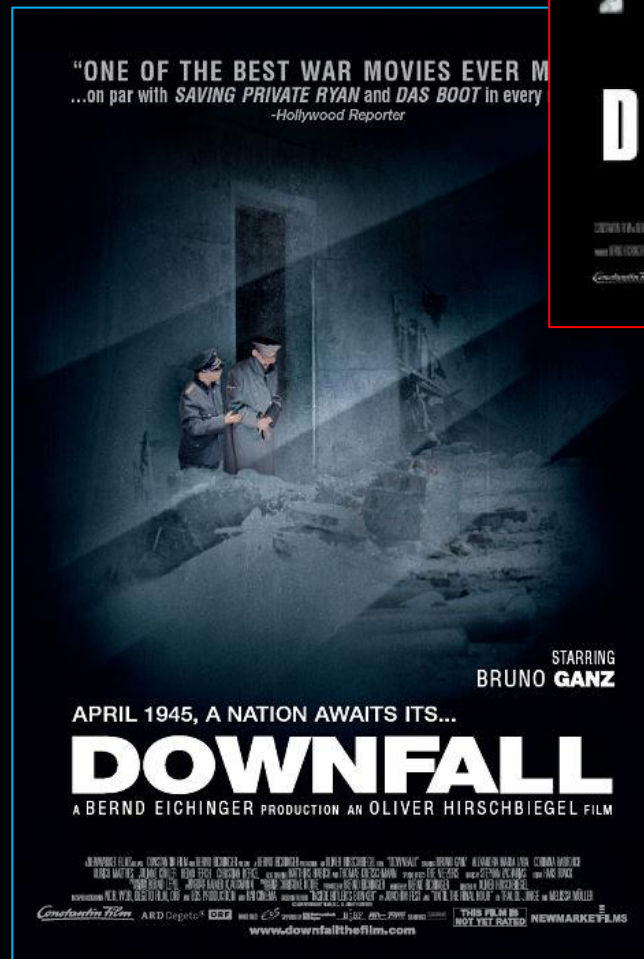


Downfall

Social Psychology...the investigation of how our thoughts, feelings and behaviors are influenced by others.

Psychologists should not ask “Why?” the Holocaust occurred, but “how?” Much behavior of perpetrators, bystanders, victims, and instigators can be understood as the consequence of normal mechanisms of perception, learning, socialization and development. What made genocide possible was not the transitory conditions created in a lab in a few hours but a complex of mechanisms that are the product of generations of human experience and of elaborate rational, emotional and logical justifications.

George Mastroianni



Instigators, much like their followers, are people who have been molded by the interplay of powerful situation forces and basic psychological needs

Groupthink

- A psychological phenomenon in which people strive for consensus within a group. In many cases, people will set aside their own personal beliefs or adopt the opinion of the rest of the group.
- A mode of thinking in which individual members of small cohesive groups tend to accept a viewpoint or conclusion that represents a perceived group consensus, whether or not the group members believe it to be valid, correct, or optimal.
- According to psychologist Irving Janis, groupthink is “a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures.” Group members often suffer overconfidence and hold an unquestioned belief in the group's competence and morality.

Controllability v un-controllability

Social Darwinism thinking

Dependent Personality Disorder

- The core issue is low self-esteem. With a fragile self, dependents are afraid of rejection and abandonment.
- People with DPD can become helpless, submissive and incapable of taking care of themselves. They may have trouble making simple decisions. Characterized by excessive fear and anxiety.
- De-individualism

Delusional Disorder

- A person with a delusion believes something that isn't true no matter how much evidence you give to the contrary.
- Is being delusional a coping mechanism?
- In the literature it has been suggested that some delusions can have an adaptive function by acting as defense mechanisms, protecting people from suffering or from unpleasant truths.

Socialization/cultural pressures (to conform to Nazism)

- Eliminationist antisemitism, and narratives about “Jewish devils” and Jewish drain on resources.
- Myths about the first two Reichs
- Long history of antisemitism
- Catholic Church (including the Pope) supported Nazis, so the pathway to heaven was not blocked.

Neurosis v Psychosis

- Neurosis is a mild mental disorder which can occur from stress, depression or anxiety. A psychological disturbance in which someone is still in contact with reality.
- Psychosis is a major personality disorder characterized by mental and emotional disruptions. It is often impairing and debilitating. A disconnect from reality.

Psychology underpinning loyalty and betrayal.

Necessitates Trust

Terror Management Theory

Mortality Salience

- When humans begin to contemplate their mortality and their vulnerability to death, feelings of terror emerge because of the simple fact that humans want to avoid their inevitable death. Mortality salience comes into effect because humans contribute all of their actions to either avoiding death or distracting themselves from the contemplation of it. Thus, terror management theory asserts that almost all human activity is driven by the fear of death.
- Most research done on terror management theory revolves around the mortality salience paradigm. It has been found that religious people as well as religious fundamentalists are less vulnerable to mortality salience manipulations, and so religious believers engage in cultural worldview defense to a lesser extent than nonreligious people. (ie, less fear of death)

Self-Deception and Belief Change

- Adopting lies and communicating them to others may enable perpetrators to carry out their evil tasks on a daily basis and may even enable them to live out the remainder of their lives with a clear conscience.

Trauma Psychology

Domestic Violence Psychology

Four “Roots of Evil” (Roy Baumeister)

- Baumeister's psychological explanation of genocide is based on four “roots of evil”. These are idealism, threatened egotism, instrumentalism, and sadism.
- Of these, Baumeister sees idealism and threatened egotism as the primary factors relevant to the explanation of Nazism and the Holocaust.

Paternalism and Nazi's

- Paternalism is action that limits a person's or group's liberty or autonomy and is intended to promote their own good.
- Paternalism can also imply that the behavior is against or regardless of the will of a person, or also that the behavior expresses an attitude of superiority.

“Power of the Situation” Explanation (Ross, Nishett)

- A basic premise of social psychology that assumes people's thoughts, actions and emotions are influenced substantially by the social setting.
- The main point is that social-psychological explanations, in emphasizing the causal power of situational forces, construe actors committing harmful actions as having relatively low personal responsibility and intentionality for their actions, and, in some instances, a low degree of conscious awareness of the determinants of their behaviors.

Obedience to authority experiment
(Stanley Milgram).

Conclusions:

- Someone in a position of authority can influence people to behave unethically and against their wishes.
- Humans has a ready propensity to obey authorities even when obedience is morally wrong.

Stanford Prison Experiment (Philip Zimbardo)

- The researchers concluded that people will readily and quickly conform to the role that is expected of them, particularly if these are heavily stereotyped
- The results of the Stanford Prison Experiment showed that people tend to conform – even when that means otherwise good people doing terrible things.

Theories about why people obey

- Informational influence: can't know everything, so when situation is confusing, trust expert
- Conflicting norms (obey authority v don't hurt people) ae hard to figure out.
- Incremental steps (starts out being reasonable, each small increase is reasonable, where do we draw the line?)
- Cognitive dissonance theory (after shocks get too high, can't undo past behavior and don't want to label self as 'bad' or 'immoral')
- Conclusion: Most people will obey orders to hurt someone, given strong situation factors

Anger and control issues

Social Psychology

Psychology of the Nazi Mindset

Short articles to read

BBC

Experiments on the ‘Science of Evil’

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/4B9rmwvZwQN45rckdzQKxp2/how-the-holocaust-created-a-new-field-of-science-the-science-of-evil>

The British Psychological Society

Questioning the Banality of Evil

<https://www.bps.org.uk/psychologist/questioning-banality-evil>

Possible Writing Topics

1. 'Downfall' presents Hitler through the lens of anti-war realism. How does one reconcile this humanistic portrayal of him with the personification of evil we know his actions/commands/words initiated? Strive to restrict your response to the behavioral and psychological aspects of the character.
2. The film portrays a group of people confronted by their own mortality, yet many of whom seem to be overlooking their defeat. Based on your ethnographic observations, use the film as a vehicle by which to profile the different responses of human behavior.
3. Identify groupthink psychology as manifested in the characters, and explain their inability to break out of this mindset

