

Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience Study Guide

Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience by Gitta Sereny

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Plot Summary

This is a nonfiction book regarding a World War 2 German soldier whose duty was to command a concentration camp designed for the purpose of containing and killing of Jewish prisoners—prisoners of the German State and of the War. The author is a journalist who conducted extensive and thorough research into the subject of the book, Franz Stangl. His role as a servant of genocide in a Reich has its painful echo in the "ethnic cleansing" of this past decade in Bosnia and Croatia. Though the most recent victims are not Jews, the truth is that, pretty much the same kind of thing has been being repeated against a different group of people despite the horror with which the world responded to what happened to the Jews in Germany under the Nazi Party.

The author wrote the book in an effort to examine how the human conscience really functions within the individual, the society, the world. The subject followed orders during the war and went to jail afterward for his war crimes. It was while imprisoned that the author interviewed him personally and conducted research. Here, cruelty is examined as an ethical problem or set of dilemmas and it is viewed from the attitude of sympathy for the victims rather than from the view that the perpetrators are somehow in the right. Both views are available in every conflict. As such, this work is one of ethics and individual biography, consisting of interviews with a soldier who carried out acts of cruelty ordered by those in authority over him and at his own discretion. This makes it an extremely eerie book and a legitimate part of twentieth century history. The book covers a large portion of Franz Stangl's career. The man has a number of talents and skills which turn up in a variety of ways throughout the course of the book. The book ends with his death. Readers are left to draw conclusions for themselves about this war criminal and his conscience. He was in many ways a perfectly good man, in actual fact, but suffered from an extreme level of self-preservation that eroded his morality when he was put to the test. If life is the ultimate value then he preserved his by tolerating the destruction of millions of others. If morality and truth are ultimate values, then he failed to fight for his life as fighting to protect his values. He might have had to sacrifice his life to do so. The book reveals the conflict between the idea that spiritual survival involves living one's values and that other kinds of "death" can occur for people who neglect to do so.



Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 1

Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 1 Summary and Analysis

There are 3 introductory documents that explain that the subject was found guilty of war crimes during World War 2 in 1970. He was kept apart from the others, and at the time the interviews were conducted had been subjected to 3 years of solitary confinement. Since he developed emotional depression as a direct consequence of the isolation, this was alleviated with one or two forms of permissible social contact within the prison. Gitta Sereny offered the prisoner an opportunity to be interviewed; he was in his 60s at the time.

The first interview reveals that the prisoner acted under orders when he ran the death camp. He served 2 tours of duty, lasting 6 months each. This is a fairly standard military system. After the first interview, he tells the author that yes, he will give the type of personal interviews the author wants. The book then changes into the basics of a biography. Franz Stangl tells an anecdote of how he is curious about some snow and how, shortly after the joyful arrival of his father, he receives a beating for having been naughty. This is followed by the story of how this Austrian man is a gifted weaver, and musician; how he shares money with his parents, often giving them most of his pay. At this point, it is worth noting that the fellow is actually gifted. In fact, the author of the book admits that this is what really draws him in: not only is this man guilty, but he is actually rather bright which makes the author more curious and more hopeful about fruitful results. So the master weaver and musician seeks a means of earning a living that will preserve his vitality. He becomes a police officer—an Austrian policeman. He feels this is a tough job, as they are all inculcated with a "me versus the world; no one can be trusted" mentality as part of their training. All is well, Franz is even in love and gets married. Then Austria's Chancellor is murdered and things go from bad to worse. All too soon, in 1938 the Nazis and the Germans are invading and Franz Stangl starts talking about intense fear. He is in a group of 5 men who have earned a medal. Within three short days, three of the others are taken and shot, but their murders are not liable to be punished. He and the other begin to be anxious how to preserve both their lives and their livelihoods.



Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 2

Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 2 Summary and Analysis

Franz Stangl begins describing how things changed when the political climate suddenly changed dramatically. One week Nazis were amongst the illegal political groups targeted for arrest and soon thereafter this man is fearing for both his life and his job. Within a few months he has been transferred and forced to work under German Nazi imports instead of under the normal Austrian officials. He remarks that he hates his boss and makes a few moves to get a promotion with a pension rather than a demotion. He tells the journalist that it works and that the same boss dislikes him after that. Readers should observe that this man develops into a Kommandant and as such has real leadership abilities. These are in evidence throughout the story and in the author's admission that the workers at the prison where this man is kept like him. Not long thereafter, Franz Stangl is chosen for a position in the Euthanasia Programme. This is a new public policy whereby many members of society—the deformed, the retarded, the marginalized, the insane, and some criminals—are able to be killed. There is an economic motivation behind this: it will reserve money and food for those viewed as more worthy members of the society. At its inception, the Euthanasia Programme is intended to kill a lot of social outcasts but is not devised to murder Jews.

The Catholic Church opposes the Euthanasia Programme due its stance in favor of life. There is another strand of opposition within the German government that, to the limited extent possible, bans all of Hitler's "death camps" as "unconstitutional." Early in the game, the Nazis normally punish those Catholic clerics who oppose them through replacement or demotion. However, Hitler wants his government to throw off the yoke of the Catholic Pope and Germanic Bishops. Hence, as the story continues, readers are more able to see the purpose behind the official document that requests or demands that Nazi officials agree to separate from the Church, should the government wish it. True loyalty to the Church might demand direct disobedience of certain orders made by the government. Stangl struggles somewhat against his new role as a policeman overseeing these Euthanasia death camps of the terminally ill and mentally and physically incurably handicapped. He is threatened with either a concentration camp or with a boss whom he knows hates him as alternatives to keeping his position.



Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 3

Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

During the next chapters, more is explained of the stance of the Catholic and Protestant Bishops of Germany during this Euthanasia campaign. These camps and their program of death are separate from the whole matter of concentration camps for Jews and political prisoners of other kinds. The Catholic Bishops did object, to the Euthanasia campaign, as did the Pope. The truth is that in the aftermath of World War 2 people are disappointed that the clerics were not more aggressive in their opposition of Hitler's policies in Germany. Approximately 60,000 people are killed through the Euthanasia Programme by gas chambers. A Catholic Bishop of Germany writes an official opinion on the subject matter and the Pope of the time makes it clear that the taking of life because someone is sick or weak or handicapped is not acceptable by the Catholic Church because of the sanctity of life. The eradication of such people, quietly sanctioned by too many perhaps, is brought to an end by a change of policy in 1940. It is these same chambers, used for the Euthanasia Programme, that are then used to kill off the first victims brought from the concentration camps. This begins after the official Euthanasia Programme is over.

The Table of Contents divides the book by its Parts. Each Part contains chapters, which are denoted by a bold font Arabic Numeral. During chapter 6 the whole situation grows more ominous. The Euthanasia Programme, which the Catholics and Protestants object to in their official policy and which some members of government deem "unconstitutional" for Germany, is brought to an end. An encoded message 14 f 13 is used to send concentration camp prisoners to their deaths at these sites after the Euthanasia Program is stopped. Chapter 6 of Part 1 begins with Gitta Sereny explaining how the Euthanasia campaign feeds into the extermination of the Jews campaign. What they have in common is eugenics. Here, social Darwinism, with the idea that the superior dominate, and the inferior will be subjected to the dominant ones is heralded as the proper order of things. Just prior to the War and the anti-Jewish laws, the Jews succeed in obtaining dominance in Berlin. This religious minority manages to grow into a pseudo-oligarchy.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 4

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

The very real problem with food supplies in Germany plays into this by emphasizing the competition for food. It becomes a garden variety argument: those with the most to offer should be assured the food; the invalids and incompetent ones should be left out and preferably killed off. This is the kind of thing that even today, when people are angry and hungry and not compassionate, some might briefly think or talk about but not with any expectation that such a nightmarish reality of mass scale eugenic slaughter should be sanctioned by the state and conducted. During the planning for the invasion of Russia, the idea of euthanizing the handicapped is given up and replaced with the mass slaughter of all the inferior peoples, except those that can be enslaved or brought to the service of the dominant and superior ones. Sereny notes that 7 million civilian Russians are murdered on the basis of the idea that Russians are inferior to Germans.

Part 2 begins. The author begins to unravel a point which is confusing for outsiders. This is understanding the differences between the Extermination Programs and the Concentration Camps. The two have been lumped together in descriptions of the events of World War 2 and Nazi policies during the 1930s and 1940s. The Extermination Camps actually only run for a year and a half. There are only 4 of these. During the Eastern invasions and expansions, they are created in Poland. The number of concentration camps is always vastly higher. Gitta Sereny explains that, however horrifying the conditions of the concentration camps the chances of survival there are vastly higher than those in the extermination camps. There are only 87 Jewish survivors of the Extermination camps, and they only survive because they work there. As already mentioned, in the larger scheme of Hitler's Germany, the Jews were but one of a number of targets. The concentration camps have extermination sections, but this is not the same as the places where nothing is done but bringing people in and killing them off. The gas chambers are used for mass scale killing especially after shooting people individually is determined to be inefficient. During this part of the book, the events being discussed move from those taking place during the 1930s into those of the 1940s. Stangl finds working with the killing to be emotionally and psychologically straining and unpleasant. To her credit, Gitta Sereny does give a brief overview of the unpleasant fact that various forms of genocide have occurred throughout history.



Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 5

Book 1, Into That Darkness : Chapter 5 Summary and Analysis

Part 2 continues, neatly divided into chapters. Readers should note that in an earlier speech Hitler warns the most prominent Jews of Europe that he will blame them if there is a second World War. He also tells the people publicly that if "they did that" then he will wipe out Jews throughout Europe in direct retribution for what the wealthiest and most powerful European Jews have done. This tells readers how powerful some of the Jews in Germany and Europe are at the dawn of the twentieth century and it also shows that the intent to kill is there all along and does not only emerge later on. Even so, the whole situation escalates in a step-by-step manner. Colonel Blobel, who is prominent as a Nazi for a while is given responsibility for tens of thousands of Jews. He buries them in mass graves which are noticed by visitors because as the bodies decompose, the gases change such that the earth covering the bodies moves—it rises from the air pressure and sinks as the corpses settled. This same man, after his tour of duty working at killing off Jews and anyone else sent to him for that purpose either suffers a nervous breakdown from the stress and duress of that task or else fakes a nervous disorder. Either way, he is able to free himself from these kinds of military duties without the loss of his life or his pension. This tells readers something important.

Gitta Sereny notes that on the fourth day of interviews with Franz Stangl, his whole approach to their work changes. His demeanor is noticeably different. When he speaks, he speaks clearly. He volunteers information; his whole attitude towards the interview is different. He is able to talk about it, but only in a certain way. It is a safe assumption that nonverbal ways of handling psychologically and emotionally intense information are in play and on display here. The author inquires about whether or not the people who are sent to work at Extermination "Camps" know whether or not that is what the camps really are.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 6

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 6 Summary and Analysis

Franz Stangl is assigned to Sobibor, an Extermination Camp in Poland. He is interviewed by a high ranking official prior to being given this post. He is told he needs to finish building the location. There are indications that it is an Extermination Camp but this is not clearly nor explicitly stated. Gitta Sereny writes that she doubts that Franz Stangl honestly did not know what his next assignment was. This observation is followed up by the author's admission to having questioned a number of other people. The author explains to readers that she tends to believe someone whom, when she asks about the same thing in a wide variety of ways gets answers that reveal the kind of consistency easiest to formulate when it is the truth. One of the realities that makes Franz Stangl admit to himself what is really going on is when he discovers that he has been reunited with some work colleagues from the Euthanasia Programme. He describes a mixture of surprise and some pleasure at meeting up with friends. The problem is that he only gets to be with these people again because they have all been re-hired from the Euthanasia Programme to work an Extermination Camp. He and his friend Michel, a nurse from earlier, recognize a gas chamber. Wirth shows up and assures them they have no choice but to accept their duties and carry out the tasks under penalty of death. Stangl reports that he and his friend want to run away but are given nothing even vaguely resembling a reasonable option for doing so. Soon thereafter Franz Stangl is taken to a meeting with Wirth. The meeting takes place on a hill beside graves designed to handle large volumes of corpses. Stangl tells Gitta Sereny that at the time there are thousands of corpses in these graves so large they are called pits. This is where Wirth spells out the fact that it actually is an Extermination Point for Jews rather than for victims of Euthanasia and that as of that moment, Wirth is putting Stangl in charge of that very place.

Gitta Sereny proceeds to begin sharing certain observations she has made regarding Franz Stangl. She reports that he and Michel intensely desire to escape facing their duties at the Extermination Camp. In fact, Wirth comes for a few days and takes care of things until the man he has just brought in adjusts a bit more to the conditions. Later, the author reports that Stangl begins to operate on two levels—this somewhat artificial separation exists apparently to create some air of normalcy despite the appalling realities. He does not always deny this, but there is a bizarre psychological difference between what she calls 2 phases of his consciousness. Chapter 3 of Part 2 ends with this observation.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 7

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 7 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4 is about how a gifted boy learns goldsmithing during his childhood and is able to save himself and a few relatives by making the most of this. He has to work a great deal; he remarks that he realizes that their survival depends upon his being indispensable to their captors. It is not long before he realizes they are at a death camp and that his ability to goldsmith and his great fortune at being outspoken about this and able to prove it saves them in circumstances in which virtually no one brought in survives. Stan Szmajzner is this fellow's name. He actually makes friends with Stangl to the extent that such a relationship is possible between them. They both end up living in Brazil after the war and Stan gives testimony at Stangl's war crimes trial. Gitta Sereny makes it clear by chapter 5 of Part 2 that the descriptions of events have begun to involve something she has hoped to be able to see: a complete change of the subject's personality. In chapter 5 he is granted leave and there is the indication that he is in danger. Bear in mind that he has told his superiors more than once that he cannot do this work. Hence the suggestion that he may have sort of lost his mind during this experience. The author describes what happens as moral degradation and personality change.

Chapter 5 of Part 2: Gitta Sereny questions the subject about how he did this work, and could not really deny that he did and that he stopped avoiding doing it even as it may well have been possible for him to get out of it. Here, the wife finds out about the killing of Jews in mass numbers from a drunken work colleague of Franz's. Naturally, she is horrified. So much so that readers see that she both seems to head directly for "denial" about this and yet she also confronts him with what he is doing and expresses the intense wish for him to have nothing to do with such atrocities. He desperately minimizes what his actual role is—telling her what they first tell him: that he just needs to do some construction work there.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 8

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Part 2 concludes with the spread of knowledge of the Extermination sites in Poland. Jews are being rounded up from the ghettos, taken and killed, either shot or gassed. The numbers are so vast that plans to use parts of the corpses the same way that parts of horses get used after death are put into practice. The British and Americans are called upon to bring a stop to this. There are new pleas to the Catholic Church from the Americans. The peak slaughter period of Jews in Poland is in 1942. Part 3: Gitta Sereny shares knowledge of these horrific atrocities, having visited both the sites of Sobibor and Treblinka that were killing points in Poland. Some effort is made so that the victims might not see their bitter ends coming and to shield at least some aspect of the minds of those who work there from the horrors taking place. At Sobibor this means that the gas chambers are secluded in the woods a bit away from the rest of the camp. At Treblinka, the destruction stations are only hidden from view. The stench of rancid flesh is reported by people for some distance with the unmistakable nighttime fires. Gitta Sereny writes of a man who is a successfully planted informant at Treblinka. He works for the railroads and is an administrator for the transportation services. His purpose as an informant is to provide the Polish underground with information about German troop movements. He is able to do this. The author is fortunate enough to be able to interview him.

Treblinka is built and used during 1942 and 1943. The author tells of how the Polish villages near the camp figure out what was going on. In general people are horrified and disgusted and suffer from feelings of morose helplessness. The informant writes that it is probably easier for men like himself who are able to be part of an organized resistance group. The man says that his wife, who was able to take it when he was a POW, has a nervous breakdown. Her condition eventually improves but she is completely debilitated for 3 weeks, after which he reports that she suffers from "pathological indifference." Only later, when he honestly assures her that he does not want her to leave when many of the other mothers are leaving the area, he notes that her condition begins to improve. This is how affected those living close to a Death Camp really are.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 9

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 9 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 2 : Money is a central issue. When pillaging, the Germans and other Nazis are able to get a lot of money from the Jews they kill. Looting of the corpses by workers is commonplace. There are regulations about how such money is handled but they do not entirely work. Some of it is and taken by soldiers. This blend of hideous death and decay with wealth and false images of normalcy come together. Again, at Treblinka Franz Stangl attempts to get transferred. He is not allowed to disclose exactly what the problem is. Gitta Sereny remarks that this is odd, and a bit unlikely as by now news of the Extermination Camps is rather widespread but even so it is true that the official policy is one of secrecy. Instead of being able to escape his fate, Franz is set up by Globocnik and Wirth to replace Dr. Eberl as Kommandant of Treblinka; rarely has a promotion been so disturbing. Wirth, who at least is an actual anti-Semite rather than just under the giant thumb of evil leadership, is observed to have really helped Treblinka with a two week long stay. This is in part because he is high enough ranking to actually stop shipments of prisoners for the gas chambers, in order that other messes that have grown overwhelming can be brought once again under control. Franz Stangl is able to give Globocnik precise insight into the routing of many of the valuables. Tracking the loot is actually a police assignment that officially belongs to Franz Stangl's job description.

Part 3 has 17 chapters and runs to page 250. It gives an account of the many events at Treblinka and reveals certain patterns of thinking found in Franz Stangl. One of the first things brought up is that two Russian men actually directly run the gas chambers, quite possibly the gristliest task at that location. The whole place is an orchestrated nightmare turned reality. Another point of great significance is the introduction of another individual into the Treblinka hierarchy. This man, named Kurt Franz, is reputed to be ruthless. Gitta Sereny admits that a main secondary motive for Franz Stangl becomes to be placed over Kurt Franz, rather than under him, in a chain of command. Chapter 3: Gitta Sereny reaches a point after which she describes Franz Stangl as having become two people in the one man; this is the best he can do to cope with his life. Gitta Sereny writes that for the next 3 days of interviews, Franz Stangl seems to have an intense need to tell the truth; this is how she gains familiarity with "both of him."



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 10

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 4: A few young men are saved by being used as workers instead of being sent to the gas chambers. Six men are described, these voluntarily subdivide into pairs. Everyone works intensely and cultivates a capacity for survival. All daily operations stem from this intense desire to survive—an attitude held by Franz Stangl and the other men assigned to Treblinka as supposedly free men, as well as found amongst the prisoners. Two of these fellows survive; Richard and Karel. They are often known affectionately as "twins." Chapter 5: Young men lose their wives or their own lives within ten minutes after arriving at Treblinka. There is a masquerade which is partially effective to soothe those going to their deaths. The illusion is that the place is a charming farm, possibly a labor camp for the countryside. The victims are lied to. They are told the gas chambers are disinfecting stations. They are told to undress with the idea that they will be back for their clothes within half an hour and then will be assigned to barracks that do not actually exist. Typically, thousands of arrivals are killed in the morning and the rest of the day is devoted to cleaning up the bodies and their possessions in preparation for the next batch of arrivals.

Chapter 5 & 6: Richard Glazar notices that Franz Stangl does not seem to directly harm anyone. Richard admits that he is far from being the best of men, but he wholeheartedly believes that Stangl is also not the worst of men. He assures Gitta Sereny that Stangl is no sadist, and that all the cruelty done under his command is done "for him" rather than "by him."

There is a bizarre sense of knowing and not knowing. It has been made clear that the evil stench of the dead and decaying bodies, and the fires used to burn up many corpses are noticeable for kilometers around. Neighboring villagers know what the place is. As the war goes on rumors spread farther and farther. Ukrainians guards trade with local peasants and with the living work-Jews. Stangl has almost two separate identities that go along with having or not having certain kinds of awareness. Hence, he is a pleasant and caring man who likes a good daily ride on horseback and wears tailored clothing made by a master weaver. At the same time, he has been sent far out past the buoys of sanity by being pushed beyond policing under SS Germans in Linz, past the brink of all reason during the Euthanasia Programme and then being saddled with the responsibility for an Extermination Camp that does not even pretend the killings are anything but "bald faced murder." The author describes how events are not remembered in exactly the same way by everyone.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 11

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 11 Summary and Analysis

Chapters 7 & 8: The main point here is the difference between the assimilated Western Jews, who are also often well educated people and the Eastern Jews. Gitta Sereny divulges through others that these groups are treated extremely differently in certain respects by their captors. The Western Jews are deceived in an effort to prevent frightening them as they were led to their deaths. The Eastern Jews are terrorized by their captors and chased to the gas chambers while being whipped. This "difference" is described as having some basis in reality. The Jews of the West tend to think that Judaism is their religion and as such is one and only one factor of their identity. Those of the East think that they are all one people, as Jews. For them, their religion and their cultural identity are united. Chapter 8 someone else who is there observes that Stangl could have done more to humanize conditions but admits that he improved things at least a little bit. Stangl was a devoted husband. Gitta Sereny reports that everyone notices that he does get drunk and that he does not cheat on his wife.

In Chapter 9 one of the work-Jews describes what happens to them, when they learn the brutal truth that their well being will be greatly advanced by plenty of wealthy victims. They are reduced to near starvation during a period of respite from this death mill, so much so, that when the Germans tell them new transports are coming they are glad. Sure enough, they carry on their work while 24,000 Bulgarians are killed and ten days later, are much relieved that they have for themselves much more food and wealth again. This is the brutal truth. Conditions change dramatically in 1943 to 1944. The Americans have entered the war rather fresh, along with the British. Clerics and kings in various locations become more outspoken and courageous against the continuing mass destruction. Circumstances do really begin to improve for Jews. The Swedes protect 45,000 Jews. This is a number that is great and small at the same time.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 12

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 10 concludes with the obvious fact that the Allies want to win the war. There is some discomfort with the fact that there are not search and rescue missions—that these are not prioritized over normal military victories. Meanwhile, the Extermination Camps are not part of the front lines of the war and this is a fact that most of the soldiers stationed there are supposed to appreciate even though they have to face mass graves instead of being shot at directly by the enemy on a day to day basis. Some of the work-Jews hatch a plot to escape. There is success, but their initial efforts are thwarted by Kurt Franz who kills some of them and beats many of the others out of well-placed suspicions. Finally, Gitta Sereny criticizes Franz Stangl for performing excellently as Kommandant. Others notice that he does not keep Kurt Franz, the sadist, in check at Treblinka but endured him as a superior officer. Part 3 concludes with a reiteration of the basic problem. People are not sharing to ensure that no one starves to death. Due to this, there are terrible problems; virtual extortion is used as a means of getting Jewish prisoners food. The author explains that for \$40 in gold, in Poland, one can get a wagon full of food. The same local residents will tell you there is no food in Poland and that everyone is starving. This problem with sharing the wealth exacerbates the political and economic problems that set the stage for the Nazi rise to power in Germany. One main reason Hitler rises to such power is that he promises to get everyone fed. Meanwhile, an intelligence agent of the Polish resistance who works for the railway reports to Gitta Sereny that he counts 1,200,000 people who are killed at Treblinka although official estimates are "only" 750,000. Franz Stangl is finally transferred. He is thrilled to be able to leave his position as Kommandant at Treblinka, but in truth he is not permitted to leave until it is all over. It is not a transfer at all; it is a next assignment.

Part 4: This Part has seven chapters. Gitta Sereny describes for readers the two or three stages of the interviews that she has with the prisoner. She conducts some in April of 1971 and others in June of 1971; she uses the intervening time to prepare for the later portion. Chapter 3: Franz Stangl's love life deserves some mention. He really loves his wife. His police and military service also makes it so that he hardly ever is able to be with her. He manages to get her pregnant and then when she has the baby he is at last granted some leave. Then, due to an entirely unrelated incident, he is only able to spend one week with her. When Gitta Sereny interviews the wife she is told "He was gone for a year after that," (p.262).



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 13

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 13 Summary and Analysis

During chapters 4 & 5 Gitta Sereny describes what happens as the war comes to an end. Frau Stangl and her husband continue to endure a degree of physical separation that a lot of healthy couples would view as intolerable. Nonetheless, the love and sharing of money continue between them. Her husband goes missing for some time. His wife goes on a quest to find her spouse. She tells Gitta Sereny that when she finally reaches the right place, when she asks for him, they tell her "just a minute; we'll go fetch him." She tells the journalist that it is another two years just to be able to spend time with her husband once a week. When she is finally able to do so, she is visiting a prisoner. Gitta also shows how something Franz Stangl does, that appears to be naive proves in the long run, to have been wiser than it first appears but the journalist can only tell this when she has more information. Chapter 6 is about how Frau Stangl persuades her husband to "escape" from a prison situation that is so low security that he can pretty much just walk off and not come back. Conditions like this are described earlier in the book at Treblinka when a man reports that he has Jews in the woods outside the camp and he would not object if they just walk off and save themselves instead getting killed off, but they come back anyways. Franz Stangl would not have escaped from the prison except that his wife begs him to do so. The escape causes them to continue to be separate for years. Gitta Sereny then goes into further examination of this matter of holding people at different ranks of the operations accountable for events. Many Nazi soldiers who were tried for war crimes argued that obedience in carrying out orders absolves the soldier from blame for the orders carried out.

The Germans actually oppose the Bolsheviks in Russia. It is suggested that the Pope may have believed that the German Catholics would be better served by quietude and meekness through the 1930s and 1940s than through active opposition. German Catholics are not attacked during Nazi Germany, but numerous Polish clerics are, apparently in reaction to their more aggressive approach. Part 4 concludes with acknowledgment that the Germans are gentler with the city of Rome and the Vatican than they are with pretty much anywhere else in all Europe where they send in the military.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 14

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 14 Summary and Analysis

Part 5: There are 8 chapters in this Part of the book. The author brings readers into the post war years. For the purposes of explanation, there is often a reference to the past—to a time during the war or the circumstances that led up to it. Stangl makes it to Rome where he is greatly helped. The Pope and the Vatican help him to get a room, to have money, and to arrange for safe transport overseas to a place where he will have a job upon arrival. If the truth is that he was psychologically and emotionally tortured by following orders then the Red Cross passport makes more sense than it does if the same man is simply viewed as someone who voluntarily allows himself be turned from someone good into someone evil.

The top Generals of World War 2 Germany, Hitler and Goebbels did devise a plan to take the Pope of Rome's Vatican City. Gitta Sereny admits that this shows that the rather delicate and fragile position of the Papal seat at that time is emphasized by knowledge of this fact, coexistent with other troubles. German troops do occupy Rome and Italy for a while, and they are careful to treat the Vatican with very intentional and careful respect. The rest of the chapter is devoted to further examining the connections between Catholics here and there, and the war and post-war conditions. There is some discussion of one donation of \$125,000 made by 3 Jewish organizations to the Vatican. There is an oblique reference to the Jewish ways of handling finances and criticisms, including those made by Hitler, that the most powerful and wealthy Jews in 1930 have so much power that they might have entirely prevented World war 2 from occurring but choose not to. There are financial reasons. Part 6 is the last Part of the book. There are 7 chapters in it. This is about Frau Stangl's journey to reunite with her husband after the war. One of her friends can only find an opening in Shanghai, but she is able to get herself and the children into Syria. Still, Syria is quite a change from Austria. She reports that there in Damascus, she is delighted to find that her husband seems to be "his old self again" and she decides to not speak to him about the terrible work he lived through ever again. The fact that Franz Stangl is a multitalented man reasserts itself. It turns out that when he is a policeman he studies mechanical engineering on the side and this comes in handy over 10 years later. He works for a company for two years and earns a middle class living. He runs into a health problem and changes to making elastic bandages for hospitals; he is better at making them than at selling them. When his health improves even more he moves to working away from home and takes a job with Volkswagon; it is simply presumed that he is healing from the deep disturbances of his war experiences during these years.



Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 15

Book 1, Into That Darkness: Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

The family actually moves to Brazil because of their daughter. One of their daughters becomes attached to a local man who is actually quite powerful. However, it is obvious that he is also a womanizer, and as such, not the kind of man they want their too young daughter involved with at all. They also feel the man is so prominent that it will only lead to disgrace and sorrow if they end up forced to confront him about his interest in their daughter. For that reason they relocate to Brazil from Syria; this is a purely preventative action. Their daughters marry other Austrians even though they are living in Brazil. The remainder of the book surrounds the family's adjustment to daily life in Brazil. The youngest child grows up to be a Brazilian, whereas the elder two, while they grow accustomed to living in Brazil, are never that much a part of it. Stangl is reported to be a wonderful father when he is able to be present and dutiful when he is absent, sending whatever help he can, financial or otherwise. He is reputed to have been a faithful husband - at least to the extent that this was possible for someone so often absent and so frequently overwhelmed with excruciatingly difficult situations. He is cited as having "not hid" while living in Brazil and as being less than surprised when Nazi hunters find him. There is the impression that he would argue that his being arresting was simply a consequence of Germany having lost the war and of his having hidden enough of his truth from the Nazis when they invaded Linz that he survived. The man's leadership skills are constantly used; it is reported that wherever he starts working, he is promoted at least once. This occurs when he is a police man and a weaver, civilian engineer and death camp administrator. Here, rather than emphasizing his evil role at the Extermination camp, it is more to note that he is a good worker and capable mid-level leader irrespective of the nature of the work itself. He is a good organizer but not necessarily as good as Wirth. Nevertheless, Stangl is not shocked when he is "caught" as he is well aware of Wiesenthal the Nazi hunter. The book reaches its end in a mysteriously perfect manner. The interviews come to their end with a reiteration of a few basic facts. The fact that Franz Stangl does not fight the Nazis when they arrive in Linz appears to seal his fate. During the final interview he describes this as having been about life and death for him. By doing what he does, he believes he buys himself another 20 years of life. At the same time, he is subjected to such horrors during his police service and military service to the Nazis in the Euthanasia and Extermination programmes that he feels he can refer to it as a fate worse than death. He is dead 19 hours after his final interview with the journalist. Naturally, they fear he had committed suicide but it is just that his heart gives out.



Characters

Gitta Sereny

This is the book's author, a journalist, married woman and mother. She informs readers, writing in the Foreword while living in London, England, that this book is very important to her. The book was published in the 1970s.

Sereny conducted a number of interviews in order to collect the material for this work. She shares her procedure with the readers to some degree; this includes ways she cross-checks information in an effort to get a more accurate sense of the truth. Sometimes the subject is truthful during the interviews and other times Sereny shares that her interviews with other people revealed different information. She is very clear in presenting these instances for readers.

As the interviewer, the author is a "character" in this book, but succeeds in not dominating it.

Franz Stangl

This is the subject of the book. He is interviewed in the early 1970s when he is living as a prisoner, convicted of World War 2 war crimes. He is in his early 60s at the time. He is Austrian by birth and his transformation into a Nazi is directly connected with the rise of power of that political party in his native Austria. He claims early in the book that he chose to entrench himself in deceit for the purposes of survival and success under the Nazi regime rather than to flee the country or to endanger himself and his family further by openly opposing the Nazis.

Franz is a multi-talented individual. By the end of the book he has worked successfully in a number of fields, Kommandant of a Nazi Death Camp being but one of his jobs in life. He is a master weaver and a textile mill mechanical engineer. He is also a good organizer and leader. In addition he is also trained as a police man.

His work with the Euthanasia and Extermination Programmes clearly impacts his mental (and moral) health. The police and military service describe it simply as a jobs that demands "more frequent leave" in order for people to be able to handle doing it. He serves two tours of six months, which is standard military practice. His main assignment is to track and move the money and possessions taken from the victims and re-route them to the German government.

As soon as he is given a genuine opportunity to resume respectable nonviolent behavior he jumps at that chance and makes a transition away from his former job. Colleagues from the Extermination Camps note that he does not directly hurt anyone—not even when he is the Kommandant of a so-called Death Camp.



Prohaska

Prohaska is a German SS officer at the time Nazi Germany invades Austria. He is introduced fairly early in the book. He is placed above the Austrian policeman Franz Stangl shortly after the invasion when personnel from the Linz police force are transferred. Franz notices him specifically because he senses that the other man dislikes him. The dislike is so strong that Franz Stangl reports that Prohaska hates him.

Franz describes Prohaska as competent and hostile. He refers to his own feelings about this man and his relationship to him as relevant to his making a number of decisions. Whenever he is threatened with having to go back to serving under Prohaska, Stangl can be forced to go in a direction that moves him away from Prohaska. This in fact occurs, according to Stangl, when Franz is urged to serve as a police officer at a Euthanasia death station. Despite legitimate misgivings, the Austrian's protests are met with two different threats. One is that if he continues to make these kinds of decisions he might end up in a concentration camp. The other threat is that he can go back to working for Prohaska if he would prefer that. At times like these, Franz Stangl agrees to continue on as a policeman overseer of the "mercy killings" by gas chamber of the "incurable."

Prohaska continues to hold some relevance for Franz later in the book as well.

Otto Horn

This man is one of Franz Stangl's work colleagues during the time when he is urged to police the Euthanasia and Extermination Programmes. Horn is a nurse. He is interviewed by Gitta Sereny as a character witness for Franz Stangl. He is forced to work the Euthanasia and Extermination Camps as well.

Horn is copes well despite being forced to work at a human butcher shop. His consolation may be that he is not in charge; the extermination camps are not his own idea and he will leave them as soon as he can.

Richard Glazar

This man is one of Franz Stangl's work colleagues. The author describes him as an excellent character witness. He is one of the Czech work-Jews at Treblinka. He is one of the very few to have escaped. There is one successful uprising that includes an escape and Richard and one of his best friends Karel are able to get out. He provides the author with a number of interviews. Amongst his many valuable observations and insights, he admits that Franz Stangl was not a sadist. Though he did not appear to shirk from his duties, he did not go out of his way to harm anyone beyond the gruesome necessity of his job.



Frau Stangl

This is Franz Sangl's wife. She actually calls him Paul, which is his middle name. She also hides from too much awareness of what he does when working at the Euthanasia and other Extermination Programs. She loves her husband very much. The two are reputed to have been genuine and mutual in their love. Both are known to have been faithful spouses despite repeated, sometimes outrageously prolonged separations. They help each other as best they can.

When she becomes aware of the truth that her husband worked Extermination sites both for the Hartheim Euthanasia Programme and later Sobibor and Treblinka, she is horrified. She finds it challenging to cope with this knowledge, even within the bounds of the extremely limited information that he shares with her.

She is able to persuade her husband to escape from the Allied military after the war. She does not foreseen the need for her and her husband to flee from Austria when the new Nazi Germans first arrived in Austria. In truth, their whole problem stems from that very mistake: they do not run away from the influx of Nazi Germans and end up stuck in the country and became embroiled in the whole affair as a result.

Renate Stangl

This is one of the three daughters of Franz and Frau Stangl. She is born late in World War 2 and is relocated from Austria to Poland and then to Syria. When she is entering adolescence her family relocates to Brazil. Her welfare is the real reason behind the move; her parents are trying to prevent her from becoming involved with the wrong kind of man. In this case, the man in question is socially prominent and well respected in many ways, but they feel the fact that he is a womanizer makes him entirely unsuitable as a partner.

Wirth

This man is a level above Franz Stangl when he is the Kommandant at Treblinka. This man is known to be an extremely effective organizer. He is of high enough rank to be able to control the arrival or temporary halt of "transports"—that is, incoming prisoners destined for execution. He has some power to promote, demote, hire and fire other people.

He does not have the reputation for being especially sadistic. However, he is well known for being able to do his job and for getting other people to do theirs, even when the respective jobs are vile. He serves during the entire period of time that Franz Stangl is a policeman working the Euthanasia and Extermination Programmes.



Kurt Franz

This man had the reputation for being a sadist. His sadism apparently extended into his sexuality. There is strong suspicion or even knowledge that he was also an abusive pedophile with a homosexual orientation.

Kurt Franz is close in rank to Franz Stangl. In fact, one of the main reasons why Franz Stangl accepts promotion to Kommandant from Wirth is to make sure he will be over rather than under Kurt Franz the sadist. It does not take much to see how that makes sense. The reason Kurt Franz is called a sadist goes far beyond his whipping of prisoners and pushing those under him to perform their gristly job functions. He is known to have encouraged the use of whipping posts and diverse blood sports at the camps he worked at. Over and above all that, he also had secluded cabins built where he kept a few boys, whom he is reported to have repeatedly sexually abused at his own discretion only to have them killed later.

Somehow, others knew this, and the author includes these facts about him in the book. He serves at Treblinka during one of the same tours of duty that Franz Stangl works there. He blames Franz Stangl's overindulgence in the staff for the ability of some of the prisoners to escape.

Berek Rojzman

This is one of the most successful escapees from an uprising at Treblinka. The author interviews him; the story of his escape and his life after it is found in Part 3. He lives in the woods for a year, along with a few others. During this time, he explains to the author, that it is absolutely necessary for the survival and cooperation of the group that he be dominant. He writes that once they did not have to stay together, the group disperses.

After that, he passes himself off for a Gentile. He is taken in by a woman who helps him and 4 Jews for a year, but then she suddenly turns against them and sells out those very Jews to the Germans for money.

He leaves there and manages to get a job working construction, again presenting himself as a Gentile.

Ukrainian Guards

These are used at Treblinka for guard duty. They are most often healthy young men. They are reputed for being a bit rough but not terrible. They acquire a lot of money performing their tasks at the Extermination Camps and this adds to the bizarre atmosphere. Their wealth makes them more attractive to local young women. They combine the desire for normalcy and fun intermingled with the gruesome stench of burning human flesh; their money came from those who were murdered/killed.



The Ukrainian guards are mentioned frequently during the sections on Sobibor and Treblinka. Their revelries at Treblinka are also described. They get drunk and have young local women around. Their behavior emphasizes the need for those working there to experience some joy in life, while widening the chasm between perpetrators and victims. There is no other way of coping with their job.

Staszek

This was a man who helps the escapees get to the next stage. He finds them in the woods; they do have money. He connects them with the wife of another man, the wife of one of the escapees. He goes to Warsaw in order to find her and brings her to her husband. He is Polish. He appears in Part 3 along with Berek Rozjman.

Pope Pius XII

This is the Pope during World War 2. The Vatican speaks out against the Euthanasia Programme and against any other policies that are destructive towards life. He appears Anti-Semitic to at least some extent but the reasons for this are not known. He is strongly criticized for not having been more aggressive in his protests against the German military. The author explains that one reason for that criticism is the sense that the Pope missed an opportunity; the majority of Germans believe in God whereas the Bolsheviks in Russia intentionally spread atheism. The author shows that the Pope may have been trying to protect the Catholics of Germany; the Catholics in Poland were quite outspoken and there were a large number of Catholic martyrs there during the war as a direct consequence of their courageous opposition to the Nazis.

God

God, conceived from a Christian perspective, appears in the book early on when the Nazis present Franz Stangl with an official document that insists that he simultaneously affirm that he believes in God and that he is willing to break with the Church should the Nazi government request that he do so.

Smul Zygielbojm

This man is mentioned on page 219. He commits suicide in 1943 and leaves a note that he does it as a specific act of protest against the extermination of Jews in Poland.

Kuttner

This man correctly senses that some of the work-Jews are up to something. In this case it is that Zhelo Bloch and some of the others are planning an uprising and an escape from the extermination camp. Kuttner is mentioned repeatedly as he is on staff at



Treblinka. Kuttner figures out enough of the truth that he has two people kill and beat up several of the other work-Jews.

Zhelo Bloch

This work-Jew is on the committee to plan the uprising and escape from Treblinka. He is used this way in part because the others feel he is an intelligent man.



Objects/Places

Dusseldorf

This is a city in Germany, in Western Germany. It is mentioned during the book as the location of the prison where Franz Strangl is being kept to serve his sentence for war crimes committed during World War 2. Franz is extradited to this location from Brazil, decades after the war had ended.

Treblinka

This is a location in southwestern Poland and is the name of camp was used for extermination, the killing of people Nazis deemed unfit. The victims at this camp were Jews, although there may have been some victims who were merely out of favor with the leadership. It was for his service here that Franz Strangl was charged with war crimes.

Austria

This is the German-speaking nation immediately south of Germany known for its mountains. Austria's Chancellor was assassinated a few years prior to the nation being invaded, saturated and overrun with Nazi Germans; these argued that the cultural continuity between the two countries made unification a good choice. Franz Strangl is an Austrian.

Linz

This is a town in Austria where the subject of the book is known to work. Franz Stangl has his first position as a police officer in Linz. He marries his girlfriend in Linz. The town is described briefly in the beginning of the book. This is where the subject is living when Austria is taken over by Nazi Germany.

Gas Chamber

This is a chamber designed to kill people. It is intended to kill them in a way that might be viewed as euthanasia; this implies that there may have been efforts to make the deaths painless instead of painful. These were first built for the Euthanasia Programme, wherein the motivation was to reduce the number of people who needed to be fed during hard economic times. Another motivation was to release the incurable from a tortuous life and to relieve other living people from the burdens associated with dealing with them.



The gas chambers reappear later, in an increasingly ominous guise as they are used to destroy people who are increasingly suspected of having every good reason for wanting to continue to live but are being killed anyways. The effects of Franz Stangl's association with these gas chambers are shown by Gitta Sereny. Stangl's initial reaction is naturally that he will not be able to endure working at the death site of a Euthanasia Programme killing point. He is assured that the patients will only be around for a few hours. The work changes the man.

Flat

In this case, this is an alternative term for an apartment. The first of these described is in Linz where Franz Stangl lives with his wife. He reports that his first real home as a grown man was their flat in Linz. Franz Stangl also lives with his wife after the war in a flat in Brazil for many years before he is captured and deported to Germany. There he is convicted of various war crimes and sentenced to a prison sentence in Dusseldorf.

Brazil

This is a South American nation, by far the largest nation of that continent. Brazil has received a number of German immigrants, amongst these are the Stangls. The author explains that she visits Brazil to interview Mrs. Stangl.

Thermometers

These are used at death camps during the Euthanasia Programme to give the impression of a final health examination to determine whether or not it is acceptable to kill a particular patient. They are mentioned early in the book. They were apparently used in a manner that was not convincing in every case.

Tables

These are mentioned in various contexts throughout the book. Most commonly they appear as household furniture, or as items found in offices. However, at Euthanasia and Death camps these were found at locations where patients were checked in by professionals of the military and often medical personnel, sometimes supervised by police officers.

Solitary Confinement

This is a prison cell devised to hold only one prisoner. This is a particular type of punishment. Normally it is used when a prisoner is viewed as having too much potential for gaining control of other people, or is in some other way a danger to prison security if allowed to mingle. Franz Stangl has been serving 3 years in solitary confinement when



the interviews take place. He is permitted some more interaction when he begins to suffer symptoms of emotional depression because of the isolation. The interviews are themselves a relief from solitary confinement.

It seems that solitary confinement is used with Franz Stangl because of his leadership abilities; the author notes that most of those exposed to social contact with him like him. In this case, it appears that the greatest danger is in fact, his ability to influence and to lead others.

Warsaw, Poland

Warsaw is a major city in Poland. It is mentioned several times in the book in connection with various people. It is mentioned in relation to an escape from Treblinka during Part 3 of the book. It is presumed to have been rather diverse, at least, in Polish terms. Warsaw is overrun by the Germans during World War 2, but is also a site of some of the most successful resistance.

Damascus, Syria

This capital city of a Middle Eastern nation is a location where Franz Stangl is able to get to after he escapes, in response to the pleading of his wife, the Allied low-security prison at the tail end of World War 2. A job at this location was found for him by a system of Catholic clerics and related organizations. He is able to relocate using an International Red Cross visa.

Bundles

Clothing bundles are tied up by work-Jews at Treblinka. These are bundles of clothing taken after the prisoners are told to undress for decontamination. The prisoners are lied to about undressing since it is felt that the Western Jews should be deceived so they will not be afraid when they go to their deaths. However, the Eastern Jews who have not even tried to assimilate are just terrorized. There are also clothing bundles at Sobibor.

There is at least one case noted where a lot of money is found that had been hidden by being sewn into a shirt.

Later, it is when a small number of men's clothing items go missing that Kuttner figures out that the work-Jews are up to something at Treblinka.

False Railway Station

This is another part of the beautification and deception of the program at Treblinka. The arrivals are further fooled when an effort is made to create a false railway station. This is described in the book as part of the efforts made to beautify the place.



Camouflaged fencing

This is part of a basic practice at the Extermination sites to make it so that most of the people at the camp do not see people walking into the gas chambers. At Sobibor the camouflage is accomplished via an entire wooded area so that the gas chambers are separate and secluded. At Treblinka there is a fence, which has pine tree branches in it, which are frequently replaced.

White jacket

Franz Stangl often wears a white jacket and carries a riding crop. Franz's white jacket is a sign of wealth and of his own uniqueness. He wears the white jacket because it is comfortable in warm weather and because it is well made and suits him.

As for the riding crop, Franz Stangl carries his mostly because he goes horse back riding on a daily basis, but also because he is expected to carry one.

Riding Crop

This refers to Franz Stangl's riding crop. He carries this around with him regularly. People at Treblinka notice this. His riding crop is compared to the whips of many of the Ukrainian guards. However, Stangl's crop is used on his horse, probably sparingly, if the rest of his behavior is any indication.

Other humans confess that the owner of this riding crop was not sadistic in nature, despite the fact that he was working at an Extermination Camp. Stangl argues much of the time that the actually killing of people was not his responsibility; prior to his being promoted to Kommandant, his work there was to supervise the gathering and re-routing of money and other valuables taken from the arriving prisoner-victims. He was also expected to oversee any necessary construction work.

The riding crop was normal for a horse-riding man to have, and it was customary for an officer of that level to also be a gentleman and thus be expected to carry a crop.



Themes

Good & Evil / The Human Conscience

Gitta Sereny reports that she wanted to be able to see what happened to Franz Stangl, how it was that he transformed into the man put on trial and held directly responsible for hundreds of thousands of deaths during his tours of duty at death camps during World War 2. In order to figure out what happened, she conducts numerous interviews.

Sereny writes much of the preliminary discussion. It seems that Franz Stangl was a perfectly ordinary man, and rather a good one. After developing some work skills but seeking something that would pay better, he decides to become a police man in Austria. He describes the training as very tough and requiring the development of independence, renouncing the need to place trust in those surrounding the person. Later, he explains how Nazis go from being an illegal group the Austrian police normally arrested and sometimes hassled to being the new leaders of the Austrian police in Linz. Here is where there is a first major change in the man's behavior. Sereny cites it as having been a first step on the path to corruption: he makes it look like he has been an illegal Nazis, prior to their arrival, in order to prevent himself from being gunned down. Sereny reports that his own wife is not even convinced that it is done as a trick to protect his life and his job. The next degradation occurs when he is asked to sign a document saying that although he believes in God he will separate from the Church if asked. He is a Catholic who does not normally attend Church. The step after this is when he is pressured to accept and then to stay at a post at the death point of the Euthanasia Programme. Only after the programme is halted does the death camp get its first arrivals from concentration camps. Now Jews and political prisoners, rather than invalids, the severely retarded and the incurably insane, are the ones being killed in the gas chambers.

The bodies are cremated after they are killed, but sent on conveyor belts such that identifying the remains of any given individual are doubtful at best.

Biography/ Franz Strangl

One of the questions implicit in the book is whether Franz Strangl was himself evil to begin with or whether he was entrapped by circumstances that resulted in turning him into someone evil. It is out of curiosity about this that the author has asked so many questions. Franz Stangl was actually quite a gifted man. He was evidently bright; in fact the author admits that this is one of the reasons that she wanted to interview him rather than some of the others. He was a good Austrian, at least in the beginning. He was reasonably robust in nature. He tended towards fealty in love. He took up a craft as a young man, and became an excellent weaver. Wanting to boost his income without ruining his health, he became a police man. It was while he was working as a police man that he was able to marry his girlfriend, with whom he was very much in love, and



he was able to study mechanical engineering on the side. He was also able to establish himself, after tough training, as a policeman. All of this took place in Linz, Austria. However, there in Linz, neither he nor his wife realized how bad the threat from Germany was. One day, his workplace was taken over by German military personnel. Many of his superior officer-colleagues were rounded up, and shot to death. He reports that from that moment on, his entire lifestyle switched into a survival mode based in fear.

The author cites that same time as his beginning down path of his corruption. At that time he claims that he and a friend lied, so that instead of being killed, the new Nazi invaders would mistakenly believe that they had been Nazis for years and therefore did not need to be eradicated or even fired from their jobs. The situation escalated from there, such that, Stangl proved to be formidable to both proponents and opponents. He was taken and used as a police overseer for the Euthanasia Program. He was reassured that this was not evil and that he could and should just rationalize all of the killing that went on there. Only after that was he moved into the extermination of Jews. First, this was slipped to him under the coded 14 f 13 after the Euthanasia Program had ended. Then he was transferred to Sobibor. He attempted to get out of it but was told by the man immediately over him to give up that idea altogether. After his disturbing work at Sobibor he was moved to Treblinka in Poland where he served at two ranks, the second of which was Kommandant. At the end of the war he was taken to prison by the Allies. His wife found him and begged him to escape so that he could help them. He did this, and went to Italy and to the Vatican and Rome. He was then relocated to Syria and the textile industry. He was able to reunite with his wife and children there but it took 3 years. They lived reasonably happy and respectable lives there until they relocated voluntarily to Brazil. Franz continued to act like a respectable civilian citizen although he sensed that there might be impending doom due to his experiences during World War 2. Wiesenthal came for him, with drama, in 1970. He was extradited, tried and by non-unanimous decision was sentenced to Dusseldorf. He died in prison just after the interviews were completed, after the loss of his wife.

Family Life / Marriage

Franz Stangl's love life was virtually perfect—he loved the woman who was first his girlfriend and later his wife. Gitta Sereny states that this is quite obvious. When asked, everyone attests to the fact that he was famously loyal to his wife. While many might find this noble even if they were together all the time, in truth, the couple survived a degree of separation that would have led large numbers of couples to just give up and go their own ways instead. At one point Frau Stangl tells Sereny that he was with her for 7 or 8 days while on leave and then she did not have time with him in person for a whole year. However, she and her husband wrote to one another and shared money. In fact, he was often providing for her and the children both when they were together and when he was absent. His wife makes it clear that she values this tremendously.

The Stangls have 3 daughters over the course of many years. During the interviews, especially when the journalist Gitta Sereny asks him to confront the extreme horror of



Sobibor and Treblinka, Franz Stangl essentially reports that his love of his wife and children is really what keeps him going. For this reason, he is exceptionally uncomfortable with his wife knowing too much about the work. His wife does find out and is horrified. Luckily for him, he does not lose her. However, she does tell Sereny that if she had really known she might have forced him to choose her and family instead. She believes he would have chosen them. It seems if he could have, maybe his wife's support would have been enough to enable him to get out of the dreadful mess.

After the war, Franz escapes so that he can better help his wife. However, even in prison he uses some of his skills—sewing—to help her; she is able to make more money for the family by marketing one of his products. Something like this happens again years later when she sells elastic bandages for him that he has manufactured at home. He proves to be a kind and attentive father when he is able to actually be with his wife and children.

Hitler's Extermination Policies

This book reveals something not often disseminated in knowledge of World War 2. In the early 20th century there are enough powerful Jews that they maintain at least a temporary oligarchy in and over the city of Berlin. Prior to the outbreak of the war, Hitler declares that these people have the power to prevent a second world war. He urges them to enact policies that will make it possible for Germany and Europe to move forward without bringing on another war. He also threatens them; promising that if these powerful Jews fail to prevent the war, he is going to punish their people. He tells them he will kill the other Jews and take their money if the wealthiest of the Jews will not fund government policies to feed Germany and otherwise preserve or renew its power in Europe. It is not clear whether Hitler makes these statements in good faith, or would have tried to wipe out the Jews regardless.

The first of the "death policies" is part of his massive eugenics program. Eugenics is the human version of breeding and husbandry, taken to something of an extreme. Eradication of the weak and inferior can be viewed as a means to improve the whole lot of humanity. Recognition of the highest quality and submission to it, is also recommended.

Euthanasia is the first "death policy." This is somewhat easy to justify since it means killing of the retarded, the apparently incurably insane, the severely disabled. Such people were to be euthanized, painlessly done away with, freeing up resources that could then be applied elsewhere. This is objected to by the Catholic Church and may have been ruled as "unconstitutional" by other members of the top ranks of the government, but it proceeds anyways. Hartheim is the first location where this is done.

The next "death policy" occurs along with another. Open and outright warfare is entered into, and thereby legalizes a great deal of killing in conditions viewed as "fair" if only because the opponents have armies of their own. The involvement in outright warfare and its results have a direct relationship to eugenics in that the superiors win

out in the end. According to the eugenics argument, whatever results, the winners are in fact "right." Dominance is viewed as inherently just. Extermination of Jews and taking their money is the next step. Only the end of the war brings this cycle to a close.



Style

Perspective

The book is written during the 1970s. At this time, the ideologies between the Communists and the Capitalistic Democracies have created a redivision. This is termed a "redivision" because of the fact that Russia and America were on the same side in World War 2, working together to vanquish Germany. However, the rivalry between these same two emerges as soon as the battles are over; the winners claim their territories and much of Europe is divided and claimed, especially Germany. Despite the mercy urged by the Americans, Germany, as a nation, was drawn and quartered, with occupying forces from France, Britain, America and Russia left to hold the Germans in check for decades. The author writes the book shortly after the war crimes trials. One longer term feature of the end of the war is that formerly prominent Nazis are hunted down and put on trial; their war deeds are treated as crimes. Given all this, it is clear that healing from World War 2 was a preoccupation for many and much of world's peoples were feeling the effects of these events.

The author addresses the question of responsibility. Accountability is important on account of what happens before, during and after the war and also what occurs for people when assessing war crimes. The subject Franz Stangl is held responsible as a war criminal for his leadership at an extermination camp. He is convicted of having killed 900,000 Jewish people at this camp, over a 12 month period, during 2 tours of duty.

Tone

The tone of the book is informative. It is also somewhat philosophical, in that the author is really seeking to get to the root of things. Her desire is to understand what happened; exploring the subject's conscience, uncovering a true appreciation of the kinds of pressures, both social and psychological, to which he was subjected, are major parts of the work. The work is intended to be personal, a fact which shows clearly.

Gitta Sereny explains at the beginning of the book that she found Franz Stangl to be more interesting than most of the others. She divulges that this is part of the reason she chose to interview him. Part of what made him interesting to her was his intelligence.

The work is inquisitive and rather thorough. The author asks all about the man in order to get a correct sense for what he is really like. As such, the work has much of the tone of a biography but at the same time, it has the tone of deep interviews designed to expose the conscience of the subject of the book, Franz Stangl.



Structure

The book is divided into 6 main Parts. Prior to these there are three introductory pieces that help acclimate readers to the subject matter, time and location. What follows is predominantly chronological. The author does shift back and forth in time later in the book. She only does this when it is necessary to explain another strand of material she is covering and how it relates to a chain of events.

The book begins with an explanation of the interviews. The author then explains what is happening and lets the subject speak. The author quotes Franz Stangl's story much of the time and then reframes the quotes in the context of the time she is writing the book—1970. The author succeeds in presenting these changes in time without confusing the readers.

The main body of the book runs on two parallel tracks. The first of these tracks is temporal progression of the subject's life, mostly his life as a grown man. The other track is that of the author's life, and the process involved with preparing this manuscript. This involves the progression of the interviews with Stangl, but also includes the other interviews she uses to cross-check or to pursue more detail.

She notes for readers when there are discrepancies in what one interviewed person reports and what someone else remembers. She notes that this helps to find the truth. She also explains that this shows the ways in which all those involved seemed willing to distort their own perceptions if only to help them to feel better when confronted with unpleasant information.

The book covers the entire life of the subject; Franz Stangl dies 19 hours after he gives the final interview for this book.



Quotes

"There is a split in Frau Stangl's attitude towards her husband; on the one hand she "stands by him" romantically, honourably, conventionally. On the other hand, she seeks small ways to emphasize her individuality, her separateness from him....[this may have shown in her] need to emphasize her intellectual and moral superiority over her husband," (p. 45).

"To understand how the Euthanasia Programme was practicable in a theoretically Christian country in the twentieth century, we must further examine the history of its development," (p. 60).

"...August 17, 1933...Father Lieber...[wrote]...Already for six months now, Catholic authorities no longer dare...to expose and emphasize the ideological differences between the [Nazi] Party and the Church," (p. 61).

"...Ministry of Justice...Almost all of them were Jews...and it was the same for the press, banks, and business; in Berlin all of it was in the hands of Jews. That wasn't right. There should have been some Germans," ...[change of speaker] "But they were Germans weren't they?" [speaker changes back]..."Well yes, but you know what I mean," (p. 90).

"The Nazi plans for the "Final Solution" in terms of mass murder crystallized as plans to invade Russia were made," (p. 96). [The approximate number of Jews murdered by Nazis is 6 million; the number of civilian Russians murdered by the Germans during the same decade is 7 million.]

"Albert Hartl....[while going to dine with a man named Blobel outside of Kiev]...It was evening and just getting dark...We were driving past a long ravine. I noticed strange movements of the earth: clumps of earth rose into the air as if by their own propulsion—and there was smoke... Blobel laughed, made a gesture with his arm...the ravine of Babi Yar...[and said] Here lie my 30,000 Jews...Hartl, a few months after that had, or faked, a nervous breakdown," (p. 97). [Hartl was released from military and political service after his breakdown.]

"I went back to Sobibor and talked it over with Michel. We decided that somehow we had to get out. But the very next day Wirth came....He said that any Jews who didn't work properly here would be 'eliminated'...'If you don't like that', he said to us, 'You can leave...but under the earth,'" (p. 110).

"I asked what was the matter. The man I was talking to said one of the pits had overflowed. They had put too many corpses in it...it had overflowed...bodies rolled down the hill," (p. 112).

"I never saw Stangl hurt anyone. What was special about him was his arrogance...He had this perpetual smile on his face...He was happy," (p. 131).



"The Conspiracy learned of this and went one night and beat him up," (p. 156).

"...fewer and fewer transports; less food and of course no new clothes...Kuttner...sensed that something was going on and with perfect instinct he picked on the one person who was almost irreplaceable to us," (p. 210).

"In April-May of 1943 a new wave of transports began which would continue throughout the summer. Some brought survivors of the desperate rebellion of the Warsaw ghetto," (p. 214).

"Before they reached the cottage, they were several days in the woods, hiding first from the security police and their dogs, then from Ukrainians and Poles who continued the chase even after the Germans had given up," (p. 242).

"I asked him about a girl friend I had heard he had in the camp," (p. 244).

"When he got back to Poland, a Polish woman let him bunk in her kitchen," (p. 245).

"Their madness manifested itself in their recklessness," (p. 245).

"Richard and Karel were to spend two years as foreign workers in Germany," (p. 245).

"The odysseys of many 'wanted' Germans have been described in dramatic detail in many books," (p. 277).

"I told him that Stangl claimed to have stayed in a convent or a monastery, to have eaten in a canteen, and later to have obtained work from the nuns," (p. 312).

"Do you really believe," he replied, "that there were more villains and thieves amongst them than amongst the British and Americans?" (p. 313).



Topics for Discussion

What is the Euthanasia Programme?

What is eugenics?

Who was the Roman Catholic Pope during these crises in Germany?

What is the significance of the fact that Franz Stangl was an Austrian?

How much do you think it mattered that Prohaska of the S.S. disliked Franz Stangl?

Do you think that Franz Stangl was evil or that he was morally injured from being forced to do evil things against his will? Explain your answer.

Do you think this book brings up the question of "spiritual health and spiritual sickness"? Why or why not.

Do you believe it is possible to cure someone who is spiritually ill?

If you think the spiritually ill can be healed, what methods do you think might work?

If the spiritually ill cannot be healed, what do you think should be done about such people?