

DRUMMING FOR BUBNY

16 October, 2015

We want to believe we are good, we are different, we are better, or we are superior. But this body of social-psychological research--and there are obviously many more experiments in addition to mine and Milgram's--shows that the majority of good, ordinary, normal people can be easily seduced, tempted, or initiated into behaving in ways that they say they never would.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO

ARNOŠT LUSTIG - RETURN, a short story by from the NIGHT AND HOPE anthology

Holešovice. Prague's seventh district. Who would have thought that a piece of the city would become a bridge along which people from elsewhere would cart away living contingents to the first stage of a different world, to the Prague-Bubny train station.

Ladislav Fuks – Mr. Theodor Mundstock

The corner of a building is a turning point.

The ability to still turn around, smile slightly, wave.

The corner extends to conceal the figures of devastated women in doorways.

One begins to pass remarkable things...

And a city park? That's magic in the morning.

A question emerges from the park that moves him:

where are you going,

certainly not to a spa,

why, you're as healthy as a horse,

it's probably a holiday, aren't I right,

but early, early, in June, you could've waited till July

or the beginning of August...

He rises up with his suitcase, he counts his footsteps, he's got a star, all he needs is feathers and he'll float above the street.

Truly, as if he wasn't walking on the ground.

Suitcase?

He doesn't even feel it, as if it were floating. In the belly of a terrestrial horse without a board and wheels there aren't even fifty or forty, only fifteen kilos, the result of late, but wise deliberation.

The Holocaust was indeed a Jewish tragedy. (...) Even so, the Holocaust was not simply a Jewish problem, and not an event in Jewish history alone. The Holocaust was born and executed in our modern rational society, (...) and for this reason it is a problem of that society, civilization and culture."

Zygmunt Bauman

Karel Čapek – winter of 1934 –

...we are assisting one of the greatest cultural debacles in the history of the world: one entire nation, one entire empire acceded to faith in animalism, race, and similar nonsense; an entire nation including university professors, priests, writers, doctors, and lawyers.

Do you think that such an animalistic doctrine could be proclaimed if every scholar in that highly educated empire shrugged his shoulders and drily said that he won't take part in such primitive rubbish? This is nothing less than an incredible betrayal by scholars, and it elicits a horrible notion of all that the intelligentsia is capable of...

Everywhere where violence is done to cultured humanity, we find scholars doing it to themselves en masse, and even brandishing ideological reasons in justification.

As it seems, in today's world, the intelligentsia can take one of three paths: that of complicity, cowardice, or martyrdom.

Perhaps there remains a fourth path: to not betray one's mental discipline; to not deny in oneself, under no circumstances, under no duress, the spirit of the unlimited and the visible...

It is still possible to face the fanatic stupefaction of the world; it is still possible, not to preach, but to communicate with all the languages of the world; it is still possible for reason to be common to all, for experience to be communicable, for knowledge to be valid...

If the intelligentsia lies or fails, it is a greater sin than the ignorance or lies of the others.

Přítomnost Magazine

The greatest evil from which the world suffers is not the strength of the evil, but rather the weakness of the good.

Romain Rolland

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Let us take as our starting point the worlds of a classic, whose death government leaders – at that time of the Protectorate - did not want to believe. Not that they were saddened by it, but because at the last minute they lost the opportunity to arrest him! Like Ferdinand Peroutka, they came to arrest him and sent him to Buchenwald along with other personages of the Czech nation. The founder of the timeless Přítomnost Magazine wrote the following in a commentary in 1947:

We already roughly know the main activities of this active humanism. They are to keep silent when something inhuman is happening. Or even to protect the beater from the beaten.

President **Václav Havel**, who in 1991 awarded the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk to Peroutka in memoriam, wrote in the introduction to the Terezín Memorial Book:

“I think that there are two chief reasons why we must remind ourselves again and again of all the horrible events to which this book is devoted.

We are primarily motivated by an entirely natural respect for the endless suffering of our loved ones and their memory, our natural obligation to honour their sacrifice and to thereby maintain this peculiar fellowship of the dead and the living, ancestors and descendants, that is one of the foundations of the existence of every healthy human society that is aware of its own identity, an identity based on a clear awareness of the continuity and import of all good and evil that it was destined to experience.

The second reason is the permanent and continuous living warning conveyed to us by the fate of all these victims of violence, cruelty, fanaticism, perverted ideology, and human vileness. It is a warning that if we do not stand up to evil at its outset, we risk that later we will be unable to stand up to it, or will be able to do so only through new human victims...”

We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.

Elie Wiesel

There may be times when we are powerless to prevent injustice, but there must never be a time when we fail to protest.

Elie Wiesel

To be a hero, you have to learn to be a deviant, because you're always going against the conformity of the group. Heroes are ordinary people whose social actions are extraordinary. Who act when others are passive.

PHILIP ZIMBARDO, 2007