

## From psychopathology of Übermensch

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“Rudolf Höss – S. Batawia wrote in his study published in 1951 – was not an abnormal individual of moral insanity type, nor *Gemütlos Psychopath*; no criminal tendencies or sadistic personality traits were traced across his life-span. He was an individual of mediocre intelligence, since his childhood, due to environmental influences, showing little criticism in understanding, and submissive to any authority; such people are met quite often.”

J. Sehn in his introduction to Rudolf Höss *Reminiscences* is right saying: “... facts and dates in Höss’s life are significant not only for this one individual. Stages of his life only are representative for many of Höss generation”.

Höss autobiography entitled *My soul, formation, life and experiences* evokes mixed reader’s emotions, but piety and repulsion dominate.

German editor of Höss’s memoirs, M. Broszat (1958) quoting Gilbert writes as follows:

“Eagerly ardour meticulousness of a man, who always serves some authority, who always fulfils his duties – as well as executioner, as admitting his guilt delinquent, who permanently lives second-hand life, always resigning from his own personality, offers the tribunal his tremendously blank “I” a form of autobiography, giving himself all to the case”.

Höss’s childhood is overwhelmingly dull and dry. Home of military traditions, father, retired

major from colonial army in German Africa, “Fanatic catholic”, as Höss describes him, was rigid in upbringing him.

“Since early childhood – writes Höss – I was brought up in deep feeling of duty. In my parents home all instructions had to be executed exactly and with commitment. ... My father was using crude military rules towards me. ... Permanently instructed me, that small seemingly insignificant neglects lead very often to serious harms.”

This attitude, transmitted by the father, was characteristic for Höss, till the end of his life. In Auschwitz, as one can conclude from his own relations, the most disturbing for him was not the odour of burning bodies, but just various small administrative neglects. Introduction of cyclone was welcomed with happiness as it improved annihilation of millions of Jews. He was worried when ordered to send part of the Jews to work because they died in a few weeks; it would be more effective to send them immediately “to the gas”.

One could say that in Auschwitz, as in other places he was so busy with avoiding “small seemingly insignificant neglects”, that he almost did not noticed crematories.

When the father figure is clearly delineated in Höss’s memoir, his mother stays obscure. He mentions only, that she tried to “devoid him from his love toward animals, she understood as dangerous”. Relations between parents were polite, (Höss writes: “they never exchanged bad or angry words”) but rather distant (“I never saw any kindness between them”). He writes about himself: “I was vehement with any kind of cordiality. Shake hand and few words of appreciation that was all one could expect from me”. He did not

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like his sisters, 4 and 6 years younger. They tried to be kind for him, but he bullied them so that they were complaining to their mother.

He was surrounded by emotional emptiness. "I appreciated my parents, both father and mother, but never felt love, of such a kind I experienced later in life." He lost the father being 14, and mother being 16 (leaving at that time to war) staying distant.

This emotional dryness, withdrawal and emptiness is present on every page of his memoir, makes it greyish, and boring in reading. The only bright fragments refer to the fights in Iran in 1917, and to the figure of an officer "war father" of 17 year old Höss (Our relation was more cordial than with my father"). He was looking at me, and even never lenient with me, was warm and caring, as I was his son"). The other, very short, refers to his first love (the same year, in a hospital in Palestine: "At first I was confused when a nurse patted me gently or supported me longer than necessary, as since early days I have avoided any signs of sentiment. But, finally even I fall in the mysterious circle of love..."). Yet another is the farewell letter to his wife and children written in the Polish prison.

He had no playmates in childhood.

"All our neighbours' children were older than me. I was left only to the company of adults." His friends were animals, especially bellowed pony, Hans.

"My only listener was my Hans, and he, I was convinced, had understood me [...] I have been a solitary person, and had played, or been busy when nobody was looking at me".

It is possible, that Höss presented some obsessive-compulsive features: "I always had to wash myself. I washed also in a bath or in a stream in our garden everything at my hand. This way I had destroyed many things, clothes as well as toys."

This devotion to being clean characterized him to the end of his life; one can suspect that in the camp dirt and lack of order irritated him most.

Till the end of life his was unable to develop an attitude towards other people. He was always "fully alert" listening to the orders, or giving them to others. He was unable to meet the other person as an equal being, on a horizontal level. He couldn't even find in himself a simple human attitude towards another human being.

His world was divided into leaders, soldiers, enemies and prisoners. It was a world of mechanical elements, robots – not people. There was no place for feelings, one's own thoughts and assessments; everything was planned, calculated, solid, scientific and clear.

In his farewell letter Höss writes to his oldest son, Klaus:

"The greatest mistake in my life was a blind confidence towards everything which was coming from the top, and, that I have never had a slightest doubt in the truth of what was declared. Go through the life with your eyes open, never stay one-sided, carefully look pros and contras in any case. In every enterprise be ruled only by your reason, but be sensitive to the voice of your heart. [...] Be the human being, who follows, in the first place, the deep feeling of humanity". And to his wife: "Only here, in Polish prisons, I have experienced what humanity means. I, who as the commandant of Auschwitz caused so much pain and disaster to the Polish nation – however not personally and not of my own initiative – was shown understanding, which ashamed me deeply".

It is possible, that writing such words Höss slightly expected that this cheap ingratiation brings him a mercy; nevertheless it is worth to notice, that in a sudden illumination he discovered, just before his death the existence of such a thing as humanity.

One other formulation is worth attention too – "however not personally and not of my own initiative". Höss regarded himself responsible for all what had happened in Auschwitz, and in this way presented himself to the Polish court of justice, but this responsibility was clear consequence of the camp set of rules: "The camp commandant is fully responsible for the whole matters of the camp". Höss knew these rules and understood his responsibility as the rules said this. But he had no feelings of responsibility. In the depths of his heart he probably, till the end, felt himself innocent, as he only fulfilled his duties.

"Not personally and not of my own initiative" – these words were used maybe without exception by all war criminals, and in a way were right – in a totalitarian system nothing can be done personally and of ones own initiative. Such a system does not allow a person to develop a feeling of responsibility, essential for a mature per-

sonality. Such a system blocks personality development, takes its power from immature people, as such people follow orders in the best way, regarding authority as the most important thing.

"I had become, without my knowledge – Höss writes in farewell letter to his wife – one of wheels in the huge German destroying machine. [...] How tragic is this: I, kind, pleasant, always friendly had become the biggest homicide killer, with cold blood, consequently realizing extermination orders. Long-term, ironhanded training in SS, aiming to change every SS-man in inert tool executing all plans of SS Reichführer, turned me also into a robot blindly following all orders."

In the sentence quoted the colloquialism "to follow blindly orders" is used. The wisdom of generations is often hidden in such sentences. "To follow blindly orders" – means to be oriented totally towards goal achievement: to follow order as robot or computer is oriented to realize the program by typing. There is no choice, as man perceives nothing except the order – goal; is unable to see "the other side", nor nothing besides the straight way to the task.

In his memoir Höss often presents a defence that he did not realize the horrible events in Auschwitz, he did not notice them; blames his subordinates, who did not follow the camp rules, nor follow his orders. In the same letter to his wife he writes:

"Only during the court procedures all the most horrifying which had happened there [in Auschwitz] came to my awareness".

For every reader such explanations are as childish lying. It seems however, this is not a lie built is a self-defensive reflex. People – robots, really, do not see many things. The goal fulfils the whole area of seeing. They lose the skills of seeing things from various angles. They can see it from one point of view only.

A stick is a tool to beat only; never the thing used by the blind, never a toy to play with a dog, a measure of length, part of a tree, imaginary horse the child rides etc. The core characteristic of the play in children, but also in some animals is the ability to look at the same thing in varying way. A moving finger can be a mouse for a playing cat; it tries to catch it. Sometimes the same finger can be a sign of punishment, or a part of a stroking hand. For a girl a piece of cloth can be

her small daughter, or a ball, something to make a dress for a doll, or many, many other things from wonderland.

In the play always a good humour is present as we discover that things we used to perceive in a way suddenly appear differently. Adults behave like children, children imitate adults, a serious gentleman walks "on fours" and becomes a horse and creator of other surprises a play brings in.

Little Höss had no play companions; he had a pony, but the pony did not create any fairytale-space for him, such as the play with other children creates. He rather washed in water imagined dirt, may be his repressed aggression. Of course these are very uncertain hypotheses; his early biographical data are very scarce to try explaining his obsessive efforts to keep everything clean. By the way many children have similar childhood – cold, rigid atmosphere with no place for play, fantasies and caress. They are unhappy children but grow up as praiseworthy people.

Empty childhood left permanent traces on Höss. This man probably could not play nor joke at all. He had no sense of humour. His life was all fulfilling orders. He was always serious, even composing tragicomic inscription and the Auschwitz gates. Lack of sense of humor resulted also from his narrow mind, unable to understand any problem in its wholeness.

He is eager to follow all orders, good pupil, brave soldier in the Iran campaign, excellent prisoner when sentenced guilty for taking part in my murder in twenties. He writes about his time in prison:

"Being in my youth disciplined and used to full obedience, pedantry in keeping order and cleanness I had no problems in adjustment, in this respect, to the hard prison life. I strictly fulfilled my duties, performed my job, even more than expected, to my foremen satisfaction".

Nevertheless, in a third year of his imprisonment, Höss went through a mental breakdown, which he describes as follows:

"After two years I spent without unusual events, always in the same way, suddenly I fell into a specific state. I became excited, nervous and irritated. I felt repulsion to work [at that time his worked as a tailor, and liked it]. I could not eat; every piece of food I swallowed with difficulties was coming back. I could not read, concen-

trate. As a wild animal I was walking forth and back in my cell. I could not sleep; till that time I was always in deep sleep without any dreams. Now, I had to get up and walk unable to find peace. Tired, I was falling asleep to wake up soon wet with sweat from enmeshed nightmares. In these dreams I was always followed, killed, shot or dropping down in an abyss. Nights became a pain for me. Hour after hour I heard the tower bells. The closer morning, the bigger my panic concerning the coming day, people I would have to see – but I wanted to see nobody. I tried to keep myself up, but could not help. I wanted to pray, but was capable to express only my fear, I forgot how to pray, I could not find the way to God. In this state I believed the God does not want to help me, because I left him. I suffered that I officially left the church in 1922. I was sorry, I did not follow my parents' advice and did not become a clergyman. It is curious, but all this was in my sorrows at that time. My excitation was increasing every day, every hour. I was close to madness. Physically I was weaker and weaker. My foreman was shocked with my inattention; I was making wrong the simplest things, and even working hard I could not achieve norms".

The physician diagnosed a prison psychosis in Höss. He recovered after several days' treatment in hospital. This was the strongest breakdown in his life, much stronger than the other one he experienced years later, by the end of his commanding Auschwitz.

Höss was also a model-prisoner in the Polish prison. "He spontaneously made written comments when any problem was interesting for the prosecutor" – wrote J. Sehn. This eagerness to be excellent in fulfilling his superiors' orders was characteristic for Höss. Independently who the superior is, it could even be a Pole.

When ordered by Himmler to extend the Auschwitz camp Höss described his enthusiasm in the following words:

"Since the beginning I have been engaged, simply speaking overwhelmed with the task and order I got. Arising difficulties only increased my enthusiasm. I did not want to give up, my ambition did not allow me for it. I have been seeing my work only".

While in Auschwitz Höss developed what could be called managers' neurosis.

"I was more and more withdrawn, isolated and tough. This caused my family, especially my wife to suffer: It happened I was just unbearable. I had not noticed anything except my job and my task. This eliminated all human reflexes. [...] I would rather run away not wanting to see anybody".

His self-treatment was the oldest tranquilizer – alcohol.

"Alcohol quickly improved my mood and caused cordiality toward the whole world"

The reason for his neurosis however was not the mass extermination of Jews and other nationalities. He accepted the information of successful experiments with cyclone with happiness:

"I was quiet now that we all will be able to avoid massacres and victims will be saved suffering". About the horrors of the camp he writes: "I saw everything exactly, sometimes even too realistically, but I could not give up. Within the context of the final goal – the obligation to win the war – nothing that perished on the way must stop my actions and had to be regarded as meaningless".

One can see, that Höss's attitude towards the mass extermination and immediate executions of which he had become aware, was clearly formulated, and he had no doubts that it is correct in the context of final goals – the war victory.

Since his 14 year of age he was used to see dreadfulness, so he quickly get used to everyday Auschwitz "views". So used he even stopped to see them. As he writes, he learned about them at his trial only.

With sympathy, he writes about Gypsies and Himmler's command on their annihilation was unpleasant for him, but an order is an order.

"Physicians, according to the SS Reichsführer order should annihilate ill people, especially children, in a tactful way. They (Gypsies) had so much trust to physicians. Nothing is more difficult than the necessity to accept as normal, in aloof, pitiless, un-empathetic way".

He did not sympathize with Jews, but he did not hate them, according to his own words:

"I would like to emphasize here once more, that personally I have never hated Jews. I perceived them as enemies of our nation, but just because of it, I thought they should be treated as other prisoners. Hate is an emotion I never felt".

Annihilation of Jews he understood to be his highest civil duty, as this was the command he got from Himmler in summer of 1941. In a person to person meeting the SS-Reichsführer told him:

“Führer ordered the final solution of the Jewish problem. We, SS, are to realize this command. It was my intention at first to assign this task one of the higher SS officers, but I postponed this idea aiming avoidance of competence problems. [In such a simple way Himmler ingratiated Höss’ ambition]. Now I appoint you to lead this task. This is a difficult and heavy duty. It requires full determination no matter what difficulties will arise”. (So, the job as tailored for Höss, as he valued only work “difficult and requiring determination”; he would sacrifice himself on the altar of duty). Himmler continued: “This order you are to keep secret, even before your superiors”.

Höss was then entrusted the top secret of service: the one sentence promoted him high above his immediate superiors.

It the last three sentences Himmler presented briefly the purpose of the extermination action:

“Jews are everlasting enemies of the German nation and must be exterminated. All Jews we get in our hands will be, at the wartime exterminated without exception. If we are not successful in destruction of biological power of Jewry now, the Jews will destroy the German nation some day”.

These three sentences placed in a textbook of psychiatry could excellently illustrate a mechanism of paranoid projection. “I hate Jews” becomes repressed and replaced with “Jews hate me”, “they are everlasting enemies of the German nation”. “I hate you” becomes changed into “you hate me”, “you want to destroy me”, “so, to defend myself, I have to destroy you; “If we are not successful in destruction of biological power of Jewry now, the Jews will destroy the German nation some day”.

If Himmler’s quotation above was, in a sense, representative for the way a part of German nation thought and felt in the thirties and forties, then according to psychiatric criteria one would be allowed to think about a common paranoid attitude.

There is no reason to suppose Höss thoughts were varied from his high superior, SS Reichsführer. Burning millions of Jews he probably felt

his duties completed and, as mentioned above, was happy that the introduction of Cyclone made the action more efficient. But, he worried, when part of the Jews was, according to the orders he got, to be sent to work in armament industry, because it was disorganization in his plans, in “cleanness of work”.

Höss wrote: “As SS Reichsführer demanded more as more prisoners were sent to the arms industry, Pohl was forced to include even those Jews who lost their ability to work. The order came that all Jews incapable for work, but curable in six weeks were cared for and fed well”. (Till this time all Jews unable to work were gassed together with next transports or killed with injections if hospitalized in “revir”). “This order was a mocking” – revolted Höss. For the first time he dared to revolt at his superiors order. Further on, he matter-of-factly gives reasons for its absurdity. His unlimited, till this time, confidence in his superiors became unbalanced.

He was disappointed with Himmler who was giving contradictory orders. He did not help him in difficult camp situations. Bringing Himmler’s several contradictory orders he wrote about him: “That is how his opinions oscillated!” The same concerns a question of punishing. One time Höss was of opinion, that a number of motions for physical punishment is to high, the other – that: “Obedience in the camps decreases, it should be improved with more severe punishment”. He did not revolt at the mentioned order concerning extermination of Jews; maybe even he was honoured being charged with such a responsible mission, but he was shocked that even Himmler was giving contradictory orders, impossible to realize, or disorganizing the camp life. This was questioning his belief in the holiest of things: order. Höss’s trust in his Führer’s authority collapsed at least, when at the defeat of Germany he was ordered “to hide within the army”, instead of, as he expected, to die with the world they created, in suicide. It seems that Reichsführer to a great extend influenced the appearance of neurotic symptoms in former commandant of the camp.

The other superiors were not better.

“This lack of understanding on the side of my superiors was bringing me to despair almost. I was using in this task all my skills, all my will, I sacrificed myself, and Glück noticed only ca-

price and play" (this sounds almost as a pupil's complaint when classified with bad grade).

But not only superiors frustrated him. Subordinates did so too.

"I saw my subordinated cheating me at every occasion, every day I was disappointed".

Höss's camp neurosis was caused not, as one could suppose by the moral conflict resulting from his function at the death-camp. This was his honourable duty. Seeing everyday, the horrible crimes did not evoke guilty feelings in him, as killing was for him not crime but military duty of destroying enemies of the Third Reich. If not destroyed, they should destroy the German nation.

Neurotic guilty feelings arose in Höss from something quite opposite, from conviction that he does not fulfil his executioner duties efficiently. For him, an old soldier, brought up in "a deep – as him states himself – sense of duty" awareness that one does not fulfil well ones duties, was unbearable.

Höss tries to reduce his burden of guilt throwing it on his superiors and subordinates. To lessen this burden he dares even to criticize even his highest superior – SS Reichsführer. But then his trust in authorities becomes unbalanced, causing a next factor of neurosis in a man of this type, for whom problem of authority was crucial since childhood.

However it sounds incredible, a feeling of incompetence in fulfilling his duties as executioner caused the moral conflict at the foundation of Höss' neurosis. The pure fact of being executioner did not arouse in him feelings of guilt, maybe they did not even reach his consciousness. Since childhood he had been introduced to rigorous fulfilling orders, not to analyzing their content.

It does not seem the everyday exposition to the camp horrors was the cause of neurosis in Höss. Very early he had started to get used to blood and suffering.

Being 14, in consequence of my continuous asking – writes Höss – I got my mother's permission to join the Red Cross auxiliary forces [...]. In hospitals I was hearing moaning of heavily wounded, passing shyly by their beds. I saw dying and the dead. I felt then something specific, unusual, giving me the shivers. I could not describe this feeling today".

Maybe this "giving the shivers feeling" in relation to dying and the dead was coloured sexu-

ally, and as such repressed in subconsciousness, but there are no proofs for it. By the way, sadistic emotions are not rare among children. In any case, in the whole lifeline of Höss, one can hardly find any trace of sadism, even hidden, something Batawia underlines.

Very good training for the future commandant of Auschwitz was Höss' service in Free Corps he joined for a time between his 19 and 23<sup>rd</sup> year. That is how he writes about them:

"Fights in Baltic countries were characterized by savageness and obstinacy I have never met before during the World War, and later fighting with Free Corps. [...] Any fight developed into a slaughter till the total extermination ... Many times I saw horrifying pictures of burned out cottages and carbonized bodies of women and children".

A specific training was also in the secret tribunals, a part of the Free Corps.

"As government could not recognize the Free Corps – writes Höss – it could not persecute and punish crimes within them; nor stealing of weapons, nor treason of military secrets, nor treason of the country, etc. That is why Free Corps, and Organizational Corps, which replaced them, had developed a form of self-regulation based on old German patterns in similar situations: the secret tribunal. Any treason was punished with capital punishment. So many traitors were executed".

That is how Höss had been preparing himself to become a judge and an executioner in one.

He went later through a regular training in the concentration camp Dachau (1934–1938). He was taught there, according to his own words, that "every minimal sign of pity reveals to the enemies of the state a weakness they would not hesitate to take advantage of. Any pity for the enemies of the state is disgraceful for the member of the SS. For soft-hearted people there is no place in SS and they would rather join immediately a monastery. SS needs people tough, decided, following any order without hesitation. They carry a scull and weapon not for nothing. They are the only soldiers who, even at peacetime, day and night, have to deal with enemy, enemy behind barbed wire". This way a service of prison warden and executioner was elevated to the level of front soldier.

But even Höss was shocked with his first physical punishment.

"I do remember the first physical punishment. I was standing in the first row and forced to look at the whole course of it. I say 'forced to', as in a back row I would not look at it at all. I felt cold and hot when the cries started. The whole event, from the beginning made me shiver". Some doubt arose, concerning his suitability for this kind of service. "And just here my guilt starts. I saw clearly I do not fit to this service, as I did not agree in myself for such life and rules in concentration camp Eicke demanded. I was in my mind too closely attached to prisoners, as I lived their lives too long, I was myself in similar conditions. [...] I went through the inner fight between my inner conviction and sense of duty to be faithful to the SS oath and vow to Führer. Should I stay a deserter?"

So, Höss step by step, for many years was preparing himself to his future position of the Auschwitz commandant.

It is worth to mention Höss religious life. He was brought up in a religious atmosphere, may be even too religious.

"In consequence of my father's vow –writes Höss – I was to become a clergyman, so my profession was predestined. My whole upbringing was oriented toward this goal. With time my father was becoming more and more religious. Time allowing, he was taking me to various miraculous places in my country, to holy places in Switzerland and to Lourdes in France. He prayed for heaven benediction for me, being some time a devoted priest. Myself, I was also deeply religious, if it is possible in a boy my age, and my religious duties treated seriously. I prayed with childish seriousness and eagerly fulfilled duties of acolyte".

Religious crisis came at 13. His confessor, a friend of his father, betrayed the confession secret, telling about young Höss' school event. The next factor contributing to his withdrawal from religion and postponing plans on priesthood was connected with his stay in Palestine, where he saw that in "holy places holiness was merchandised". Being 22 he formally stepped out of the Catholic Church.

He came back to religion in the Polish prison only. He wrote in farewell letter to his wife:

"During my long lonely stay in prison I had enough time and peace to think through my life. I had reviewed all my doings. [...] All ideology,

all the world I believed in so deeply, were based on completely false presumptions, and had to fall apart some day. My acting in a service of this ideology was also completely false; however I had acted in good belief that the idea was right. Oh, it is logical, that many doubts arose in me; among them that my stepping out from the belief in God was based on completely false presumptions. This was a serious struggle. Nevertheless, I have found my belief in God. I cannot, my dear, write more about it. This would bring me too far".

It is well known, that in a search for aetiology of mental disorder one can follow three basic directions: biological, psychological and sociological – to mention only the most essential. In the biological one there are many detailed traits: genetic, chemical, neurophysiological, pathophysiological etc. what is obvious none of them leads to the full cognition of the disorder aetiology, allows us only to see the problem from a certain point of view.

Höss reaction for imprisonment, described above, can be explained in different ways. For example, as consequence of isolation and monotony of life in prison. It can be also seen in a way taking into account, that neurosis, or psychosis, is a warning that our life does not go in a proper way, according to the laws of human development. Similarly to a pain being a warning of a danger for the organism. It is very rare for a human being to develop all his potentials, part of them stay suppressed, unable to be developed. Sometimes, in exceptional conditions, requiring extraordinary effort, the real worth of the person reveals. In a chaotic and turbulent way these all "energies" not used till now, appear in the acute stage of psychosis.

There are however, people whose whole life goes in a dwarf way. These people have no chance for free development; become dwarfs as a tree put into a flower-pot. Their life is paralysing dull, monotonous, and idle. Using psychiatric terminology one can say these people are incapable to create their own personality, their life is "second-hand", as dr. Gilbert calls it. Such was the life of Höss, always in a shadow of authority, always suppressed, and closed in a narrow circle of orders. Maybe his prison psychosis was the warning that such a life should not be carried on. In fact Höss decided to change his life when he

left prison. Settle in the country and fund a big family. This sounded idyllically. Shortly after, he joined the SS.

So, the warning in a form of prison psychosis did not help. Höss came back to his former line of life – perfect obedience – and in SS he had been developing his features of perfect robot.

Extending human typology by adding a type of robot: somebody whose life goes in complete obedience, precise fulfilling of orders, fully believing in authority, lacking sense of humour, as humour is capable of endangering authority of someone able to see one side only and the other point of view are inaccessible for him – one should add that such a type is keen to compensate his, maybe unconscious, feeling of inferiority with the need of unscrupulous subduing other people.

Let us hope such a type of robot-Übermensch disappeared with Nazi Germany.