

# Society that made the holocaust possible sociology essay



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As civilisation has progress, along with humanities superior self-image, so too has science and organisation. Western civilisation prides itself on upholding morality throughout the world, but this is only after the events of World War Two. One of the most recognisable parts of World War Two is the Holocaust, and how when it was discovered shocked the world. It was never believed that something like this would be done and that a mad dictator was responsible for this being achieved. However, this undermines another argument that the Holocaust was actually an amazing achievement of science and organisation, and however immoral it is, it was only possible because of modernity.

Reasons why there maybe another one can't be clear, but it can sometimes come in the form of policies in which lead to the inevitable purging of an ethnic group and the technical resources and knowledge to make them possible has been created through modern civilization. This means that the norms and institutions that are adopted in modernity made the last Holocaust possible. Also, humanities self-image was so high due to their limitless ability to achieve through science, that whatever means could have been used to stop it originally would have failed because it had become too powerful through it's organisation and efficiency. This is why we live in a society that made it possible and that would struggle to stop another one from happening.

Through history and even in the present, genocide has occurred. But what differs the Holocaust from any previous genocide was that it wasn't fuelled by hate, it was also fuelled by science and organisation. This is what makes it unique. This is proven due to the amount of people that died during the

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period of its creation and end, because it would have been too difficult to sustain such high levels of murder if there weren't any effective means of killing or organisation. Also, hate can only last for so long before people begin to feel that what they're doing is morally 'wrong'.

This is when the Nazi's adopted bureaucratic organisation into their killing because Weber defined bureaucracy as efficient and highly regulated. This is what made the new planned world possible and gave the genocide a radical purpose of being an unorthodox means to an ultimate end.

Under the ideological influence of the Naziss, Bauman argued that the idea of controlling our future and manipulating nature are rather modern ideas which are related to the characteristics of modernity. So they killed to make the 'perfect world'. But, the Holocaust was made possible by modernity, it didn't support it.

Bauman quoted, " When the modernist dream is embraced by an absolute power able to monopolize modern vehicles of rational action, and when that power attains freedom from effective social control, genocide follows " (p. 93-94). So when an ideology combines with a absolute power, then it gains access to multiple resources, e. g. bureaucracy and science. Combined they set in motion events that bring together rather separate factors that are usually kept separate, e. g. the state, ant-Semitism. This is what combined to give rise to the Holocaust.

So such notions of violence leaving society is not true, it has just become more concentrated, and kept hidden from mainstream society. This is

because violence leads to reactionary aggression, which is why it must be  
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kept hidden. Also, violence need to be controlled and organised so it can become more efficient in achieving its goal. So people now control violence and can use it rationally for state use, and it's not constraint by morality due to a hierarchy distancing themselves from the results of this violence.

This efficient use of violence takes morality out of the equation. This requires there to be an existing division of labour and operating and adhering to rules and not operating by moral responsibility. The division in labour allows those at the top of the divisional hierarchy to distance themselves from the final outcome. Knowledge is unique depending on the level of the hierarchy, so people don't know how things are carried out and emerge. This is what leads to commands from superiors without knowledge of the effects of an action. As different parts of the hierarchy come together through functional instead of hierarchical reasons. This is when each division is unaware of what each division does. There are multiple purposes for each division, trains can carry resources and people. This combination of roles makes it difficult to discover the origins of the action and harder to pin responsibility. With substituting moral knowledge with technical, responsibilities simply become an end in itself, not a means.

Acts are now seen as morally indifferent because the meaning towards their actions is stripped. So when moral worries are encountered, they can be judged rationally and efficiently to get the best outcome.

Statistics dehumanize objects through bureaucracy by replacing humans with numbers. Bureaucracy has developed through modernity, and contains in its actions all the technical elements which proved necessary in the

execution of genocidal tasks. This mode can be put to the service of a genocidal objective without major revision of its structure, mechanisms and behavioral norms.” (p. 104). This action was what led to Germany defining, segregating, deporting and executing the Jewish.

**Simple institutions such as the church and even science should have been able to stop the Holocaust. With violence being organised and controlled by the state and any form of resistance being removed, the population seem helpless. This leaves people unable to do anything about the violence. But, safeguards in other societies give people the belief that they're protected from the state, but this is not true and hides the inevitable truth. Certain things like science, however much they attempt to improve the world, did little to stop Hitler but actually helped him. Also, the Hitler left the catholic church alone he exploited people's revulsion for violence which intimidated people into submitting to his demands. This is what made modern society incapable of stopping the Holocaust.**

**The Jewish, however the victims, had a part to play in their own situation. This was because nearly every decision made by the Jewish helped the Nazis. Due to the lack of conflict in society, the Jewish community was still part of the class structure and not immediately segregated. This meant that whatever existing conflicts there existed within the Jewish society remains and some became more significant, so everyone was out for themselves. All this allowed the German's to work with and within the Jewish community. "The Jews could therefore play into the hands of their oppressors, facilitate their task, bring closer their own perdition, while guided in their action by the rationally interpreted purpose of survival." (p. 122)**

**Isolating the victims was of vital necessity in making it easy to work and handle the population. In the community remains whole and not divided they become easier targets. This was done by the increasing appeal of anti-Semitism because the Jewish were seen as unclean and were alienated due to the disgust of the rest of society. The new definition of the Jew allowed a clear separation of Jewish and non. This resulted in the more distinguish members of the Jewish society simply trying to survive. In controlling the situations the Jewish found themselves in, they could become easily controlled. Some Jewish attempted to move of labelled ‘third race’, those who weren’t counted as German. Some attempting to control their own status by appealing to the state were often privileged and could afford it, this is what resulted in a separation within the Jewish community. This ‘rejection of solidarity’ (p 133) reinforced the principle of division and at “each stage of the destruction — except the final one — there were individuals and groups eager to save what could be saved.” (p. 134).**

**In organising the conditions of choice, the self interest of the Jewish simultaneously helped the Nazis. Even if the creation of Jewish ghettos helped preserve their way of life, it isolated them and distanced them from modern society. But at moment there was co-operation between Germans and Jewish, but relationship weren’t maintained because the ultimate plan was there destruction.**

**But, the Jewish community couldn't help the situation they were placed in and they had to decide rationally between two evils. These decisions must be made on an individual and group level, but the people making the decisions aren't always in a position of control, even despite their position within society.**

**In using Milgram's study of Obedience, it was shown that average people can commit awful acts. Milgram demonstrates this by showing inhumanity is a function of social relations and distance. In his study on obedience (1963), subjects are socially authorised by a scientist to gradually intensify the administration of an electrical shock to the victim that can only be heard, with the legitimacy that administration of an electrical shock serves the victims learning capabilities. In the experiment, Milgram discovered that subjects continue administration of shocks, as long as physical proximity is eliminated, with actions being routinized and shocks authorised by higher ranks. This repeating of an action makes it harder to quit, because a person's dependence of an action grows with repetition, but it also becomes second nature in which people don't question what they're doing.**

**But it is due to bureaucracy changed the nature of morality and choice. Rules have replaced morality, so people find it hard to discover the what is wrong with something due to how it's organised and the shift of focus from moral to technical.**



**In providing the right to demand to superiors, subjects are freed of morality. This is why in Milgram's experiment, when the experimenter gave permission for the shocking. Bureaucracy allowed people the ability to command others and provided this became the duty of others to obey. When this shift in responsibility is dominant within an entire system, finding who was originally responsible difficult because not one person is to blame.**

The Holocaust is commonly associated with a mad dictator's goal to achieve the 'perfect society' and is viewed simply as an aberration, this undermines its significance. In Zygmunt Bauman's book, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, he contends with the idea that the Holocaust is more than an accident along the road of modernity, but modernity provided the 'necessary conditions' for this genocide (Bauman, 1989, pg13). The book revolves around the relation between moral indifference and social configurations of modernity, being essential towards the Holocaust. To Bauman, the Holocaust was a 'legitimate resident in the house of modernity' (Bauman, 1989, pg 17). 'At no point of this long and torturous execution did the Holocaust come into conflict with the principles of rationality' (Beilharz, 2001, pg 246). In pursuit of the 'perfect society', there was no conflict between this and the values and beliefs of modernity. Modernity may not have been directly responsible, but it failed to prevent it. This immoral act, which took many years to end, was compatible with modern society due to bureaucratic configurations using rationality and efficiency, instead of morality in socially engineering and organising society. With modern society operating in a similar fashion, what is to stop another Holocaust from happening?

To Bauman, the Holocaust was a product of modernity, not a failure. While not directly responsible, it provided the means and resources needed to foster the genocide; this was due to the inherent characteristics of modernity. As Bauman explains, “ it arose out of a genuinely rational concern, and it was generated by bureaucracy true to its form and purpose” (Bauman, 1989, pg 17). Bureaucracy naturally emerged from strict adherence to reason and maintained the efficiency of the Holocaust. In complimenting this view, Bauman sees the Holocaust as not some rare aberration of civilised society, but as the ‘ hidden face’ of civilised face of society. Natural behaviour at this time had a hidden deviant agenda. This behaviour was well hidden due to it manifesting itself under stressful events, e. g. recovery from World War 1.

‘ The bureaucracy’ can mean an organisational structure (government, education), and can be projected onto societies to help explain their inner workings. To control their victims and isolate them, the bureaucratic apparatus of the Nazi regime made sure to invade all the existing Jewish communities. In order to be easily controlled, the Jewish needed to behave predictably. Sealing their communities forced the Judenräte to create a ‘ predictable market for survival’. Those of a more privileged position and better social class have access to better resources and chances of survival, so intentional stratification was established within these communities. “ This led to the rejection of solidarity in the name of personal or group privileges (which always, albeit indirectly, meant consent to the principle that not all members of the marked category deserve to survive, and that differential treatment should follow the duly assessed ‘ objective’ quality) was prominent

not only in the inter communal relations” (Bauman, 1989, p. 133). This system aimed at provoking primal tendencies towards self preservation and class mattered. In this decision, German’s overcame moral objection by forcing the poor Jewish communities to deal with this dilemma. Later, after inhumane decisions were made, the bureaucracy took over to rationalise all the horrors, in the name of authority and technical responsibility.

The Jewish were viewed as disruptive and a threat to national identity. The Jewish society over history had never had a home nation and have a mixed heritage; this led to them having ties to many countries, including hostile countries. Categorization of groups due to their perceived deficiencies is the social engineering of the perfect society. Paradoxically this goal fuels both modernity and racism. And once the belief sets in that ‘ the Jew’ could not be cured, the realization of a Judenfrei Reich moved from expulsion to extermination. Without the drive for full control found in modern civilisations, the Holocaust may not have happened.

In maximising its efficiency, modern society guarded the bureaucracy.

Sundaram understands Bauman’s thesis that “ the spread of instrumental reason with the rise of capitalism enforced a means-ends to the exclusion of morality from social action. It was this bureaucratic culture which is a condition of modern society in general, which made the holocaust possible” (Sundaram, Modernity and Its Victims, pg 459). Reason was such as influential characteristic of modernity it replaced morality in society and individual action. With capitalism providing the most promise in terms of autonomy and power, it seemed the most logical path. Instrumental reason was promoted to such an extent that factors such as morality were sidelined.

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The culture of bureaucracy was a by product of instrumental reason, eventually it became a more pervasive force in society by taking on greater jurisdiction. It no longer uniquely served capitalism, and began changing societies actions and attitudes, either hiding morality or changing is perceived as moral and immoral, e. g. the Jewish.

Rationalization and its consequences of bureaucratic organisation on Weber's theoretical analysis of the rational bureaucracy explain the Holocaust. Weber defined bureaucracy as a ' hierarchical organisational structure designed rationally to co-ordinate the work of many individuals in the pursuit of large scale administrative tasks and organisational goals' (Slattery, 2003, pg 28). Bureaucracy relies on rules, hierarchy and reliability, not personal relationships and decisions by men, making it possibly the most efficient and technically superior form of organisation. Bureaucracies ensures continuity of a process and progressively increases its methods, becoming more efficient. Hitler's goal of a ' judenfrie' (Jewish free land), the bureaucratic apparatus had to devise the means, formalizing distinctions, segregating Jewish from mainstream society, deporting the Jewish, whilst rationalising their extermination.

Weber's positive regard to bureaucracy doesn't come without concern. The alienation of workers from ' their' final product, because of the specialisation of work may lead to moral indifference. Hierarchies exist within bureaucracies, so people can distance themselves from the consequences of the final outcome. The moral context isn't related to the actions of people, but the authorization of superiors. In Milgram's study of obedience (1963), the subject is authorised by a scientist to gradually intensify the

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administration of an electrical shock to the victim that can only be heard, with the legitimacy that administration of an electrical shock serves the victims learning capabilities. In the experiment, Milgram discovered that subjects continue administration of shocks, as long as physical proximity is eliminated, with actions being routinized and shocks authorised by higher ranks. Sundaram points to the fact that “ the holocaust provides us with a profound insight into the consequences of the ethically blind pursuit of efficiency and goal-maximisation that informs bureaucratic culture” (Sundaram, 459). Bauman suggests in his book that society has inherited a form of ethical blindness, instead of giving pause to individuals and consider the consequences of their actions; they are fixated upon meeting immediate objective in the most efficient manner.

Ethical blindness is the immediate effect of the ‘ social production of distance’ (Sundaram, 460) resulting in the modern divisions in labour found in modern capitalist societies. Routinized practises cut out the ‘ choice’ where morality should be considered. Repetition of this actions helps dissolve moral conundrums, so the action become automatic. This level of high management and efficiency can effectively distance the contributor towards the end product. This distancing removes moral consideration which may surround the end products. “ Most people involved in the holocaust simply never faced difficult moral choices” (Sundaram, 460). Bauman explains, “ the struggle over moral issues never takes place, as the moral aspects of action are not immediately obvious or are deliberately prevented from discovery or discussion” (Beilharz, 2001, pg 252). So distancing from an

action is a problem, but also common of criminals to conceal the moral implications of their actions.

Proximity is possible in a variety of forms. Through identification and objectification, boundaries are created between 'them' and 'us'. Employing negative labels allows the Nazi regime to relate to the Jewish identity as a threat to the German community. This subsequently structures the perceptions and understandings to the Aryan category (Lakeoff and Johnson, 1980). This builds the image of groups supported by the system, e. g. Nazis, and those rejected. Visible evidence, like stars of David, ensure instantaneous categorization- and thus segregation by the supported groups.

Identifying rationality, efficiency and bureaucracy as the defining characteristics of modern society is supported by Horkheimer and Adorno, in their book *The Concept of Enlightenment*, by criticising the dominant tendencies of modernity. With its main thrust being the human desire to conquer its fear of the unknown through accumulation of knowledge. Within the context of modernity, this knowledge takes on the specific form of technology: technology is the essence of this knowledge. It aims to produce neither concepts nor images, nor the joy of understanding, but method, exploitation of the labour of others, capital (Kearney and Rainwater, 1996, pg 199). This is seen as a cold form of knowledge, complimenting methodological predictability and calculability. 'For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion'. (Horkheimer et al, 2002, pg 3)

Hoekheimer and Adorno begin to critique the enlightenment by highlighting its dominant tendencies. With its main thrust being the human desire to conquer its fear of the unknown through accumulation of knowledge. Within the context of modernity, this knowledge takes on the specific form of technology: technology is the essence of this knowledge. It aims to produce neither concepts nor images, nor the joy of understanding, but method, exploitation of the labour of others, capital (Horkheimer et al, 2002, pg 2). This is seen as a cold form of knowledge, complimenting methodological predictability and calculability. ' For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion' (Horkheimer et al, 2002, pg 3). From this determination to accumulate knowledge, the concept of power and domination come into play. To Horkheimer and Adorno, " power and knowledge are synonymous," and " what human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts" (Horkheimer et al, 2002, pg 2). To understand the nature of something is to explain it scientifically, therefore to control it. But as more power and control are gained we distance ourselves more from nature. Horkheimer and Adorno said, " human beings purchase the increase in their power with estrangement from that over which it is exerted" (Wilson, 2007, pg 17). The process of science conceptualises and classifies objects, which diminishes individuality by seeing it as ' insignificant'. Lessening the importance of individuality, account's for humanities estrangement from nature and long term suffering. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, " not only is domination paid for with the estrangement of humans beings from the dominated objects, but the relationship of individuals to themselves, have

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themselves been bewitched by the objectification of mind.” As a result, “ individuals shrink to the nodal points of conventional reactions and the modes of operation objectively expected of them” (Horkheimer et al, 2002, pg 21)

In conclusion, Bauman’s evaluation on the mechanisms of authority, rationality and modernity were all relevant and still have meaning in contemporary society and organisations. Rationalistic views on organisation and co-ordination is dominant in organisational design nowadays. Focus is on financial decisions, performance, functional specialization and layering in competences. But, in relating these designs to the Holocaust is a little extreme. But in order to prevent something similar in the future, patterns in the early stages must be recognised and quick evaluation needs to be made by learning from history. This may involve taking a critical stance towards bureaucratic and objectivistic organising principles. But, it was under these circumstances that man committed the unthinkable by capitalising on man’s estrangement from nature and resulting in moral blindness. With the Nazi enterprise proceeded towards the final solution with the power and legitimacy of modern technological industry, and this is why when we have progressed in forms of technology and means to execute orders, be wary of another Holocaust.

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