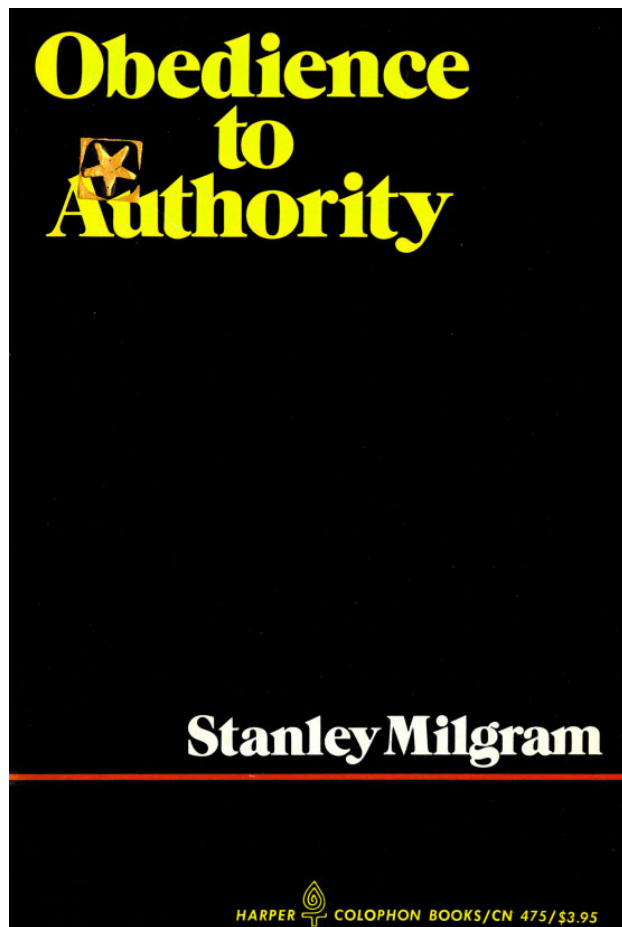


## Book of The Century



**Stanley Milgram (1974). *Obedience to Authority*. Harper & Row Publishers. New York.**

"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. To deal with the problem only as if it were a matter of history is to give it an illusory distance." (p.179).

### Additional Commentary

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." (p178).

"Some dismiss the Nazi example because we live in a democracy and not an authoritarian state. But, in reality, this does not eliminate the problem. For the problem is not "authoritarianism" as a mode of political organization or a set of psychological attitudes but authority itself. Authoritarianism, may give way to democratic practice, but authority itself cannot be eliminated as long as society is to continue in the form we know." (p 179).

"Thus, Mantell, in Munich, found 85% of his subjects obedient. (p.171).

"Men do become angry; they do act hatefully and explode in rage against others. But not here. Something far more dangerous is revealed: the capacity for man to abandon his humanity, indeed, the inevitability that he does so, as he merges his unique personality into larger institutional structures. This is a fatal flaw nature has designed into us, and which in the long run gives our species only a modest chance of survival. (p.188).

"What is the limit of such obedience? At many points we attempted to establish a boundary. Cries from the victim were inserted; they were not good enough. The victim claimed heart trouble; subjects still shocked him on command. The victim pleaded to be let free, and his answers no longer registered on the signal box; subjects continued to shock him "(p.188).

"The results, as seen and felt in the laboratory, are to this author disturbing. They raise the possibility that human nature, or--more specifically--the kind of character produced in American democratic society, cannot be counted on to insulate its citizens from brutality and inhumane treatment at the direction of malevolent authority. 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. (p.189)

"In an article entitled "The Dangers of Obedience", Harold J. Laski wrote: "...civilization means, above all, an unwillingness to inflict unnecessary pain. Within the ambit of that definition, those of us who heedlessly accept the commands of authority cannot yet claim to be civilized men" (p.189.).