



THE SOCIAL APPROACH

OBEDIENCE

An introduction to the Social Approach and the idea of obedience

Social Approach -

the scientific investigation of how the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others

THE SOCIAL APPROACH

The **Social Approach** is the study of how our behaviour is influenced by the presence, attitudes and actions of other people. It considers how individuals interact with each other, and how behaviour may be influenced by group membership and by social situation, and includes our wider culture.

OBEDIENCE

To **obey** someone means to follow direct orders from an individual more often than not in a position of authority. There are three types of obedience in general:

1. **compliance** – following instructions without necessarily agreeing with them (an example of this might be wearing a school uniform – although you don't want to, you comply with the rules and do anyway because it causes you no harm)
2. **conformity** – adopting the attitudes and behaviours of others, even if they are against an individual's own inclinations (an example of this might be the Nazis during the Holocaust, they were instructed to do what they did, and some of them may not have wanted to do it but conformed to the rules anyway)
3. **internalising** – this is carrying out orders with agreement

The term **destructive obedience** refers to the idea of an individual following the orders which they consider to be immoral, which will cause them a lot of distress and regret. This often occurs with *conformity*.

Taking the example of the holocaust further, think of Adolf Eichmann. He was the officer probably most responsible for what happened during the Holocaust, and he always said that he only did what he did because he was carrying out orders. Whether or not it was true, this is an example of how obedience can work, and it was particularly frightening because it makes people wonder if they would do the same thing if it ever happened again and they were in his position. This thought is what has encouraged numerous psychologists to carry out studies into the nature of obedience, probably the most famous of which being **Stanley Milgram**, who was specifically curious about potential replications of the holocaust, because he wanted to test to see if the Germans in particular were different to other people, by testing obedience on other people.