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**Stephen R.C. Hicks (2014). *Nietzsche and the Nazis. A Personal View*. Chojnice: Fuhrmann Foundation Publishing House, 132 pages, translated from English by Izabela Klodzińska.**

Stephen Ronald Craig Hicks (b. 1960) is an American philosopher of Canadian origin, currently lecturing at Rockford University, USA. He is the author of the following works: *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (2004), *Nietzsche and the Nazis* (2006—a documentary, 2010—a book, 2014—Polish edition). Stephen R.C. Hicks is also a co-editor of *The Art of Reasoning: Reading for Logical Analysis* (1994). The thinker's achievements also include works on the history of the development of modern art, ethical issues in business, and philosophy of education. The author is also a member of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society and the North American Nietzsche Society. In the spring of 2014, he visited several academic centres in Poland, among others, Casimir the Great University in Bydgoszcz, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, University of Gdańsk, and Chojnice, where the publishing house operating at the Martin Fuhrmann Civic Initiatives Foundation published the book which is the subject of this review<sup>1</sup>.

The book consists of nine parts, which take the form of short chapters. It was created as a transformation of the screenplay transcription of a documentary under the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.stephenhicks.org>

same title<sup>2</sup>. In Part One, being a kind of introduction, the author poses open-ended questions about the causes of fascination with philosophy and its links with history. Part Two is an attempt to explain, through the language of philosophy, what Nazism was. In Part Three, the author describes the programme objectives the National Socialist Party, and in Part Four he provides a description of the way the Nazi government apparatus worked. Part Five is devoted to introducing the figure of Friedrich Nietzsche and those threads of his philosophical thought, which were taken over by the Nazis in order to justify the ideology developed by them. In Part Six the author points out key differences between Nietzsche's philosophical thought and the Nazi ideology, and in Part Seven he presents those philosophical views of Nietzsche, which could have caused his thought to become the foundations of the Nazi ideology. Part Eight contains the author's reflections on Nazi and anti-Nazi philosophies. Part Nine includes materials supplementing the author's argument, including the political programme of the NSDAP, quotes on National Socialism and Fascism, German anti-Semitism, and militarism. The work ends with extensive bibliographic references.

In the preface to the Polish edition of the book Stephen Hicks wrote: *Did any other thinker than Nietzsche exert such a huge impact on the century that followed him? A measure of strength of his ideas is the fact that they attracted most widely varied circles of intellectuals. From atheists, such as Sigmund Freud, to theists, such as Martin Buber, from free-market capitalists, such as Ayn Rand, to post-modern socialists, such as Michel Foucault. And finally, from seeking writers, such as Herman Hesse, to desperate philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre* (p. 7). As history has shown, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical thought had an impact not only on the enlightened minds walking down the path of philosophy or literature, but it also became useful for justifying Hitler's totalitarian governance and genocide. Stephen Hicks's book is a solid attempt to present relationships between Nietzsche's philosophical views and fascist ideology. The author does it in a manner analogous to drawing circles on water: he familiarizes his readers with his thoughts beginning with outlining the relationships between history and philosophy, and then leads them through successive circles of his analyses towards posing, in the final part of the book, open questions about the present world, about whether history can repeat itself, and if one can prevent it.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://ockhamsrazormedia.wordpress.com/nietzsche-and-the-nazis>

At the outset, the author invites the reader to seek answers to the questions about fascination with history, he inquires about the causes of important historical events and social changes, about the significance of prominent historical figures, and about the causes of falls of great civilizations and empires. He ends this series of his inquiries with an intriguing question: *Why could, half a century later, the most educated people in Europe succumb to the Nazi dictatorship?* (p. 15). The author also invokes the example of African tribes and Australian Aborigines, who have existed for generations virtually unchanged, and juxtaposes them with the Europeans, whose history is one of continuous, mostly highly dynamic changes. This section ends with an attempt to explain what philosophy of history is. The author points out that philosophy is a radical science (cf. J. Bocheński, who also calls philosophy a radical science), that it reaches to the depths of phenomena, and simply indicating facts does not satisfy it. Philosophy of history is a search for a broader explanation of the fate of cultures, empires, peoples. It seeks to answer the question of what is the driving force behind changes, and what costs of these changes are borne by the individual.

Part Two begins with the very important question of how something like Nazism could appear at all. The author does not provide the reader with a simple answer here, he only shows the scale of the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis, and also puts them amongst such brutal regimes as those of Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong. He also presents to the reader little convincing, in his opinion, explanations of the sources of National Socialism. According to the author, these include geopolitical conditions and the contributions paid by Germany after losing World War I, Germany's economic problems, the evil inherent in the nature of the Germans, psychological traumas of the rulers of the Third Reich, and the recognition of the Nazis as a product of modern communication techniques and masters of propaganda. In Hicks's view, seeking an explanation of Nazism one should not be directed toward economics, psychology, or politics. According to him, the main cause of Nazism lies in philosophy. National Socialism, according to the author, was originally a philosophy of life of the contemporary intellectual elite of Germany, and they managed to convince millions of the Germans that it was National Socialism that was a remedy for all of the country's problems. The author believes that Nazi intellectuals were fanatically involved, believing in the fact that they served in the ranks of a new revolution, aiming to uplift the state after a crushing defeat. Hicks also grants himself permission to be, as he calls it, the "devil's advocate". He states that the things people living in countries known as liberal-

democratic ones believe in, namely, freedom, equality and peace, are not always obvious goods. Similarly, referring to historical examples (such as ancient Greece, Rome, and then the USA), he indicates that democracy repeatedly went through periods of crises, which were connected with wars. The author asks whether history itself does not teach the superiority of one culture over another, or that life runs in the brutal world where war is a breeding ground for human characters. Hicks emphasizes once again that Nazism was born on the foundation of a system of ideals. Those ideals were false and scary, but they showed no such signs for those who believed in them.

In Part Three the author describes what the National Socialists' ideology consisted in. This description begins with encouraging the reader to make familiar with the political programme of the NSDAP. The National Socialists laid emphasis mainly on collectivism; the role of the individual was to entirely yield to the state. Paragraph 24 of the party's political programme created in 1920 was as follows: *The interest of the state is always above the interest of the individual*. The party also strongly focused on the German national identity and the fight against those who wanted to harm the Germans. The Jews, whose activities were connected with the defeat of Germany in World War I, were considered as the greatest enemy. The Nazis advocated strong rule of militarized power. Representatives of the NSDAP suited their political programme to a philosophy of life, its ideological vision, which was to encourage German citizens to support the National Socialists. Brought up in the spirit of Nazi ideology and grouped in organizations such as the Hitler Youth (Hitlerjugend) and the Bund Deutscher Madel, young people were to be the driving force behind the proposed changes. Education of children and young people was yet another link in the Nazi social revolution. Young people were to be brought up to become a new type of man – superman—who would unscrupulously and uninhibitedly trample slave morality and contribute to the glory of the Third Reich.

In Part Four, the author describes how the Nazis exercised their power. The first step on the way to introduce authoritarian dictatorship was to ban all other political parties. The power of the Nazi party was also strengthened through propaganda activities, a specific system of education. Indoctrination in the spirit of the Nazi ideology was also propagated at universities, where academics of Jewish origin were eliminated and where students, at the instigation of pro-Nazi professors, initiated the book-burning action. In the interest of the quality of the German people, reproduction of the Aryan race and the policy of eugenics were promoted. Destruction of worthless, according to the Nazis,

individuals (the mentally ill, the disabled) was supposed to protect the valuable German nation. The author concludes this part of the book with reflections on the question of philosophical roots of Nazism. According to Hicks: *National Socialism was the result of a well thought out philosophy of life, whose main elements were created, developed and justified by philosophers and other intellectuals of many generations* (p. 52). Friedrich Nietzsche's name is by far the greatest and most controversial one cited in connection with Nazism.

In Part Five the author briefly describes the life of Friedrich Nietzsche and his most important philosophical theses. He wrote about Nietzsche in the following way: *Friedrich Nietzsche was a 19th-century German philosopher famous for his devotion to human potential and for encouraging individuals to go beyond limitations and to implement their creative dreams. He is also known for his absolute contempt for everything that is small, cowardly and mediocre* (p. 55). The author presents a diagnosis which, in his opinion, Nietzsche made for the 19th-century world. It was a world in which religion had lost its monopoly on truth, and God had ceased to be the guardian of the little ones ("God is dead"). People were mostly conformist individuals who, having lost God's custody, wanted to take refuge under the wings of the welfare state. Only very few of them were outstanding persons, ready to face the challenges posed by life. People are born as slaves or as masters. According to Nietzsche, slave morality (humility, temperance, shame) dominated in the days of his contemporaries. The philosopher saw its roots in the time of enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt. In order to survive and preserve their national and religious identity, they had to demonstrate humility and subjection. This morality then penetrated into the Christian tradition. According to the philosopher, the abolishment of slave morality is the only way to save the world, and this can only be done by the Superman. He will be guided by instinct, not reason, which is the support of conformists. The Superman will face reality and willingly take part in the struggle; the future will belong to him. He will possess tyrannical power, triumph over God and nothingness, and will lead humanity towards indefinite future.

In Part Six, the author asks questions about whether the Nazis' fascination with Nietzsche's philosophy was at all justified. Hicks indicates five key aspects distinguishing Nietzsche's philosophical views from their interpretation by National Socialism. What is particularly worth noting is the question of superiority of races and condemnation of the Jewish people. Nietzsche did not glorify the German nation, on the contrary, he was disgusted with it and pointed out many of their weaknesses. Regarding

the question of anti-Semitism, Nietzsche directed harsh words but to the Jews who lived in the times of the Egyptian enslavement since, in his opinion, it was them who created slave morality. In contrast, he had much respect for and admired the Jews contemporary to him for having the ability to survive in spite of many difficulties, and for being able to cultivate their culture and national identity. He considered German anti-Semitism to be a manifestation of psychopathology and stupidity. He even believed that, as an “anti-rational” race, the Germans should adopt intellectual habits from the Jews.

In Part Seven Hicks presents those of Nietzsche’s philosophical views that could be a foundation of Nazism. Similarly to Nietzsche, the Nazis advocated the perception of man as a part of the collective. For Nietzsche, man has a meaning only if he works for purposes that go beyond his individual being, when he is the Superman and not a representative of conformists cultivating slave morality. Like Nietzsche, the National Socialists believed that conflict was inevitable. Nietzsche looked forward to war as a refreshing breeze, which would cleanse the world of people advocating slave morality. For the Nazis, war naturally formed part of their political goals and tributes to the cult of Germanic warriors. Similarly to Nietzsche, the Nazis were antidemocratic, anti-capitalist and anti-liberal, as well as irrational (the primacy of instinct over reason) in their views.

In Part Eight, the author takes up the topic of Nazi and anti-Nazi philosophies. Hicks warns his readers that the Nazis' destructive actions could be repeated in the future. An attempt to prevent this is to understand the roots of Nazism, including those philosophical ones, too. The author believes that it is better to fight Nazi ideas in the intellectual field, rather than on a battlefield. According to the author, knowledge is the most powerful weapon in this fight. It is also important to get to know oneself in order to know what we advocate and what we are against. Author ends his study with a provocative question: *The Nazis knew well what they advocated. And do we?* (p. 98).

In his book, the author discusses the vital issue of philosophical roots of one of the most cruel totalitarian regimes of the last century, the Third Reich. He presents to the reader how the Nazis received Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophical thought, and how they selected from it only what was useful to them. The author also shows how fragile a value truth is, and how easy it is to betray truth in science in favour of the interest of power.

An important advantage of the argument conducted by Hicks is constantly questioning the readers, forcing them to reflect upon the condition of the world, and on the course of history. The author not only tells us about difficult issues in a vivid way,

but he also encourages the reader to engage in further research. What is more, the book leaves the reader in the state of intellectual excitement. Having read it, there is no way just to put it back onto the shelf and forget what content was discussed in it.

Another advantage of Hicks's work is the language the book is written in. Hicks's argument is carried out in a clear way and, despite raising difficult issues in the book, its literary qualities make one read it with a great deal of intellectual pleasure.

Hicks's work is primarily important reading because of the problem of evil and its roots, brought up in it. It does not matter whether we speak of totalitarianism in the Third Reich or in the Soviet Union; both of them made philosophy their foundation. Hicks's study should become reading matter for anyone who is not satisfied with simple questions and answers provided mechanically. The author takes the reader on an intellectual journey full of challenges. Hicks's book is not only an attempt to seek the truth about Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical views, it is also a way to indicate how difficult it is to separate life from ideology, and how easy it is to appropriate science for the use by populist power. In my opinion, Hicks's book is an important voice in the discussion on the sources of evil in the world, and on the problem of manipulating knowledge and achievements of science. In his book, Hicks also shows how easy it is to be "seduced" by ideology. This danger is still present today. The mechanism of indoctrinating education, depriving of humanity, and transforming man into a faithful follower of ideology, a fanatic, described by the author, is particularly disturbing.