the approach of the present study, where we sought to plot behavioral regularities against manipulated properties of the social field. Ultimately, social, psychology would like to have a compelling *theory of situations* . . . and then point to the manner in which definable properties of situations are transformed into psychological forces in the individual. (op. cit., p: 74)

The point is that, in general, this kind of experiment does not consider the psychological forces or motives of the individual as such, who becomes simply a statistical item. Notwithstanding, society is an abstract entity, whereas individuals are real entities. Milgram states:

. . . the person entering an authority system no longer views himself as acting out of his own purposes but rather comes to see himself as an agent for executing the wishes of another person. . . . I shall term this *the agentic state* . . . This term will be used in opposition to that of *autonomy*—that is, when a person sees himself as acting on his own. . . . In this condition the individual no longer views himself as responsible for his own actions but defines himself as an instrument for carrying out the wishes of theirs. (Milgram, 1974a, pp: 132–133)

In contrast, "residues of selfhood, remaining to varying degrees outside the experimenter's authority, keep personal values alive in the subject and lead to strain, which, if sufficiently powerful, can result in disobedience" (op. cit., p: 155).

In fairness to Milgram, he personally was very interested in the individual personality of the disobedient persons. Consider the descriptions of the defiance of the subjects by the names "Professor of Old Testament", "Jan Rendaleer, Industrial Engineer", the post-factum remorse of "Morris Braverman, Social Worker" (Milgram, 1974a, pp: 47-54) and, especially, "Gretchen

Brandt, Medical Technician" (op. cit., pp: 84-85) who re-mentioned the equality of the learner and herself as free-willed human beings. Indeed, defiance to malevolent authority is based on considering the learner as an individual human being deserving of moral and humane consideration and treatment. As for Mrs. Brandt, Milgram comments: Her "straightforward, courteous behavior in the experiment, lack of tension and total control of her own action seems to make disobedience a simple and rational deed. Her behavior is the very embodiment of what I had initially envisioned would be true for almost all subjects" (op. cit., p: 85). In fact, Milgram was quite frustrated to the extent that almost two thirds of the subjects obeyed the malevolent authority!

Nevertheless, in fact, in Milgram's experiments there are almost only statistics, focusing around the age and occupation of the subjects involved. By its nature, statistics do not make individual or personal distinctions. For this reason, Freud refused to use statistics in his psychoanalytic studies (Freud, 1917, p: 460). According to Freud, statistics does not consider the differences between individual analyzands, which makes it useless for the psychological inquiries that consider such differences very seriously. The distance from the identity of the person involved, either as teacher or as learner, was maintained also by employing a lottery to *pick at random* (which is contrary to choose) the teacher and the learner (Milgram, 1974a., p: 373).

The whole frame of the experiments rests upon the irrelevancy of the singular individuality of the persons who obeyed the experimenter. Furthermore, the teachers ignored or disregarded the singular individuality of the learner. This disregard or indifference created an arena for an act of cruelty toward him. This is most vital to understand how cruelty is possible even in a laboratory setting and not only in life outside the psychological or social laboratory. To ignore the individuality of the persons involved, to disregard the singularity¹⁰, to deny the irreplaceability and absolute value of *each* person—any of these renders cruelty possible and even begs it. When functions (such as authority) and circumstances replace persons—each of whom is a singular individual—cruelty raises its head. This is one of the tacit major lessons of Milgram's experiments (though he did not focus on cruelty). These are the built-in conditions of the experiments which, from the outset, simply ignore the identity of the persons involved.

In Milgram's reports of his experiments, notwithstanding, there were a few cases in which the

¹⁰ Which is actualized in a unique body; there are not two human bodies that are identical, all the more so human minds, each of which is singular and not even similar to any other human mind.

individuality and exceptional reactions were distinctly mentioned; for instance: "On one occasion we observed a seizure so violently convulsive that it was necessary to call a halt to the experiment. The subject, a 46-year-old encyclopedia salesman, was seriously embarrassed by his untoward and uncontrollable behavior" (Milgram, 1963, p: 375).¹¹ It is really typical of humane behavior to be attached to the singular individuality of the person who is no more simply one of the "subjects" of a psychological experiment but an individual, singular person. This still anonymous 46-year-old encyclopedia salesman is a singular human being, not simply one of the participants in this experiment. He was not a Führer, a Leader, or a Celeb, he was just a singular human being. Such a being, acknowledging the singular individuality of each of the learners and teachers, including himself, cannot behave cruelly. Once a person acknowledges the singular individuality, the dignity and the absolute value of any of his or her potential "victims" or the learner, such a person cannot behave or relate cruelly to any of them. This acknowledgement is both emotional and cognitive.

Note that torturers do not hide their crimes; it is the identity of the torturers that is concealed. They try as much as they can to spread the message that they, in the name of a state or an agency, use such brutal means in order to terrorize the targeted population.¹² In contrast, the identity of the torturers is kept as an absolute secret.

¹¹ Or, one of the observers attending the experience behind a one-way mirror, reports: "I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. He constantly pulled on his earlobe and twisted his hands. At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: 'Oh God, let's stop it'. And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter and obeyed to the end" (Milgram, 1963, p: 377). It is quite exceptional that Milgram mentioned some individual features of a reported obedient person.

¹² Contrary to the received view, the vital aim of torture is to terrorize the targeted population; it is not to extract life-saving information (Gilead, 2003, pp: 97-111 and Gilead, 2005b). We have good reason to believe that such means do not extract veridical or reliable information, on the contrary—torture causes hallucinations and psychotic states in which the tortured informer cannot be reliable. It is only the torturers who claim the "success" of their methods to extract reliable information from the tortured persons; there is no independent, academic evidence for this claim.

The torturers not only know that their atrocity and crime against humanity justify a severe punishment which they try to elude; they also know or feel that they are highly immoral agents, actually criminals against humanity, for they would not wish such a treatment for themselves. They cannot universalize an imperative such as "You have the right to torture a suspect under whatever circumstances". There is no moral justification for torture and it is morally absolutely forbidden.

Torturers fit very well Milgram's experiments. In democratic states, secret police sometimes has a "lawful" authority (or defenses by the law) to commit such crimes, especially when the population is under the threat of terrorism. Some such torturers try to represent themselves as "saints" that are forced to do dreadful deeds in order to save civilization as a whole, their country, or innocent civilians, defending them against barbaric, dreadful terror and the like. No terror and torture is a typical kind of terror, can fight back justly or efficiently any terror, however awful. Most of the torturers obey authority. Obedience to malevolent authority is the mother of torture.

Torturers believe that there is a prize for any human action, belief, ideology, fight and the like. They are convinced that torture can break any person, however determined, devoted to one's object or conscientious he or she may be. They compare their job as torturers to breaking into a safe to get access to its hidden vital contents. However, there is no access from without to any human mind, for each human mind is singular and thus it is not accessible from without, by other person. Thus, torturers can destroy, mentally and physically, their victims but they cannot destroy their singularity, which they try to deny.

The very nature of obedience is at least to restrict, sometimes to an extreme extent or even silence, the singular individuality of the obedient person. Any kind of fascism rests upon this. There is no fascism without obedience and sacrificing the singular individuality of the persons involved (except, perhaps, for the Leader, the Duce, or the Führer whose singular individuality is absurd or simply a caricature):

Most shockingly,

Upon command of the experimenter, each of the 40 subjects went beyond the expected break off point. No subject stopped prior to administering Shock Level 20 (At this level—300 volts—the victim kicks on the wall and no longer provides answers to the teacher's multiple-choice questions). Of the 40 subjects, 5 refused to obey the experimental commands beyond the 300-volt level. Four more subjects administered one further shock and then

refused to go on. Two broke off at the 330-volt level and 1 each at 345, 360 and 375 volts. Thus a total of 14 subjects defied the experimenter. (Milgram, 1963, p: 375)

Indeed, the significant majority the teachers in Milgram's experiments were not aware of the *mere, pure possibility* of defying the instructions. Unconsciously, they excluded such a possibility and strongly believed that they had to obey the experimenter. They had received a decent education, instructing them to obey the authority of parents, teachers, judges, officers and the like and to be good citizens. Without obedience there must be anarchy and we are educated to believe that anarchy is the worst enemy of the civilized order (one may really wonder whether anarchy is really the real enemy of humanity and civilization). We are raised to believe that to disobey, to defy, is to behave criminally, selfishly, immaturely, without responsibility, consideration, cooperation and the like.

In Milgram's experiments, if the teacher turned to the experimenter for advice or instruction whether he or she should continue to administer electroshocks despite the yelling and the protests of the learner, the experimenter responded, *inter alia*, with the following prod: "It is absolutely essential that you continue" (Milgram, 1963, p: 374). Whenever the subject said that the learner refused to go on, the experimenter replied: "Whether the learner likes it or not, you must go on until he has learned all the word pairs correctly. So please go on" (*ibid.*). Whenever the teacher still refused or hesitated, the experimenter urged him or her in a firm but not impolite tone in the following manner: "You have no other choice, you must go on" (*ibid.*). Yet *if*, after this prod, the subject still refused to obey the experimenter, "the experiment was terminated" (*ibid.*).

Hence, whenever the teacher did not exclude the *pure, mere possibility* that he or she had the free choice not to continue but, instead, to stop the experiment (despite the prods of the experimenter) and the teacher chose to actualize this possibility, any of the experiments, with no exception, was terminated. However, in any case in which the teacher excluded this possibility, even as a pure or mere one, he or she obeyed the authority of the experimenter, or even that of the impersonal experiment (prod 2 reads: "the experiment requires that you continue") despite scruples and inconvenience or even real stress if there were such.

Indeed, the main point is that most of the teachers in the experiments did not really consider the mere possibility not to obey in this case. They, in fact, excluded it, even as a pure, mere one. Only those who did not obey, considered such a possibility seriously and eventually decided to actualize it and rendered it actual.

Excluding pure possibilities may be one of the main obstacles, if not the prime one, to block scientific

progress. In various publications of (Gilead, 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2015a; 2015b), he has referred to some of these amazing, sometimes even shocking or tragic, phenomena. The dogmatically harsh reaction of Pauling to Shechtman's discovery of quasi-crystals ("There are no quasi-crystals, there are quasi-scientists!") (Gilead, 2013) is a most notorious example. Whenever, owing to dogmatic attitudes, for instance, vital pure possibilities have been excluded, scientists could not recognize, study, or understand the actual phenomena that they encountered. Think about the reaction of Ignaz Semmelweis's colleagues to his conjecture (in 1847) that microorganisms should be considered as the cause of puerperal (childbed) fever. Or, think about the more recent opponents to the idea that a micro-organism causes stomach ulcers. All such opponents simply excluded these possibilities, even as pure ones (that is, simply on theoretical grounds and sometimes even on subjective or prestigious ones) and thus delayed scientific progress. The most negative reaction, skepticism and ridicule by Semmelweis's colleagues led to his mental illness that ended in his confinement to an insane asylum until his death in 1865. Had he lived in Rome, at the time of Bruno, he would probably have been burnt to death in the Campo de Fiori for his heretical ideas and praxis.

Another intriguing aspect of excluding or closing possibilities has to do with the fact that most of the subjects (of the teachers) did not doubt that the experimental situation was a real life one, a real process of learning (*op.cit.*, p: 375). Such credulity is based upon closing or excluding possibilities, whereas skepticism, doubts, critical mind and humor have to do with saving or opening up pure possibilities. Another interesting point is the gap between the shocking actual results of the experiments and the predictions of some experts, including Milgram himself and his colleagues. Most of them believed that only very few subjects would obey the experimenter until the end of the experiments, whereas the actual results were proved the contrary. This shows that there is and that there has indeed always been a gap between reality as purely possible or expected and as actual.¹³

¹³ Furthermore, "many of the subjects, at the level of stated opinion, feel quite as strongly as any of us about the moral requirement of refraining from action against a helpless victim. They, too, in general terms know what *ought* to be done and can state their values when the occasion arises. This has little, if anything, to do with their *actual behavior* under the pressure of circumstances. . . . values are not the only forces at work in an *actual, ongoing situation*" (Milgram, 1975, p: 6; my italics). Values, moral imperatives and "the ought" are not actualities; they are not facts. Instead, they are

There are many cases in which we exclude pure possibilities for our choices, attitudes, approaches, actions, or behavior. In the case of Milgram's experiments, the subjects who continued with the experiment until its planned end, first of all excluded the possibility—the mere, pure possibility—that they should not obey the experimenter and listen to the voice of their conscience or feelings.

The Nazis used prods, such as those employed by Milgram's experimenters to persuade soldiers, torturers, informers and other collaborators to obey their instructions or orders. Obviously, they used other, much harsher, methods. What is common to all these cases and those of Milgram's obeyed subjects is the *excluding of the pure possibility* that such instructions or command should not be obeyed, that malevolent authority should be defied.

Panenmentalism has made a great effort to draw the attention of the readers to the heavy price that we have to pay in closing or excluding vital pure possibilities for our knowledge and morality. Indeed, whenever we try to reach a decision, we have to exclude some possibilities, especially pure ones. Equally, whenever we wish to get to the truth of the matter, we have to exclude some possibilities, for instance: Is it a micro-organism that causes stomach ulcers or is it stress or a particular diet? If all or both relevant possibilities are kept open, we cannot make any progress in knowing and understanding more and better the relevant phenomena or their causes and in making decisions what we have to do in practice. On the one hand, we need to be familiar with as many possibilities as possible in order to choose the right one among them, yet, on the other hand, we have to close or exclude some of them in order to choose one of them. This is a vital balance that should be maintained. Nevertheless, without saving vital pure possibilities we cannot make any progress, epistemic, scientific, or practical.

The subjects in Milgram's experiments who refused to obey, acted, unknowingly, according to a panenmentalist imperative—never close or exclude a pure possibility that can be vital for your free and decent choice. Beware of closing pure possibilities on dogmatic basis, on grounds of prejudice and the like. In contrast, those who obeyed the experimenter against their conscience or feelings, in fact closed a most vital pure possibility for them as well as for us or for our society as a whole.

Dictatorship or fascism rests upon excluding vital possibilities and possibilities in general: as if there were one leader, one nation, all strongly united until there is no difference to be made in the nationalistic totality, one

pure possibilities pertaining to the mental (while taking part in an intersubjective reality) or to the psychical (while taking part in the subjective, inner reality of a psychical subject or a person).

common state of mind, one ideology, one way of conduct and the like. In this way, the obedience to tyrannical, dictatorial, or fascist authorities is similar even equal to the obedience of the subjects to the experimenter in Milgram's most shockingly illuminating experiments.

The motives of Milgram were clear enough and well expressed, loud and clear: as a son of a couple of Jewish refugees from the Nazi occupation in Eastern Europe, he knew quite well what was the horrible price that humanity in general and the Jewish people in particular have had to pay because of blind obedience to authorities without any question, doubt, or criticism. Or, in panenmentalist terms, without considering other pure possibilities that are open to one's choice and praxis.

Individual pure possibilities play a more vital and decisive role in psychological experiments than that which what meets the eye. Dixon and others have drawn our attention to the significant difference between experimental reality, in which a deception of the subjects plays some vital role and actual reality. For instance, he explains: "By using role playing the situation can be faced squarely with the open acknowledgement that the actual consequences are not 'real'" (Dixon, 1972, p: 169).¹⁴ Thus, a psychological experiment, as it should be, is more a playing with or entertaining individual pure possibilities and their relationality than facing actualities. In Milgram's experiments, the subjects did not administer real electroshocks to the "victims"—the learners—but they believed that they did so. This was a deception ("a false fire"), as was "The Mousetrap", which Hamlet instructed the players to play in order to reveal or display the crime of his uncle, the King. Thus, the psychological experiments achieved what they precisely should. Such is the case because, according to panenmentalism, when it comes to psychical reality, *psychical pure possibilities rather than actualities are what our mind consists of*. We have to distinguish between three kinds of reality: subjective, intersubjective and objective. Subjective reality consists of psychical pure possibilities of which our mind consists; intersubjective reality consists of mental pure possibilities shared by people who live in the same society, speak the same language and the like; finally, objective reality consists of actual, physical possibilities. When it comes to psychical reality, pure possibilities rather than actualities are vital. In social life, it is our intersubjective pure possibilities and their relationality

¹⁴ For Milgram's answering back the deception argument, see Milgram, 1974a, pp: 173-174. In summing up, "the majority of subjects accepted the experimental situation as genuine; a few did not. Within each experimental condition it was my estimate that two to four subjects did not think they were administering painful shocks to the victim" (op. cit., p: 173).

that are crucial; when it comes to one's psychical reality, it is psychical, subjective, personal pure possibilities that are concerned.

According to panenmentalism, dreams, expectations, fears, anxiety, hopes, projects, images, meanings, thoughts and so on are not actualities; rather, they are psychical or mental pure possibilities. The same actuality has different psychical meanings—psychical possibilities—for different persons. Moral imperatives, conscience, fear of punishment, obedience, defiance and the like are not actualities but pure possibilities first. Such possibilities and not only actual behavior play a decisive role in Milgram's experiments. The same holds true for the gap between pure possibilities and their actualities.

Conclusion

In summing up, panenmentalist principles and terms shed such an enlightening light on Milgram's experiments, which makes it possible to understand better why ordinary human beings may obey malicious commands against their better education, feelings and conscience. Panenmentalism reveals the prime philosophical conditions in which such persons may behave in this inhumane and uncivilized way. This raises some hope that philosophical awareness of the meaning and significance of such obedience can change the reality, which Milgram's experiments reveal, for the better, both morally and practically. Such awareness can make it possible for us to choose otherwise, following our morality, conscience and humane obligations.

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