

*The Nazi Doctors*, by Robert Jay Lifton, is a must for anyone interested in the direct psychosocial and material circumstances of the Final Solution, an enterprise that most people have found incomprehensibly cruel. Like Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, *The Nazi Doctors* attempts to demystify the motives of Holocaust perpetrators (in this case, SS doctors and medical workers) and ends up contributing greatly to a modern, enlightened, psychological understanding of evil.

The formalization of Lifton's extensive, groundbreaking research is probably what will continue to bring new readers to *The Nazi Doctors*. His overall thesis that "medicalized killing" played an essential and often overlooked role in the Holocaust has many profound implications, and he has argued it with a rigor characteristic of the best social science. *The Nazi Doctors* is without doubt an important and valuable book.

There are drawbacks, too—mainly in Lifton's presentation. His psychological theorizing about the etiology of individual doctors' behavior is usually either obvious or, if not obvious, a bit oversimple. Of course there is no harm in stating simple ideas or facts, especially if they are new or have been overlooked. There is no harm, either, in stating the obvious: Of course there are those readers to whom it isn't yet obvious. But this book states and restates basic psychological theories, and then summarizes its statements and restatements.

For example, Lifton points to a sort of psychological "doubling" phenomenon, which he posits as having occurred in the personalities of Auschwitz doctors, most of whom began life as relatively "normal" people. This doubling allowed them to separate the non-murderous versions of themselves—the family men, the husbands, the fathers—from the men who felt compelled by circumstance or duty or some deviant inner need to conduct selections, murders, cruel pseudoscientific experiments, etc., on innocent people.

While almost certainly true, it's a simple idea and could have been stated in far fewer pages and invoked far less often without thwarting the author's ends. It is Lifton's application of the idea, rather than the idea itself, that is original. The fact that he goes on for so long explaining such things makes the book seem a little bloated. This is an injustice to his research.

An added weakness for ostentatiously academic formulations makes Lifton seem at times almost unsure of the book's importance. I suppose the thing among career academics is to make a name with novel ideas. Though Lifton clearly succeeds in accomplishing a lot more than that, one can't help but feel subjected to a sort of academic mannerism.

The real core of the book, for these reasons, is the unself-conscious, highly instructive, and direct middle section documenting the careers of Nazi doctors, among them Mengele and Wirths. Even the prose style in this section seems strikingly fluent in comparison with the rest of the book.