

## **The Lucifer-Effect – The Importance of Arendt's 'Banality of Evil' for Social Psychology**

In 1971 the social-psychologist Philip Zimbardo showed with his "Stanford Prison Experiment" that certain social and political conditions are favourable for the emergence of the "banality of evil" (see the film *The Experiment*, 2001, by Oliver Hirschbiegel). In his book *The Lucifer Effect*, Zimbardo writes:

What is most striking in Arendt's account of Eichmann is all the ways in which he seemed absolutely ordinary ... Arendt's phrase of the 'banality of evil' continues to resonate because genocide has been unleashed around the world and torture and terrorism continue to be common features of our global landscape. We prefer to distance ourselves from such a fundamental truth, seeing the madness of evildoers and senseless violence of tyrants as dispositional characters within their personal makeup. Arendt's analysis was the first to deny this orientation by observing the fluidity with which social forces can prompt normal people to perform horrific acts.

Philip Zimbardo: *The Lucifer Effect. Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, New York: Random House, 2008, pp. 28of.

[Interview with Philip Zimbardo](#) 2006 by Christopher Lydon, "Radio Open Source. Art, ideas & politics"

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