

Ethics of work and mobbing from the perspective of moral philosophy and psychology

Summary

The main thesis of the dissertation is that mobbing is the source of moral evil because it deprives employee of primary goods which are valued by liberal-democratic societies.

In the first chapter I analyze terms and definitions of mobbing which are used in the literature concerned with mobbing, and raise the problem of the source and prevalence of this pathology in the workplace. The most popular terms used by researchers to label the phenomenon under discussion are: „mobbing” and „bullying”. The first term is typically used in Scandinavian and Polish sources, the second in the English-language literature on that subject. Although there are some interpretations according to which the terms have different meanings, researchers use them interchangeably.

The causes of mobbing are not clear but the literature suggests that some aspects of the work environment as well as social-psychological well-being of employees are particularly relevant, which include, among other things, globalization-related pressure on productivity and the deterioration of capability of effective coping with stress. The prevalence of the phenomenon is a popular subject of research and although the results are inconclusive the problem of mobbing seems to be alarming

In the second chapter I present the importance of work in human life in modern society. I try to show the crucial role of work in creating satisfying relations with others, building self-dignity and interpreting the whole life as good and meaningful. These three factors constitute an important part of self-knowledge which, as Charles Taylor claims, is a building block of identity. According to this philosopher there are three directions of self-narration: other people, self-dignity, and an intrinsic moral sense of the whole life. As a social activity, work is an important source of human self-knowledge, which is connected with relations with others. In the workplace human beings build the knowledge of themselves as participants of social relations; they are able to answer questions about their attitudes towards other people. Since human relations are mostly reciprocal, workplace is also a source of these parts of self-narratives, which relate to the dignity expressed by attitudes of others towards an individual. People build their sense of dignity in the workplace not only because of the respect they experience from others, but also because of the

opportunity for self actualization the work provides them. People spend vast part of their time in the workplace, encountering others there and developing their own potentials. They also have the unique opportunity for justifying their existence as good and meaningful.

In the third chapter I focus on the social dimension of the phenomenon. Mobbing occurs in public space and involves social mechanisms, among which the most important are: stigmatization, silencing, isolation and expulsion. Although the main character of psychological terror in workplace is the mobber, social surroundings play a crucial role in the phenomenon. An aggressor takes control over the process of social communication imposing on the social environment the biased picture of the situation. In the first stage of mobbing, as a result of mobber's manipulation, co-workers begin to blame the target labeling him or her as a troublemaker or "an employee with a problem". The stigmatized target attracts negative attention from others. When targets attempt to defend their destroyed image, abusers and observers reframe targets' experience and try to silence them. In the next stage the processes of social isolation are involved. Social environment, emotionally exhausted by observing mobber's aggression and biased by his or her manipulation, finally change its attitude towards the targeted person and gets involved in more or less explicit negative behavior in order to separate the attacked person from the organization.

The source of stigmatization, silencing and expulsion lays, not only in the mobber's manipulative behavior, but also in general organization's climate. The general philosophy and style of organization management may create fertile ground for mobbing so the third chapter of the dissertation discusses the organizational antecedents like perceived power imbalance, strong internal competition, lack of or too strong control over employees, pressure on productivity maximization , reward systems which stimulate negative behavior towards others.

In the next part of the dissertation I discuss psychological mechanisms which are both responsible for and triggered by mobbing. In an attempt to answer the question of the source of mobbing, some researchers focus on the personality traits of victims and aggressors. In this part of the dissertation I concentrate on cognitive and emotional mechanisms stimulated by mobbing in victims as well as in its observers. The most important are rebuilding of self-narratives and change of beliefs which constitute the basic cognitive representation of the social world. The analysis of psychological processes triggered by mobbing leads to the question of mobbing's impact on its victims. Among the most serious consequences researchers mention posttraumatic

stress disorder, general anxiety disorder and depression.

The picture of psychological mechanisms generated by mobbing presented in chapter four is completed by descriptions of typical behavior of people confronted with mobbing.

In the fifth chapter I attempt to answer the question of the moral evil of mobbing by integrating psychological data with an ethical perspective. In order to do this I show mobbing as an experience which deprives both its targets and observers of the access to primary goods which are indispensable for living the good life. The tool which I use to this purpose is a sketch of a conception of primary goods which I derive from liberal philosophy, and the need theory which is the core element of the humanistic psychology tradition. I do not use any particular liberal theory but rather reconstruct its general axiological framework. Although liberal philosophers recognize plurality of conceptions of the good life, they agree that there is a set of primary goods which are necessary for all citizens, and access to which is a precondition of realization of individual conceptions of the good life. The list of primary goods corresponds to the list of psychological needs created by Abraham Maslow in his theory of human motivation. The most important goods enumerated in the dissertation are: life and income sufficient for decent existence, the sense of justice, realization of goals, rationality, self-respect built on social basis, freedom and sense of well-being.

In the fifth chapter I try to show that mobbing threatens the targets' life by expulsing them from the job market. It has also a destructive influence on victims' health, and in extreme cases may even lead to suicide. Mobbing destroys social reality by isolating its targets from the network of meaningful relationships, prevents victims from realizing their goals and shatters the belief in the rationality of the social world. It fractures self-respect, reduces subjective well-being and constrains freedom.