CHAPTER ONE

The Psychology of Evil: Situated Character Transformations

The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Look at this remarkable image for a moment. Now close your eyes and conjure it in your memory.

Does your mind's eye see the many white angels dancing about the dark heavens? Or do you see the many black demons, horned devils inhabiting the bright white space of Hell? In this illusion by the artist M. C. Escher, both perspectives are equally possible. Once aware of the congruence between good and evil, you cannot see only one and not the other. In what follows, I will not allow you to drift back to the comfortable separation of Your Good and Faultless Side from Their Evil and Wicked Side. "Am I capable of evil?" is the question that I want you to consider over and over again as we journey together to alien environments.

Three psychological truths emerge from Escher's image. First, the world is filled with both good and evil—was, is, will always be. Second, the barrier between good and evil is permeable and nebulous. And third, it is possible for angels to become devils and, perhaps more difficult to conceive, for devils to become angels.

Perhaps this image reminds you of the ultimate transformation of good into evil, the metamorphosis of Lucifer into Satan. Lucifer, the "light bearer," was God's favorite angel until he challenged God's authority and was cast into Hell along with his band of fallen angels. "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven," boasts Satan, the "adversary of God" in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In Hell, Lucifer-Satan becomes a liar, an empty imposter who uses boasts, spears, trumpets, and banners, as some national leaders do today. At the Demonic Conference in Hell of all the major demons, Satan is assured that he cannot regain Heaven in any direct confrontation.[1] However, Satan's statesman, Beelzebub, comes up with the most evil of solutions in proposing to avenge themselves against God by corrupting God's greatest creation, humankind. Though Satan succeeds in tempting Adam and Eve to disobey God and be led into evil, God decrees that they will in

time be saved. However, for the rest of time, Satan will be allowed to slither around that injunction, enlisting witches to tempt people to evil. Satan's intermediaries would thereafter become the target of zealous inquisitors who want to rid the world of evil, but their horrific methods would breed a new form of systemic evil the world had never before known.

Lucifer's sin is what thinkers in the Middle Ages called "cupiditas."* For Dante, the sins that spring from that root are the most extreme "sins of the wolf," the spiritual condition of having an inner black hole so deep within oneself that no amount of power or money can ever fill it. For those suffering the mortal malady called cupiditas, whatever exists outside of one's self has worth only as it can be exploited by, or taken into one's self. In Dante's Hell those guilty of that sin are in the ninth circle, frozen in the Lake of Ice. Having cared for nothing but self in life, they are encased in icy Self for eternity. By making people focus only on oneself in this way, Satan and his followers turn their eyes away from the harmony of love that unites all living creatures.

The sins of the wolf cause a human being to turn away from grace and to make self his only good—and also his prison. In the ninth circle of the Inferno, the sinners, possessed of the spirit of the insatiable wolf, are frozen in a self-imposed prison where prisoner and guard are fused in an egocentric reality.

In her scholarly search for the origins of Satan, the historian Elaine Pagels offers a provocative thesis on the psychological significance of Satan as humanity's mirror:

> What fascinates us about Satan is the way he expresses qualities that go beyond what we ordinarily recognize as human. Satan evokes more than the greed, envy, lust, and anger we identify with our own worst impulses, and more than what we call brutality, which imputes to human beings a resemblance to animals ("brutes"). . . . Evil, then, at its worst, seems to involve the supernatural—what we recognize, with a shudder, as the diabolic inverse of Martin Buber's characterization of God as "wholly other."[2]

We fear evil, but are fascinated by it. We create myths of evil conspiracies and come to believe them enough to mobilize forces against them. We reject the "Other" as different and dangerous because it's unknown, yet we are thrilled by

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*Cupiditas, in English, is cupidity, which means avarice, greed, the strong desire for wealth or power over another. What *cupiditas* means is the desire to turn into oneself or take into oneself everything that is "other" than self. For instance, lust and rape are forms of cupiditas, because they entail using another person as a thing to gratify one's own desire; murder for profit is also cupiditas. It is the opposite of the concept of *caritas*, which means envisioning oneself as part of a ring of love in which each individual self has worth in itself but also as it relates to every other self. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is a weak expression of caritas. The Latin "*Caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*" is probably the best expression of the concept "wherever caritas and love are, God is."

contemplating sexual excess and violations of moral codes by those who are not our kind. Professor of religious studies David Frankfurter concludes his search for Evil Incarnate by focusing on the social construction of this evil other.

> [T]he construction of the *social* Other as cannibal-savage, demon, sorcerer, vampire, or an amalgam of them all, draws upon a consistent repertoire of symbols of inversion. The stories we tell about people out on the periphery play with their savagery, libertine customs, and monstrosity. At the same time, the combined horror and pleasure we derive from contemplating this Otherness—sentiments that influenced the brutality of colonists, missionaries, and armies entering the lands of those Others—certainly affect us at the level of individual fantasy, as well.[3]

TRANSFORMATIONS: ANGELS, DEVILS, AND THE REST OF US MERE MORTALS

The Lucifer Effect is my attempt to understand the processes of transformation at work when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things. We will deal with the fundamental question "What makes people go wrong?" But instead of resorting to a traditional religious dualism of good versus evil, of wholesome nature versus corrupting nurture, we will look at real people engaged in life's daily tasks, enmeshed in doing their jobs, surviving within an often turbulent crucible of human nature. We will seek to understand the nature of their character transformations when they are faced with powerful situational forces.

Let's begin with a definition of evil. Mine is a simple, psychologically based one: *Evil consists in intentionally behaving in ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize, or destroy innocent others—or using one's authority and systemic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf.* In short, as my friend and mentor Irving Sarnoff says in his aphorism, "Evil is knowing better but doing worse."[4]

What makes human behavior work? What determines human thought and action? What makes some of us lead moral, righteous lives, while others seem to slip easily into immorality and crime? Is what we think about human nature based on the assumption that *inner determinants* guide us up the good paths or down the bad ones? Do we give insufficient attention to the *outer determinants* of our thoughts, feelings, and actions? To what extent are we creatures of the situation, of the moment, of the mob? And is there anything that anyone has ever done that you are absolutely certain you could never be compelled to do?

Most of us hide behind egocentric biases that generate the illusion that we are special. These self-serving protective shields allow us to believe that each of us is above average on any test of self-integrity. Too often we look to the stars through the thick lens of personal invulnerability when we should also look down to the slippery slope beneath our feet. Such egocentric biases are more commonly found in societies that foster independent orientations, such as Euro-

American cultures, and less so in collectivist-oriented societies, such as in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.[5]

In the course of our voyage through good and evil, I will ask you to reflect upon three issues: How well do you really know yourself, your strengths and weaknesses? Does your self-knowledge come from reviewing your behavior in familiar situations or from being exposed to totally new settings where your old habits are challenged? In the same vein, how well do you really know the people with whom you interact daily: your family, friends, co-workers, and lover? One thesis of this book is that most of us know ourselves only from our limited experiences in familiar situations that involve rules, laws, policies, and pressures that constrain us. We go to school, to work, on vacation, to parties; we pay the bills and the taxes, day in and year out. But what happens when we are exposed to totally new and unfamiliar settings where our habits don't suffice? You start a new job, go on your first computer-matched date, join a fraternity, get arrested, enlist in the military, join a cult, or volunteer for an experiment. The old you might not work as expected when the ground rules change.

Throughout our journey I would like you to continually ask the "Me also?" question as we encounter various forms of evil. We will examine genocide in Rwanda, the mass suicide and murder of Peoples Temple followers in the jungles of Guyana, the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, the horrors of Nazi concentration camps, the torture by military and civilian police around the world, and the sexual abuse of parishioners by Catholic priests, and search for lines of continuity between the scandalous, fraudulent behavior of executives at Enron and WorldCom corporations. Finally, we will see how some common threads in all these evils run through the recently uncovered abuses of civilian prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. One especially significant thread tying these atrocities together will come out of a body of research in experimental social psychology, particularly a study that has come to be known as the Stanford Prison Experiment.

Evil: Fixed and Within or Mutable and Without?

The idea that an unbridgeable chasm separates good people from bad people is a source of comfort for at least two reasons. First, it creates a binary logic, in which Evil is *essentialized*. Most of us perceive Evil as an entity, a quality that is inherent in some people and not in others. Bad seeds ultimately produce bad fruits as their destinies unfold. We define evil by pointing to the really bad tyrants in our era, such as Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Saddam Hussein, and other political leaders who have orchestrated mass murders. We must also acknowledge the more ordinary, lesser evils of drug dealers, rapists, sex-trade traffickers, perpetrators of fraudulent scams on the elderly, and those whose bullying destroys the well-being of our children.

Upholding a Good–Evil dichotomy also takes "good people" off the responsibility hook. They are freed from even considering their possible role in creating,

sustaining, perpetuating, or conceding to the conditions that contribute to delinquency, crime, vandalism, teasing, bullying, rape, torture, terror, and violence. "It's the way of the world, and there's not much that can be done to change it, certainly not by me."

An alternative conception treats evil in *incrementalist* terms, as something of which we are all capable, depending on circumstances. People may at any time possess a particular attribute (say intelligence, pride, honesty, or evil) to a greater or lesser degree. Our nature can be changed, whether toward the good or the bad side of human nature. The incrementalist view implies an acquisition of qualities through experience or concentrated practice, or by means of an external intervention, such as being offered a special opportunity. In short, we can learn to become good or evil regardless of our genetic inheritance, personality, or family legacy.[6]

Alternative Understandings: Dispositional, Situational, and Systemic

Running parallel to this pairing of essentialist and incremental conceptions is the contrast between *dispositional* and *situational* causes of behavior. When faced with some unusual behavior, some unexpected event, some anomaly that doesn't make sense, how do we go about trying to understand it? The traditional approach has been to identify inherent personal qualities that lead to the action: genetic makeup, personality traits, character, free will, and other dispositions. Given violent behavior, one searches for sadistic personality traits. Given heroic deeds, the search is on for genes that predispose toward altruism.

In the United States, a rash of shootings in which high school students murder and wound scores of other students and teachers rocks suburban communities.[7] In England, a pair of ten-year-old boys kidnap two-year-old Jamie Bulger from a shopping center and brutally murder him in cold blood. In Palestine and Iraq, young men and women become suicide bombers. In most European countries during World War II, many people protected Jews from capture by the Nazis even though they knew that if they were caught, they and their families would be killed. In many countries "whistle-blowers" risk personal loss by exposing injustice and immoral actions of superiors. Why?

The traditional view (among those who come from cultures that emphasize individualism) is to look within for answers—for pathology or heroism. Modern psychiatry is dispositionally oriented. So are clinical psychology and personality and assessment psychology. Most of our institutions are founded on such a perspective, including law, medicine, and religion. Culpability, illness, and sin, they assume, are to be found within the guilty party, the sick person, and the sinner. They begin their quest for understanding with the "Who questions": *Who* is responsible? *Who* caused it? *Who* gets the blame? and *Who* gets the credit?

Social psychologists (such as myself) tend to avoid this rush to dispositional judgment when trying to understand the causes of unusual behaviors. They pre-

fer to begin their search for meaning by asking the "What questions": *What* conditions could be contributing to certain reactions? *What* circumstances might be involved in generating behavior? *What* was the situation like from the perspective of the actors? Social psychologists ask: To what extent can an individual's actions be traced to factors outside the actor, to situational variables and environmental processes unique to a given setting?

The dispositional approach is to the situational as a medical model of health is to a public health model. A medical model tries to find the source of the illness, disease, or disability within the affected person. By contrast, public health researchers assume that the vectors of disease transmission come from the environment, creating conditions that foster illness. Sometimes the sick person is the end product of environmental pathogens, which unless counteracted will affect others, regardless of attempts to improve the health of the individual. For example, in the dispositional approach a child who exhibits a learning disability may be given a variety of medical and behavioral treatments to overcome that handicap. But in many cases, especially among the poor, the problem is caused by ingesting lead in paint that flakes off the walls of tenement apartments and is worsened by conditions of poverty—the situational approach. These alternative perspectives are not just abstract variations in conceptual analyses but lead to very different ways of dealing with personal and societal problems.

The significance of such analyses extends to all of us who, as intuitive psychologists, go about our daily lives trying to figure out why people do what they do and how they may be changed to do better. But it is the rare person in an individualist culture who is not infected with a dispositional bias, always looking first to motives, traits, genes, and personal pathologies. Most of us have a tendency both to overestimate the importance of dispositional qualities and to underestimate the importance of situational qualities when trying to understand the causes of other people's behavior.

In the following chapters I will offer a substantial body of evidence that counterbalances the dispositional view of the world and will expand the focus to consider how people's character may be transformed by their being immersed in situations that unleash powerful situational forces. People and situations are usually in a state of dynamic interaction. Although you probably think of yourself as having a consistent personality across time and space, that is likely not to be true. You are not the same person working alone as you are in a group; in a romantic setting versus an educational one; when you are with close friends or in an anonymous crowd; or when you are traveling abroad as when at home base.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* and the Inquisition's WID Program

One of the first documented sources of the widespread use of the dispositional view to understand evil and rid the world of its pernicious influence is found in a text that became the bible of the Inquisition, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, or "The

Witches' Hammer."[8] It was required reading for the Inquisition judges. It begins with a conundrum to be solved: How can evil continue to exist in a world governed by an all-good, all-powerful God? One answer: God allows it as a test of men's souls. Yield to its temptations, go to Hell; resist its temptations, and be invited into Heaven. However, God restricted the Devil's direct influence over people because of his earlier corruption of Adam and Eve. The Devil's solution was to have intermediaries do his evil bidding by using witches as his indirect link to people they would corrupt.

To reduce the spread of evil in Catholic countries, the proposed solution was to find and eliminate witches. What was required was a means to identify witches, get them to confess to heresy, and then destroy them. The mechanism for witch identification and destruction (which in our times might be known as the WID program) was simple and direct: find out through spies who among the population were witches, test their witchly natures by getting confessions using various torture techniques, and kill those who failed the test. Although I have made light of what amounted to a carefully designed system of mass terror, torture, and extermination of untold thousands of people, this kind of simplistic reduction of the complex issues regarding evil fueled the fires of the Inquisition. Making "witches" the despised dispositional category provided a ready solution to the problem of societal evil by simply destroying as many agents of evil as could be identified, tortured, and boiled in oil or burned at the stake.

Given that the Church and its State alliances were run by men, it is no wonder that women were more likely than men to be labeled as witches. The suspects were usually marginalized or threatening in some way: widowed, poor, ugly, deformed, or in some cases considered too proud and powerful. The terrible paradox of the Inquisition is that the ardent and often sincere desire to combat evil generated evil on a grander scale than the world had ever seen before. It ushered in the use by State and Church of torture devices and tactics that were the ultimate perversion of any ideal of human perfection. The exquisite nature of the human mind, which can create great works of art, science, and philosophy, was perverted to engage in acts of "creative cruelty" that were designed to break the will. The tools of the trade of the Inquisition are still on display in prisons around the world, in military and civilian interrogation centers, where torture is standard operating procedure (as we shall see later in our visit to Abu Ghraib Prison).[9]

Power Systems Exert Pervasive Top-Down Dominance

My appreciation of the power residing in systems started with an awareness of how institutions create mechanisms that translate ideology—say, the causes of evil—into operating procedures, such as the Inquisition's witch hunts. In other words, my focus has widened considerably through a fuller appreciation of the ways in which situational conditions are created and shaped by higher-order

factors—*systems* of power. Systems, not just dispositions and situations, must be taken into account in order to understand complex behavior patterns.

Aberrant, illegal, or immoral behavior by individuals in service professions, such as policemen, corrections officers, and soldiers, is typically labeled the misdeeds of "a few bad apples." The implication is that they are a rare exception and must be set on one side of the impermeable line between evil and good, with the majority of good apples set on the other side. But who is making the distinction? Usually it is the guardians of the system, who want to isolate the problem in order to deflect attention and blame away from those at the top who may be responsible for creating untenable working conditions or for a lack of oversight or supervision. Again the bad apple–dispositional view ignores the apple barrel and its potentially corrupting situational impact on those within it. A systems analysis focuses on the barrel makers, on those with the power to design the barrel.

It is the "power elite," the barrel makers, often working behind the scenes, who arrange many of the conditions of life for the rest of us, who must spend time in the variety of institutional settings they have constructed. The sociologist C. Wright Mills has illuminated this black hole of power:

> The power elite is composed of men whose positions enable them to transcend the ordinary environments of ordinary men and women; they are in positions to make decisions having major consequences. Whether they do or do not make such decisions is less important than the fact that they do occupy such pivotal positions: their failure to act, their failure to make decisions, is itself an act that is often of greater significance than the decisions they do make. For they are in command of the major hierarchies and organizations of modern society. They rule the big corporations. They run the machinery of state and claim its prerogatives. They direct the military establishment. They occupy strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centered the effective means of power and the wealth and celebrity which they enjoy.[10]

As the interests of these diverse power brokers coalesce, they come to define our reality in ways that George Orwell prophesied in *1984*. The military-corporate-religious complex is the ultimate megasystem controlling much of the resources and quality of life of many Americans today.

> It is when power is wedded to chronic fear that it becomes formidable.
>
> —Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind*

The Power to Create "The Enemy"

The powerful don't usually do the dirtiest work themselves, just as Mafia dons leave the "whackings" to underlings. Systems create hierarchies of dominance

with influence and communication going down—rarely up—the line. When a power elite wants to destroy an enemy nation, it turns to propaganda experts to fashion a program of hate. What does it take for the citizens of one society to hate the citizens of another society to the degree that they want to segregate them, torment them, even kill them? It requires a "hostile imagination," a psychological construction embedded deeply in their minds by propaganda that transforms those others into "The Enemy." That image is a soldier's most powerful motive, one that loads his rifle with ammunition of hate and fear. The image of a dreaded enemy threatening one's personal well-being and the society's national security emboldens mothers and fathers to send sons to war and empowers governments to rearrange priorities to turn plowshares into swords of destruction.

It is all done with words and images. To modify an old adage: Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names can sometimes kill you. The process begins with creating stereotyped conceptions of the other, dehumanized perceptions of the other, the other as worthless, the other as all-powerful, the other as demonic, the other as an abstract monster, the other as a fundamental threat to our cherished values and beliefs. With public fear notched up and the enemy threat imminent, reasonable people act irrationally, independent people act in mindless conformity, and peaceful people act as warriors. Dramatic visual images of the enemy on posters, television, magazine covers, movies, and the Internet imprint on the recesses of the limbic system, the primitive brain, with the powerful emotions of fear and hate.

The social philosopher Sam Keen brilliantly depicts how this hostile imagination is created by virtually every nation's propaganda on its path to war and reveals the transformative powers on the human psyche of these "images of the enemy."[11] Justifications for the desire to destroy these threats are really afterthoughts, proposed explanations intended for the official record but not for critical analysis of the damage to be done or being done.

The most extreme instance of this hostile imagination at work is of course when it leads to genocide, the plan of one people to eliminate from existence all those who are conceptualized as their enemy. We are aware of some of the ways in which Hitler's propaganda machine transformed Jewish neighbors, co-workers, even friends into despised enemies of the State who deserved the "final solution." This process was seeded in elementary school textbooks by means of images and texts that rendered all Jews contemptible and not worthy of human compassion. Here I would like to consider briefly a recent example of attempted genocide along with the use of rape as a weapon against humanity. Then I will show how one aspect of this complex psychological process, the dehumanization component, can be studied in controlled experimental research that isolates its critical features for systematic analysis.

CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY: GENOCIDE, RAPE, AND TERROR

Literature has taught us for at least three thousand years that no person or state is incapable of evil. In Homer's account of the Trojan War, Agamemnon, commander of the Greek forces, tells his men before they engage their enemy, "We are not going to leave a single one of [the Trojans] alive, down to the babies in their mothers' wombs—not even they must live. The whole people must be wiped out of existence . . ." These vile words come from a noble citizen of one of the most civilized nation-states of its time, the home of philosophy, jurisprudence, and classical drama.

We live in the "mass murder century." More than 50 million people have been systematically murdered by government decrees, enacted by soldiers and civilian forces willing to carry out the kill orders. Beginning in 1915, Ottoman Turks slaughtered 1.5 million Armenians. The mid-twentieth century saw the Nazis liquidate at least 6 million Jews, 3 million Soviet POWs, 2 million Poles, and hundreds of thousands of "undesirable" peoples. As Stalin's Soviet empire murdered 20 million Russians, Mao Zedong's government policies resulted in an even greater number of deaths, up to 30 million of the country's own citizens. The Communist Khmer Rouge regime killed off 1.7 million people of its own nation in Cambodia. Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party is accused of killing 100,000 Kurds in Iraq. In 2006, genocide has erupted in Sudan's Darfur region, which most of the world has conveniently ignored.[12]

Note that almost exactly the same words that Agamemnon used three millennia ago were also spoken in our own time, in the African nation of Rwanda, as the ruling Hutus were in the process of wiping out their former neighbors, the Tutsi minority. One victim recalls what one of her tormentors told her: "We're going to kill all the Tutsi, and one day Hutu children will have to ask what a Tutsi child looked like."

The Rape of Rwanda

The peaceful Tutsi people of Rwanda in Central Africa learned that a weapon of mass destruction could be a simple machete, used against them with lethal efficiency. The systematic slaughter of Tutsis by their former neighbors, the Hutus, spread throughout the country in a few months during the spring of 1994 as death squads killed thousands of innocent men, women, and children with machetes and nail-studded clubs. A report by the United Nations estimates that between 800,000 and a million Rwandans were murdered in about three months' time, making the massacre the most ferocious in recorded history. Three quarters of the entire Tutsi population were exterminated.

Hutu neighbors were slaughtering former friends and next-door neighbors—on command. A Hutu murderer said in an interview a decade later that "The worst thing about the massacre was killing my neighbor; we used to drink to-

gether, his cattle would graze on my land. He was like a relative." A Hutu mother described how she had beaten to death the children next door, who looked at her with wide-eyed amazement because they had been friends and neighbors all their lives. She reported that someone from the government had told her that the Tutsi were their enemies and had given her a club and her husband a machete to use against this threat. She justified the slaughter as doing "a favor" to those children, who would have become helpless orphans given that their parents had already been murdered.

Until recently, there was little recognition of the systematic use of rape of these Rwandan women as a tactic of terror and spiritual annihilation. By some accounts it began when a Hutu leader, Mayor Silvester Cacumbibi, raped the daughter of his former friend and then had other men also rape her. She later reported that he had told her, "We won't waste bullets on you; we will rape you, and that will be worse for you."

Unlike the rapes of Chinese women by Japanese soldiers in Nanking (to be described subsequently), where the details of the nightmare were blurred by failures in early reporting and the reluctance of the Chinese to relive that experience by sharing it with outsiders, much is known about the psychological dynamics of the rape of Rwandan women.[13]

When the citizens of the village of Butare defended its borders against the onslaught of the Hutus, the interim government dispatched a special person to deal with what it considered a revolt. She was the national minister of family and women's affairs and Butare's favorite daughter, having grown up in the area. Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, a Tutsi and former social worker who lectured on women's empowerment, was the only hope of this village. That hope was instantly shattered. Pauline supervised a terrible trap, promising the people that the Red Cross would provide food and shelter in the local stadium; in reality, armed Hutu thugs (the Interahamwe) were awaiting their arrival, eventually murdering most of the innocent sanctuary seekers. They were machine-gunned, grenades were thrown into the unsuspecting throngs, and survivors were sliced apart with machetes.

Pauline gave the order that "Before you kill the women, you need to rape them." She ordered another group of these thugs to burn alive a group of seventy women and girls they were guarding and provided them with gasoline from her car to do so. Again she invited the men to rape their victims before killing them. One of the young men told a translator that they couldn't rape them because "we had been killing all day and we were tired. We just put the gasoline in bottles and scattered it among the women, then started burning."

A young woman, Rose, was raped by Pauline's son, Shalom, who announced that he had "permission" from his mother to rape Tutsi women. She was the only Tutsi allowed to live so she could deliver a progress report to God as the witness of the genocide. She was then forced to watch her mother being raped and twenty of her relatives slaughtered.

A U.N. report estimated that at least 200,000 women were raped during this

brief period of horror, many of them killed afterward. "Some were penetrated with spears, gun barrels, bottles or the stamens of banana trees. Sexual organs were mutilated with machetes, boiling water and acid; women's breasts were cut off" (p. 85). "Making the matter worse, the rapes, most of them committed by many men in succession, were frequently accompanied by other forms of physical torture and often staged as public performances to multiply the terror and degradation" (p. 89). They were also used as a public way of promoting social bonding among the Hutu murderers. This shared emergent camaraderie is often a by-product of male group rape.

The extent of the inhumanity knew no boundaries. "A 45-year old Rwandan woman was raped by her 12-year-old son—with Interahamwe holding a hatchet to his throat—in front of her husband, while their five other young children were forced to hold open her thighs" (p. 116). The spread of AIDS among the living rape victims continues to wreak havoc in Rwanda. "By using a disease, a plague, as an apocalyptic terror, as biological warfare, you're annihilating the procreators, perpetuating death unto generations," according to Charles Strozier, professor of history at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York (p. 116).

How do we even begin to understand the forces that were operating to make Pauline a new kind of criminal: one woman against enemy women? A combination of history and social psychology can provide a framework based on power and status differentials. First, she was moved by the widespread sense of the lower status of the Hutu women compared with the beauty and arrogance of Tutsi women. They were taller and lighter-skinned and had more Caucasian features, which made them appear more desirable to men than Hutu women were.

A racial distinction had arbitrarily been created by Belgian and German colonialists around the turn of the twentieth century to distinguish between people who for centuries had intermarried, spoke the same language, and shared the same religion. They forced all Rwandans to carry identification cards that declared them to be in either the majority Hutu or the minority Tutsi, with the benefits of higher education and administrative posts going to the Tutsi. That became another source of Pauline's pent-up desire for revenge. It was also true that she was a political opportunist in a male-dominated administration, needing to prove her loyalty, obedience, and patriotic zeal to her superiors by orchestrating crimes never before perpetrated by a woman against an enemy. It also became easier to encourage the mass murders and rapes of Tutsis by being able to view them as abstractions and also by calling them by the dehumanizing term "cockroaches," which needed to be "exterminated." Here is a living documentary of the hostile imagination that paints the faces of the enemy in hateful hues and then destroys the canvas.

As unimaginable as it may be to any of us for someone to intentionally inspire such monstrous crimes, Nicole Bergevin, Pauline's lawyer in her genocide trial, reminds us, "When you do murder trials, you realize that we are all susceptible, and you wouldn't even dream you would ever commit this act. But you come

to understand that everyone is [susceptible]. It could happen to me, it could happen to my daughter. It could happen to you" (p. 130).

Highlighting even more clearly one of the main theses of this book is the considered opinion of Alison Des Forges of Human Rights Watch, who has investigated many such barbarous crimes. She forces us to see our reflection mirrored in these atrocities:

> This behavior lies just under the surface of any of us. The simplified accounts of genocide allow distance between us and the perpetrators of genocide. They are so evil we couldn't ever see ourselves doing the same thing. But if you consider the terrible pressure under which people were operating, then you automatically reassert their humanity—and that becomes alarming. You are forced to look at the situation and say, "What would I have done? Sometimes the answer is not encouraging." (p. 132)

The French journalist Jean Hatzfeld interviewed ten of the Hutu militia members now in prison for having macheted to death thousands of Tutsi civilians.[14] The testimonies of these ordinary men—mostly farmers, active churchgoers, and a former teacher—are chilling in their matter-of-fact, remorseless depiction of unimaginable cruelty. Their words force us to confront the unthinkable again and again: that human beings are capable of totally abandoning their humanity for a mindless ideology, to follow and then exceed the orders of charismatic authorities to destroy everyone they label as "The Enemy." Let's reflect on a few of these accounts, which make Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* pale in comparison.

> "Since I was killing often, I began to feel it did not mean anything to me. I want to make clear that from the first gentleman I killed to the last, I was not sorry about a single one."
>
> "We were doing a job to order. We were lining up behind everyone's enthusiasm. We gathered into teams on the soccer field and went out hunting as kindred spirits."
>
> "Anyone who hesitated to kill because of feelings of sadness absolutely had to watch his mouth, to say nothing about the reason for his reticence, for fear of being accused of complicity."
>
> "We killed everyone we tracked down [hiding] in the papyrus. We had no reason to choose, to expect or fear anyone in particular. We were cutters of acquaintances, cutters of neighbors, just plan cutters."
>
> "Our Tutsi neighbors, we knew they were not guilty of no misdoing, but we thought all Tutsis at fault for our constant troubles. We no longer looked

> at them one by one, we no longer stopped to recognize them as they had been, not even as colleagues. They had become a threat greater than all we had experienced together, more important than our way of seeing things in the community. That's how we reasoned and how we killed at the same time."
>
> "We no longer saw a human being when we turned up a Tutsi in the swamps. I mean a person like us, sharing similar thoughts and feelings. The hunt was savage, the hunters were savage, the prey was savage—savagery took over the mind."

A particularly moving reaction to these brutal murders and rapes, which expresses a theme we will revisit, comes from one of the surviving Tutsi women, Berthe:

> "Before, I knew that a man could kill another man, because it happens all the time. Now I know that even the person with whom you've shared food, or with whom you've slept, even he can kill you with no trouble. The closest neighbor can kill you with his teeth: that is what I have learned since the genocide, and my eyes no longer gaze the same on the face of the world."

Lieutenant General Roméo Dallaire has authored a powerful testimony about his experiences as the force commander for the U.N. Assistance Mission to Rwanda in *Shake Hands with the Devil.*[15] Although he was able to save thousands of people by his heroic ingenuity, this top military commander was left devastated by his inability to summon more aid from the United Nations to prevent many more atrocities. He ended up with severe post-traumatic stress disorder as a psychological casualty of this massacre.[16]

The Rape of Nanking, China

So graphically horrifying—yet so easily visualized—is the concept of rape that we use the term metaphorically to describe other, almost unimaginable atrocities of war. Japanese soldiers butchered between 260,000 and 350,000 Chinese civilians in just a few bloody months of 1937. Those figures represent more deaths than the total annihilation caused by the atomic bombing of Japan and all the civilian deaths in most European countries during all of World War II.

Beyond the sheer number of Chinese slaughtered, it is important for us to recognize the "creatively evil" ways devised by their tormentors to make even death desirable. The author Iris Chang's investigation of that horror revealed that Chinese men were used for bayonet practice and in decapitation contests. An estimated 20,000 to 80,000 women were raped. Many soldiers went beyond rape to disembowel women, slice off their breasts, and nail them to walls alive. Fathers

were forced to rape their daughters and sons their mothers as other family members watched.[17]

War engenders cruelty and barbaric behavior against anyone considered the Enemy, as the dehumanized, demonic Other. The Rape of Nanking is notorious for the graphic detail of the horrific extremes soldiers went to to degrade and destroy innocent civilian "enemy non-combatants." However, were it a singular incident and not just another part of the historical tapestry of such inhumanities against civilians we might think it an anomaly. British troops executed and raped civilians during the U.S. Revolutionary War. Soviet Red Army soldiers raped an estimated 100,000 Berlin women toward the end of World War II and between 1945 and 1948. In addition to the rapes and murders of more than 500 civilians at the My Lai massacre in 1968, recently released secret Pentagon evidence describes 320 incidents of American atrocities against Vietnamese and Cambodian civilians.[18]

Dehumanization and Moral Disengagement in the Laboratory

We can assume that most people, most of the time, are moral creatures. But imagine that this morality is like a gearshift that at times gets pushed into neutral. When that happens, morality is disengaged. If the car happens to be on an incline, car and driver move precipitously downhill. It is then the nature of the circumstances that determines outcomes, not the driver's skills or intentions. This simple analogy, I think, captures one of the central themes in the theory of moral disengagement developed by my Stanford colleague Albert Bandura. In a later chapter, we will review his theory, which will help explain why some otherwise good people can be led to do bad things. At this point, I want to turn to the experimental research that Bandura and his assistants conducted, which illustrates the ease with which morality can be disengaged by the tactic of dehumanizing a potential victim.[19] In an elegant demonstration that shows the power of dehumanization, one single word is shown to increase aggression toward a target. Let's see how the experiment worked.

Imagine you are a college student who has volunteered for a study of group problem solving as part of a three-person team from your school. Your task is to help students from another college improve their group problem-solving performance by punishing their errors. That punishment takes the form of administering electric shocks that can be increased in severity over successive trials. After taking your names and those of the other team, the assistant leaves to tell the experimenter that the study can begin. There will be ten trials during each of which you can decide the shock level to administer to the other student group in the next room.

You don't realize that it is part of the experimental script, but you "accidentally" overhear the assistant complaining over the intercom to the experimenter that the other students "seem like animals." You don't know it, but in two other

conditions to which other students like you have been randomly assigned, the assistant describes the other students as "nice guys" or does not label them at all.

Do these simple labels have any effect? It doesn't seem so initially. On the first trial all the groups respond in the same way by administering low levels of shock, around level 2. But soon it begins to matter what each group has heard about these anonymous others. If you know nothing about them, you give a steady average of about a level 5. If you have come to think of them as "nice guys," you treat them in a more humane fashion, giving them significantly less shock, about a level 3. However, imagining them as "animals" switches off any sense of compassion you might have for them, and when they commit errors, you begin to shock them with ever-increasing levels of intensity, significantly more than in the other conditions, as you steadily move up toward the high level 8.

Think carefully for a moment about the psychological processes that a simple label has tripped off in your mind. You overheard a person, whom you do not know personally, tell some authority, whom you have never seen, that other college students like you seem like "animals." That single descriptive term changes your mental construction of these others. It distances you from images of friendly college kids who must be more similar to you than different. That new mental set has a powerful impact on your behavior. The post hoc rationalizations the experimental students generated to explain why they needed to give so much shock to the "animal-house" students in the process of "teaching them a good lesson" were equally fascinating. This example of using controlled experimental research to investigate the underlying psychological processes that occur in significant real-world cases of violence will be extended in chapters 12 and 13 when we consider how behavioral scientists have investigated various aspects of the psychology of evil.

> Our ability to selectively engage and disengage our moral standards . . . helps explain how people can be barbarically cruel in one moment and compassionate the next.
>
> —Albert Bandura[20]

Horrific Images of Abuse at Abu Ghraib Prison

The driving force behind this book was the need to better understand the how and why of the physical and psychological abuses perpetrated on prisoners by American Military Police at the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. As the photographic evidence of these abuses rocketed around the world in May 2004, we all saw for the first time in recorded history vivid images of young American men and women engaged in unimaginable forms of torture against civilians they were supposed to be guarding. The tormentors and the tormented were captured in an extensive display of digitally documented depravity that the soldiers themselves had made during their violent escapades.

Why did they create photographic evidence of such illegal acts, which if found would surely get them into trouble? In these "trophy photos," like the proud displays by big-game hunters of yesteryear with the beasts they have killed, we saw smiling men and women in the act of abusing their lowly animal creatures. The images are of punching, slapping, and kicking detainees; jumping on their feet; forcibly arranging naked, hooded prisoners in piles and pyramids; forcing naked prisoners to wear women's underwear over their heads; forcing male prisoners to masturbate or simulate fellatio while being photographed or videotaped with female soldiers smiling or encouraging it; hanging prisoners from cell rafters for extended time periods; dragging a prisoner around with a leash tied to his neck; and using unmuzzled attack dogs to frighten prisoners.

The iconic image that ricocheted from that dungeon to the streets of Iraq and every corner of the globe was that of the "triangle man": a hooded detainee is standing on a box in a stress position with his outstretched arms protruding from under a garment blanket revealing electrical wires attached to his fingers. He was told that he would be electrocuted if he fell off the box when his strength gave out. It did not matter that the wires went nowhere; it mattered that he believed the lie and must have experienced considerable stress. There were even more shocking photographs that the U.S. government chose not to release to the public because of the greater damage they would surely have done to the credibility and moral image of the U.S. military and President Bush's administrative command. I have seen hundreds of these images, and they are indeed horrifying.

I was deeply distressed at the sight of such suffering, of such displays of arrogance, of such indifference to the humiliation being inflicted upon helpless prisoners. I was also amazed to learn that one of the abusers, a female soldier who had just turned twenty-one, described the abuse as "just fun and games."

I was shocked, but I was not surprised. The media and the "person in the street" around the globe asked how such evil deeds could be perpetrated by these seven men and women, whom military leaders had labeled as "rogue soldiers" and "a few bad apples." Instead, I wondered what circumstances in that prison cell block could have tipped the balance and led even good soldiers to do such bad things. To be sure, advancing a situational analysis for such crimes does not excuse them or make them morally acceptable. Rather, I needed to find the meaning in this madness. I wanted to understand how it was possible for the characters of these young people to be so transformed in such a short time that they could do these unthinkable deeds.

Parallel Universes in Abu Ghraib and Stanford's Prison

The reason that I was shocked but not surprised by the images and stories of prisoner abuse in the Abu Ghraib "Little Shop of Horrors" was that I had seen something similar before. Three decades earlier, I had witnessed eerily similar scenes as they unfolded in a project that I directed, of my own design: naked, shackled pris-

oners with bags over their heads, guards stepping on prisoners' backs as they did push-ups, guards sexually humiliating prisoners, and prisoners suffering from extreme stress. Some of the visual images from my experiment are practically interchangeable with those of the guards and prisoners in that remote prison in Iraq, the notorious Abu Ghraib.

The college students role-playing guards and prisoners in a mock prison experiment conducted at Stanford University in the summer of 1971 were mirrored in the real guards and real prison in the Iraq of 2003. Not only had I seen such events, I had been responsible for creating the conditions that allowed such abuses to flourish. As the project's principal investigator, I designed the experiment that randomly assigned normal, healthy, intelligent college students to enact the roles of either guards or prisoners in a realistically simulated prison setting where they were to live and work for several weeks. My student research associates, Craig Haney, Curt Banks, and David Jaffe, and I wanted to understand some of the dynamics operating in the psychology of imprisonment.

How do ordinary people adapt to such an institutional setting? How do the power differentials between guards and prisoners play out in their daily interactions? If you put good people in a bad place, do the people triumph or does the place corrupt them? Would the violence that is endemic to most real prisons be absent in a prison filled with good middle-class boys? These were some of the exploratory issues to be investigated in what started out as a simple study of prison life.

EXPLORING THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE

Our journey together will be one that the poet Milton might say leads into "darkness visible." It will take us to places where evil, by any definition of the word, has flourished. We will meet a host of people who have done very bad things to others, often out of a sense of high purpose, the best ideology, and moral imperative. You are alerted to watch for demons along the path, but you may be disappointed by their banality and their similarity to your next-door neighbor. With your permission, as your adventure guide, I will invite you to walk in their shoes and see through their eyes in order to give you an insider's perspective upon evil, up close and personal. At times, the view will be downright ugly, but only by examining and understanding the causes of such evil might we be able to change it, to contain it, to transform it through wise decisions and innovative communal action.

The basement of Stanford University's Jordan Hall is the backdrop I will use to help you understand what it was like to be a prisoner, a guard, or a prison superintendent at that time in that special place. Although the research is widely known from media sound bites and some of our research publications, the full story has never before been told. I will narrate the events as they unfold in first person, present tense, re-creating the highlights of each day and night in chronological

sequence. After we consider the implications of the Stanford Prison Experiment—ethical, theoretical, and practical—we will expand the bases of the psychological study of evil by exploring a range of experimental and field research by psychologists that illustrates the power of situational forces over individual behavior. We will examine in some detail research on conformity, obedience, deindividuation, dehumanization, moral disengagement, and the evil of inaction.

"Men are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds," said President Franklin Roosevelt. Prisons are metaphors for constraints on freedom, both literal and symbolic. The Stanford Prison Experiment went from initially being a symbolic prison to becoming an all-too-real one in the minds of its prisoners and guards. What are other self-imposed prisons that limit our basic freedoms? Neurotic disorders, low self-esteem, shyness, prejudice, shame, and excessive fear of terrorism are just some of the chimeras that limit our potentiality for freedom and happiness, blinding our full appreciation of the world around us.[21]

With that knowledge in mind, Abu Ghraib returns to capture our attention. But now let us go beyond the headlines and TV images to appreciate more fully what it was like to be a prison guard or a prisoner in that horrid prison at the time of those abuses. Torture forces its way into our investigation in the new forms that it has taken since the Inquisition. I will take you into the court-martial of one of those military policemen, and we will witness some of the negative fallout of the soldiers' actions. Throughout, we will bring to bear all we know about the triadic components of our social psychological understanding, focusing on acting people in particular situations, created and maintained by systemic forces. We will put on trial the command structure of the U.S. military, CIA officials, and top government leaders for their combined complicity in creating a dysfunctional system that spawned the torture and abuses of Abu Ghraib.

The first part of our final chapter will offer some guidelines on how to resist unwanted social influence, how to build resistance to the seductive lures of influence professionals. We want to know how to combat mind control tactics used to compromise our freedom of choice to the tyranny of conformity, compliance, obedience, and self-doubting fears. Although I preach the power of the situation, I also endorse the power of people to act mindfully and critically as informed agents directing their behavior in purposeful ways. By understanding how social influence operates and by realizing that any of us can be vulnerable to its subtle and pervasive powers, we can become wise and wily consumers instead of being easily influenced by authorities, group dynamics, persuasive appeals, and compliance strategies.

I want to end by reversing the question with which we started. Instead of considering whether you are capable of evil, I want you to consider whether you are capable of becoming a hero. My final argument introduces the concept of the "banality of heroism." I believe that any one of us is a potential hero, waiting for the right situational moment to make the decision to act to help others despite

personal risk and sacrifice. But we have far to travel before we get to that happy conclusion, so *andiamo!*

> Power said to the world,
> "You are mine."
> The world kept it prisoner on her throne.
> Love said to the world, "I am thine."
> The world gave it the freedom of her house.
>
> —Rabindranath Tagore, *Stray Birds*[22]

CHAPTER TEN

The SPE's Meaning and Messages: The Alchemy of Character Transformations

We're all guinea pigs in the laboratory of God . . .
Humanity is just a work in progress.

—Tennessee Williams, *Camino Real* (1953)

The Stanford Prison Experiment began as a simple demonstration of the effects that a composite of situational variables has on the behavior of individuals role-playing prisoners and guards in a simulated prison environment. For this exploratory investigation, we were not testing specific hypotheses but rather assessing the extent to which the external features of an institutional setting could override the internal dispositions of the actors in that environment. Good dispositions were pitted against a bad situation.

However, over time, this experiment has emerged as a powerful illustration of the potentially toxic impact of bad systems and bad situations in making good people behave in pathological ways that are alien to their nature. The narrative chronology of this study, which I have tried to re-create faithfully here, vividly reveals the extent to which ordinary, normal, healthy young men succumbed to, or were seduced by, the social forces inherent in that behavioral context—as were I and many of the other adults and professionals who came within its encompassing boundaries. The line between Good and Evil, once thought to be impermeable, proved instead to be quite permeable.

It is time now for us to review other evidence that we collected during the course of our research. Many quantitative sources of information shed additional light on what happened in that dark basement prison. Therefore, we must use all the available evidence to extract the meanings that have emerged from this unique experiment and to establish the ways in which humanity can be transformed by power and by powerlessness. Underlying those meanings are significant messages about the nature of human nature and the conditions that can diminish or enrich it.

SUMMING UP BEFORE DIGGING INTO THE DATA

As you have seen, our psychologically compelling prison environment elicited intense, realistic, and often pathological reactions from many of the participants. We were surprised both by the intensity of the guards' domination and the speed with which it appeared in the wake of the prisoner rebellion. As in the case of Doug-8612, we were surprised that situational pressures could overcome most of these normal, healthy young men so quickly and so extremely.

Experiencing a loss of personal identity and subjected to arbitrary continual control of their behavior, as well as being deprived of privacy and sleep, generated in them a syndrome of passivity, dependency, and depression that resembled what has been termed "learned helplessness."[1] (Learned helplessness is the experience of passive resignation and depression following recurring failure or punishment, especially when it seems arbitrary and not contingent upon one's actions.)

Half of our student prisoners had to be released early because of severe emotional and cognitive disorders, transient but intense at the time. Most of those who remained for the duration generally became mindlessly obedient to the guards' demands and seemed "zombie-like" in their listless movements while yielding to the whims of the ever-escalating guard power.

As with the rare "good guards," so too, a few prisoners were able to stand up to the guards' domination. As we have seen, Clay-416, who should have been supported for his heroic passive resistance, instead was harassed by his fellow prisoners for being a "troublemaker." They adopted the narrow dispositional perspective provided by the guards rather than generate their own metaperspective on Clay's hunger strike as emblematic of a path for their communal resistance against blind obedience to authority.

Sarge also behaved heroically at times by refusing to curse or verbally abuse a fellow prisoner when ordered to do so, but at all other times he was the model obedient prisoner. Jerry-486 emerged as our most evenly balanced prisoner; however, as he indicates in his personal reflections, he survived only by turning inward and not doing as much as he might to help the other prisoners, who could have benefited from his support.

When we began our experiment, we had a sample of individuals who did not deviate from the normal range of the general educated population on any of the dimensions we had premeasured. Those randomly assigned to the role of "prisoner" were interchangeable with those in the "guard" role. Neither group had any history of crime, emotional or physical disability, or even intellectual or social disadvantage that might typically differentiate prisoners from guards and prisoners from the rest of society.

It is by virtue of this random assignment and the comparative premeasures that I am able to assert that these young men did not import into our jail any of

the pathology that subsequently emerged among them as they played either prisoners or guards. At the start of this experiment, there were no differences between the two groups; less than a week later, there were no similarities between them. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that the pathologies were elicited by the set of situational forces constantly impinging upon them in this prisonlike setting. Further, this Situation was sanctioned and maintained by a background System that I helped to create. I did so first when I gave the new guards their psychological orientation and then with the development of various policies and procedures that I and my staff helped to put into operation.

Neither the guards nor the prisoners could be considered "bad apples" prior to the time when they were so powerfully impacted by being embedded in a "bad barrel." The complex of features within that barrel constitute the situational forces in operation in this behavioral context—the roles, rules, norms, anonymity of person and place, dehumanizing processes, conformity pressures, group identity, and more.

WHAT DID WE LEARN FROM OUR DATA?

The around-the-clock direct observations that we made of behavioral interactions between prisoners and guards, and of special events, were supplemented by videotaped recordings (about twelve hours), concealed audiotape recordings (about thirty hours), questionnaires, self-reported individual difference personality measures, and various interviews. Some of these measures were coded for quantitative analyses, and some were correlated with outcome measures.

The data analyses present a number of problems in their interpretation: the sample size was relatively small; the recordings were selective and not comprehensive because of our limited budget and staff, and because of the strategic decision to focus on daily events of high interest (such as counts, meals, visitors, and parole hearings). In addition, the causal directions are uncertain because of the dynamic interplay among guards and prisoners within and across guard shifts. The quantitative data analysis of individual behavior is confounded by the obvious fact of the complex interactions of persons, groups, and time-based effects. In addition, unlike traditional experiments, we did not have a control group of comparable volunteers who did not undergo the experimental treatment of being a mock prisoner or mock guard but were given various pre–post assessments. We did not do so because we thought about our design as more a demonstration of a phenomenon, like Milgram's original obedience study, than as an experiment to establish causal associations. We imagined doing such control-versus-experimental group comparisons in future research if we obtained any interesting findings from this first exploratory investigation. Thus, our simple independent variable was only the main effect of the treatment of guard-versus-prisoner status.

Nevertheless, some clear patterns emerged that amplify the qualitative narrative I have presented thus far. These findings offer some interesting insights into the nature of this psychologically compelling environment and of the young men who were tested by its demands. Full details of the operational scoring of these measures and their statistical significance is available in the scientific article published in the *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*[2] and on the website www.prisonexp.org.

Personality Measures

Three kinds of measures of individual differences among the participants were administered when they came in for their pre-experiment assessment a few days prior to the start of the study. These measures were the F-Scale of authoritarianism, the Machiavellian Scale of interpersonal manipulation strategies, and the Comrey Personality Scales.

The F-Scale.[3] On this measure of rigid adherence to conventional values and a submissive, uncritical attitude toward authority, there was no statistically significant difference between the mean score of the guards (4.8) and that of the prisoners (4.4)—before they were divided into the two roles. However, a fascinating finding emerges when we compare the F-Scale scores of the five prisoners who remained for the duration of the study and the five who were released early. Those who endured the authoritarian environment of the SPE scored more than twice (mean = 7.8) as high on conventionality and authoritarianism than their early-released peers (mean = 3.2). Amazingly, when these scores are arranged in rank order from lowest to highest prisoner F-Scale values, a highly significant correlation is found with the number of days of staying in the experiment (correlation coefficient = .90). A prisoner was likely to remain longer and adjust more effectively to the authoritarian prison environment to the extent that he was high in rigidity, adherence to conventional values, and acceptance of authority—the features which characterized our prison setting. To the contrary, the prisoners who handled the pressures least well were the young men who were lowest on these F-Scale traits—which some would say are to their credit.

The Machiavellian Scale.[4] This measure, as its name implies, assesses one's endorsement of strategies for gaining effective advantage in interpersonal encounters. However, no significant differences were found between the guards' mean score (7.7) and the slightly higher mean of the prisoners (8.8), nor did this measure predict duration of the stay in prison. We expected that the skill of those high on this trait of manipulating others might be relevant in their daily interactions in this setting, but while two of the prisoners with the highest Machiavellian score were those we judged to have adjusted best to the prison, two others we evaluated as also adjusting well had the lowest Machiavellian scores.

The Comrey Personality Scales.[5] This self-report inventory consists of eight subscales that we used to predict dispositional variations between the guards and prisoners. These personality measures are: Trustworthiness, Orderliness, Conformity, Activity, Stability, Extroversion, Masculinity, and Empathy. On this measure, the average scores of the guards and those of the prisoners were virtually interchangeable; none even approached statistical significance. Furthermore, on every subscale, the group mean fell within the fortieth to sixtieth percentile range of the normative male population reported by Comrey. This finding bolsters the assertion that the personalities of the students in the two different groups could be defined as "normal" or "average." Craig Haney and Curt Banks did indeed do their preselection task of choosing a sample of student volunteers who were "ordinary men" well. In addition, there were no prior dispositional tendencies that could distinguish those individuals who role-played the guards from those who enacted the prisoner role.

A few interesting, though nonsignificant, differences were found between the prisoners who were released early and those who endured the full catastrophe. The "endurers" scored higher on Conformity ("acceptance of society as it is"), Extroversion, and Empathy (helpfulness, sympathy, generosity) than those who had to be released due to their extreme stress reactions.

If we examine the scores for those individual guards and prisoners that most deviated from the average of their group (by 1.5 standard deviations or more), some curious patterns appear.

First, let's look at some personality characteristics of particular prisoners. My impression of prisoner Jerry-5486 as "most together" was clearly supported by his being higher than any other prisoner on Stability, with nearly all his other scores very close to the population norm. When he does deviate from the others, it is always in a positive direction. He was also highest in Masculinity ("does not cry easily, not interested in love stories"). Stewart-819, who trashed his cell and caused grief to his cellmates who had to clean up his mess, scored lowest in Orderliness (the extent to which a person is meticulous and concerned with neatness and orderliness). Despite rules to the contrary, he did not care. Guess who scored highest on the measure of Activity (liking physical activity, hard work, and exercise)? Yes, indeed, it was Sarge-2093. Trustworthiness is the belief in the basic honesty and good intentions of others, and Clay-416 took the prize on that dimension. Finally, from the prisoner profiles, who do you suspect got the highest score on "Conformity" (a belief in law enforcement, acceptance of society as it is, and resentment of nonconformity in others)? Who reacted most strongly against Clay-416's resistance to the guards' demands? It was none other than our handsome youngster, Hubbie-7258!

Among the guards, there were only a few individual profile scores that were interesting as being "atypical" compared to their peers'. First, we see that the "good guard" John Landry, not his brother Geoff, was highest on Empathy. Guard

Varnish was lowest on Empathy and Trustworthiness but highest on concern for neatness and orderliness. He also had the highest Machiavellian score of any guard. Packaged together, that syndrome characterizes the coolly efficient, mechanical, and detached behavior he showed throughout the study.

While these findings suggest that personality measures do predict behavioral differences in some individual cases, we need to be cautious in overgeneralizing their utility in understanding individual behavior patterns in novel settings, such as this one. For example, based on all the measures we examined, Jerry-5486 was the most "supranormal" of the prisoners. However, second in line with personality inventory scores that would qualify him as "most normal" is Doug-8612. His disturbed account of acting and then becoming "crazy" was hardly predictable from his "most normal" pre-experimental status. Moreover, we could find no personality precursors for the difference between the four meanest guards and the others who were less abusive. Not a single personality predisposition could account for this extreme behavioral variation.

Now if we look at the personality scores of the two guards who were clearly the meanest and most sadistic toward prisoners, Hellmann and Arnett, both turned out to be ordinary, average on all but one of the personality dimensions. Where they diverged was on Masculinity. An intuitive personality theorist would seem justified in assuming that Hellmann, our badass "John Wayne," would top off the scale on Masculinity. Just the opposite was true: he scored lower on Masculinity than any other guard and, for that matter, lower than any prisoner did. In contrast, Arnett scored as the most masculine of all the guards. Psychodynamic analysts would most certainly assume that Hellmann's cruel, dominating behavior and his invention of homophobic exercises were motivated by a reaction formation against his nonmasculine, possibly latent-homosexual nature. However, before we wax analytically lyrical, I must hasten to add that there has been nothing in his subsequent lifestyle over the past thirty-five years that has characterized this young man as anything but appropriate and normal as a husband, father, businessman, and civic-minded citizen.

Mood Adjective Self-Reports. Twice during the study and immediately after the debriefing session, each of the students completed a checklist of adjectives that they felt best described their current mood state. We combined the mood adjectives into those that reflected negative versus positive moods and separately those that portrayed activity versus passivity. As might well be expected from all we have seen of the state of the prisoners, the prisoners expressed three times as much negative affect as positive and much more negativity overall than did the guards. The guards expressed slightly more negative than positive affect. Another interesting difference between the two groups is the greater fluctuation in the prisoners' mood states. Over the course of the study, they showed two to three times as much variation in their moods as did the relatively stable guards. On the dimension of activity-passivity, the prisoners tended to score twice as high, indicating

twice as much internal "agitation" as the guards. While the prison experience had a negative emotional impact upon both guards and prisoners, the adverse effects upon the prisoners were more profound and unstable.

Comparing the prisoners who stayed to those who were released early, the mood of those who had to be terminated was marked by a decidedly more negative tone: depression and unhappiness. When the mood scales were administered for a third time, just *after* the subjects were told that the study had been terminated (the early-released subjects returned for the debriefing encounter session), elevated changes in positive moods were evident. All of the now "ex-convicts" selected self-descriptive adjectives that characterized their mood as less negative and much more positive—a decrease in negativity from the initially strong 15.0 to a low of 5.0, while their positivity soared from the initial low of 6.0 up to 17.0. In addition, they now felt less passive than before.

In general, there were no longer any differences on these mood subscales between prisoners released early and those who endured the six days. I am happy to be able to report the vital conclusion that by the end of the study both groups of students had returned to their pre-experiment baselines of normal emotional responding. This return to normality seems to reflect the "situational specificity" of the depression and stress reactions these students experienced while playing their unusual roles.

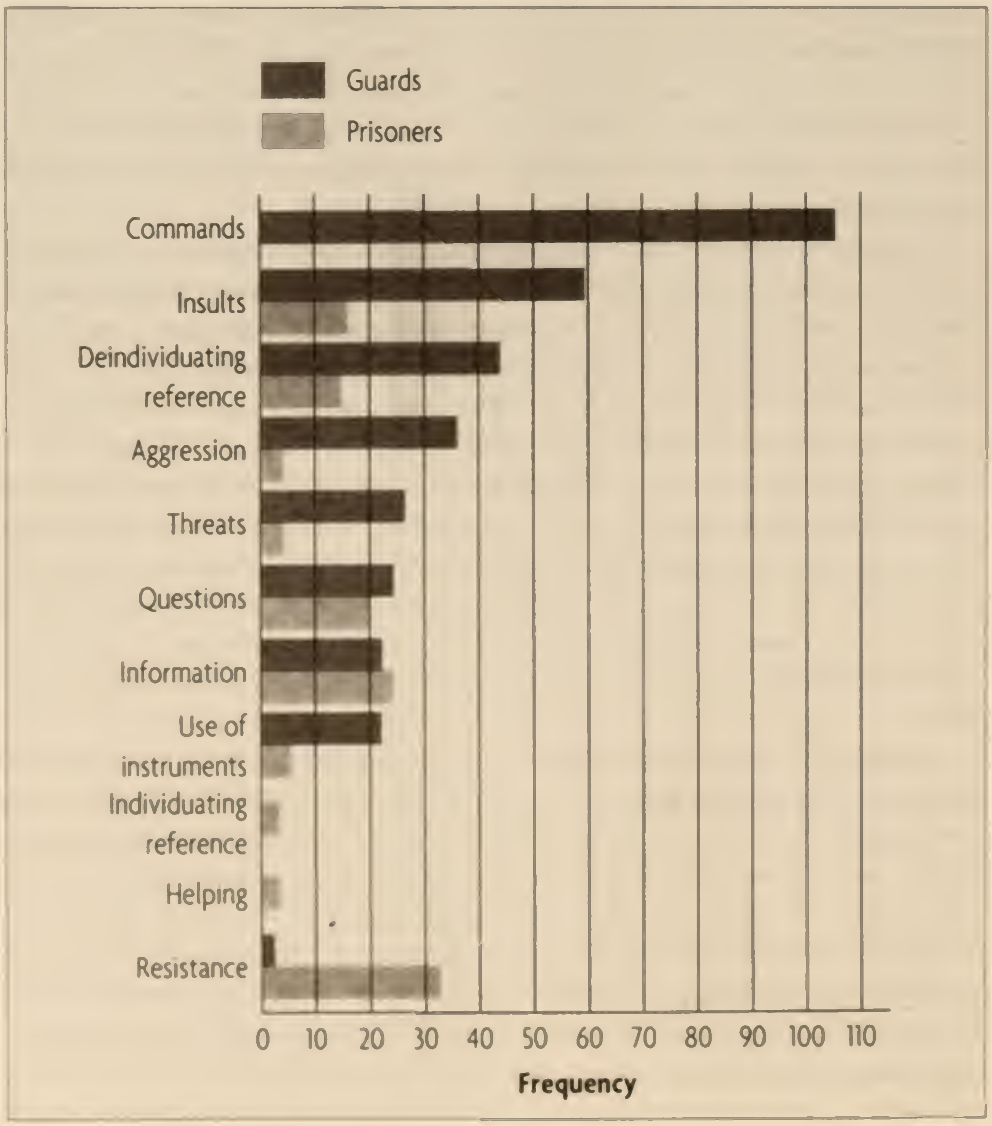
This last finding can be interpreted in several ways. The emotional impact of the prison experience was transient since the suffering prisoners quickly bounced back to a normal mood base level as soon as the study was terminated. It also speaks to the "normality" of the participants we had so carefully selected, and this bounce-back attests to their resilience. However, the same overall reaction among the prisoners could have come from very different sources. Those who remained were elated by their newfound freedom and the knowledge that they had survived the ordeal. Those who were released early were no longer emotionally distressed, having readjusted while away from the negative situation. Perhaps we can also attribute some of their newly positive reactions to gratification at seeing their fellow prisoners released, thus relieving them of the burden of guilt they may have felt for leaving early while their fellows had to stay on, enduring the ordeal.

Although some guards indicated that they wished the study had continued as planned for another week, as a group they too were glad to see it end. Their mean positivity score more than doubled (from 4.0 to 10.2), and their low negativity score (6.0) got even lower (2.0). Therefore, as a group, they also were able to regain their emotional composure and balance despite their role in creating the horrible conditions in this prison setting. This mood readjustment does not mean that some of these young men were not troubled by what they had done and by their failure to stop abuse, as we noted earlier in their postexperiment reactions and retrospective diaries.

Video Analysis. There were twenty-five relatively discrete incidents identifiable on the tapes of prisoner–guard interactions. Each incident or scene was scored for the presence of ten behavioral (and verbal) categories. Two raters, who had not been involved with the study, independently scored these tapes, and their level of agreement was satisfactory. These categories were: Asking Questions, Giving Commands, Offering Information, Using Individuating Reference (positive) or Deindividuating (negative), Making Threats, Giving Resistance, Helping Others, Using Instruments (for some goal), and Exhibiting Aggression.

As shown in the figure summarizing these results, overall there was an excess of negative, hostile interactions between the guards and prisoners. Assertive activity was largely the prerogative of the guards, while the prisoners generally assumed a relatively passive stance. Most characteristic of the guards across the

GUARD AND PRISONER BEHAVIOR[6]



situations we recorded were the following responses: giving commands, insulting prisoners, deindividualizing prisoners, showing aggression toward prisoners, threatening, and using instruments against them.

At first, the prisoners resisted the guards, notably in the early days of the study and later, when Clay-416 went on his hunger strike. The prisoners tended to positively individuate others, asked questions of them, gave information to them, and rarely showed the negative behavior toward others that became typical of the dominating guards. Again, this occurred only in the first days of the study. On the other hand, the two most *infrequent* behaviors we observed over the six days of our study were individuating others and helping others. Only one such incident of helping was recorded—a solitary sign of human concern for a fellow human being occurred between two prisoners.

The recordings also underscore quantitatively what was observed over the course of the study: the guards continually escalated their harassment of the prisoners. If we compare two of the *first* prisoner–guard interactions during the counts with two of the *last*, we note that in an equivalent unit of time, no deindividuating references occurred initially, but a robust average of 5.4 occurred in the last counts. Similarly, the guards spoke few deprecating insults initially, only an average of 0.3, but by the last day they degraded the prisoners an average of 5.7 times in the same length of time.

According to the temporal analysis from this video data, what the prisoners did was simply to behave less and less over time. There was a general decrease across all behavioral categories over time. They did little initiating, simply becoming increasingly passive as the days and nights moved numbingly on.

The video analysis also clearly showed that the "John Wayne" night shift was hardest on the prisoners compared to the other two shifts. The behavior of the guards on this tough and cruel shift differed significantly from those that preceded and followed it in the following ways: issuing more commands (an average of 9.3 versus 4.0, respectively, for standardized units of time); giving more than twice as many deprecating insults toward the prisoners (5.2 versus 2.3, respectively). They also resorted more often to aggressively punishing the prisoners than did the guards on the other shifts. The more subtle verbal aggression in Arnett's shift is not detected in these analyses.

Audio Analysis. From time to time, audio recordings with concealed microphones were made of interviews between one of the staff with prisoners and guards, and of conversations among prisoners taking place in the cells. Nine categories were created to capture the general nature of this verbal behavior. Again, the recordings were classified into these categories by two independent judges, who did so reliably.

In addition to asking questions, giving information, making requests and demands and ordering commands, other categories focused on criticism; positive/negative outlook; positive/negative self-evaluation; individuating/deindividuating

references; desire to continue in the study or abort; and intention to act in the future in positive or negative ways.

We were surprised to discover that the guards tended to have nearly as much negative outlook and negative self-regard as did most of the prisoners. In fact, the "good guard" Geoff Landry expressed more negative self-regard than did any prisoner and more general negative affect than all but one participant, namely Doug-8612. Our interviews with prisoners were marked by their general negativity in expressing affect and in their self-regard and intentions (primarily intention to be aggressive and having a negative outlook on their situation).

These interviews showed clear differences in the emotional impact of the experience between the prisoners who remained and those who were released early. We compared the mean number of expressions of negative outlook, negative affect, negative self-regard, and intention to aggress that were made by remaining versus released prisoners (per interview). Prisoners released early expressed expectations that were more negative and had more negative affect, more negative self-regard, and four times as many intentions to aggress as did their fellow prisoners who stuck it out. These interesting trends are close to being statistically significant.

Bugging the cells gave us information about what the prisoners were discussing in private during temporary respites from the counts, the menial work tasks, and other public events. Remember that the three inmates in each cell were initially total strangers. It was only when they were alone in the solitude of their cells that they could get to know one another since no "small talk" was allowed at public times. We assumed that they would seek common ground for relating to one another, given their close quarters and their expectation of interacting for two weeks. We expected to hear them talk about their college lives, majors, vocations, girlfriends, favorite teams, music preferences, hobbies, what they would do for the remainder of the summer once the experiment was over, or maybe what they would do with the money they would earn.

Not at all! Almost none of these expectations were borne out. Fully 90 percent of all conversations among prisoners related to prison issues. Only a mere 10 percent focused on personal or autobiographical exchanges that were not related to the prison experience. The prisoners were most concerned about food, guard harassment, establishing a grievance committee, forging plans of escape, visitors, and the behavior of prisoners in the other cells and those in solitary.

When they had the opportunity to distance themselves temporarily from the harassment by guards and the tedium of their schedules, to transcend the prisoner role and establish their personal identity in a social interaction, they did not do so. The prisoner role dominated all expressions of individual character. The prison setting dominated their outlook and concerns—forcing them into an expanded present temporal orientation. It did not matter whether the presentation of self was under surveillance or free from its glare.

By not sharing their pasts and future expectations, the only thing each prisoner knew about the other prisoners was based on observations of how they were

behaving in the present. We know that what they had to see during counts and other menial activities was usually a negative image of one another. That image was all they had upon which to build a personality impression of their peers. Because they focused on the immediate situation, the prisoners also contributed to fostering a mentality that intensified the negativity of their experiences. Generally, we manage to cope with bad situations by compartmentalizing them into a temporal perspective that imagines a better, different future combined with recall of a reassuring past.

This self-imposed intensification of prisoner mentality had an even more damaging consequence: the prisoners began to adopt and accept the negative images that the guards had developed toward them. Half of all reported private interactions between the prisoners could be classified as nonsupportive and noncooperative. Even worse, whenever the prisoners made evaluative statements of, or expressed regard for, their fellow prisoners, 85 percent of the time they were uncomplimentary and deprecating! These frequencies are statistically significant: the greater focus on prison than nonprison topics would occur only one time in a hundred by chance, while the focus on negative attributions of fellow prisoners as opposed to positive or neutral terms would occur by chance only five times in a hundred. This means that such emerging behavioral effects are "real" and not likely to be attributed to random fluctuations in what the prisoners discussed in the privacy of their cells.

By internalizing the oppressiveness of the prison setting in these ways, the prisoners formed impressions of their mates primarily by watching them be humiliated, act like compliant sheep, or carry out mindlessly degrading orders. Without developing any respect for the others, how could they come to have any self-respect in this prison? This last unexpected finding reminds me of the phenomenon of "identification with the aggressor." The psychologist Bruno Bettelheim[7] used this term to characterize ways in which Nazi concentration camp prisoners internalized the power that was inherent in their oppressors (it was first used by Anna Freud). Bettelheim observed that some inmates acted like their Nazi guards, not only abusing other prisoners but even wearing bits of cast-off SS uniforms. Desperately hoping to survive a hostile, unpredictable existence, the victim senses what the aggressor wants and rather than opposing him, embraces his image and becomes what the aggressor is. The frightening power differential between powerful guards and powerless prisoners is psychologically minimized by such mental gymnastics. One becomes one with one's enemy—in one's own mind. This self-delusion prevents realistic appraisals of one's situation, inhibits effective action, coping strategies, or rebellion, and does not permit empathy for one's fellow sufferers.[8]

> Life is the art of being well-deceived; and in order that the deception may succeed it must be habitual and uninterrupted.
>
> —William Hazlitt, "On Pedantry," *The Round Table*, 1817

THE SPE'S LESSONS AND MESSAGES

It is time to move from the specific behavioral reactions and personal attributes of these young men who enacted the roles of prisoners and guards to consider some broader conceptual issues raised by this research and its lessons, meaning, and messages.

The Virtue of Science

From one perspective, the SPE does not tell us anything about prisons that sociologists, criminologists, and the narratives of prisoners have not already revealed about the evils of prison life. Prisons can be brutalizing places that invoke what is worst in human nature. They breed more violence and crime than they foster constructive rehabilitation. Recidivism rates of 60 percent and higher indicate that prisons have become revolving doors for those sentenced for criminal felonies. What does the SPE add to our understanding of *society's failed experiment* of prisons as its instruments of crime control? I think the answer lies in the experiment's basic protocol.

In real prisons, defects of the prison situation and those of the people who inhabit it are confounded, inextricably intertwined. Recall my first discussion with the sergeant in the Palo Alto police station wherein I explained the reason we were conducting this research rather than going to a local prison to observe what was going on. This experiment was designed to assess the impact of a simulated prison situation on those who lived in it, both guards and prisoners. By means of various experimental controls, we were able to do a number of things, and draw conclusions, that would not have been possible in real-world settings.

Systematic selection procedures ensured that everyone going into our prison was as normal, average, and healthy as possible and had no prior history of antisocial behavior, crime, or violence. Moreover, because they were college students, they were generally above average in intelligence, lower in prejudice, and more confident about their futures than their less educated peers. Then, by virtue of random assignment, the key to experimental research, these good people were randomly assigned to the role of guard or prisoner, regardless of whatever inclination they might have had to be the other. Chance ruled. Further experimental control involved systematic observation, collection of multiple forms of evidence, and statistical data analyses that together could be used to determine the impact of the experience within the parameters of the research design. The SPE protocol disentangled person from place, disposition from situation, "good apples" from "bad barrels."

We must acknowledge, however, that all research is "artificial," being only an imitation of its real-world analogue. Nevertheless, despite the artificiality of controlled experimental research like the SPE, or that of the social psychological studies we will encounter in later chapters, when such research is conducted in

sensitive ways that capture essential features of "mundane realism," the results can have considerable generalizability.[9]

Our prison was obviously not a "real prison" in many of its tangible features, but it did capture the central psychological features of imprisonment that I believe are central to the "prison experience." To be sure, any finding derived from an experiment must raise two questions. First, "Compared to what?" Next, "What is its external validity—the real-world parallels that it may help to explain?" The value of such research typically lies in its ability to illuminate underlying processes, identify causal sequences, and establish the variables that mediate an observed effect. Moreover, experiments can establish causal relationships that if statistically significant cannot be dismissed as chance connections.

The pioneering theorist-researcher in social psychology Kurt Lewin argued decades ago for a science of experimental social psychology. Lewin asserted that it is possible to abstract significant issues from the real world conceptually and practically and test them in the experimental laboratory. With well-designed studies and carefully executed manipulations of independent variables (the antecedent factors used as behavioral predictors), he thought, it was possible to establish certain causal relationships in ways that were not possible in field or observational studies. However, Lewin went further to advocate using that knowledge to effect social change, using research-based evidence to understand as well as attempt to change and improve society and human functioning.[10] I have tried to follow his inspiring lead.

Guard Power Transformations

> Our sense of power is more vivid when we break a man's spirit than when we win his heart.
>
> —Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind* (1954)

Some of our volunteers who were randomly assigned to be guards soon came to abuse their newfound power by behaving sadistically—demeaning, degrading, and hurting the "prisoners" day in and night out. Their actions fit the psychological definition of evil proposed in chapter 1. Other guards played their role in tough, demanding ways that were not particularly abusive, but they showed little sympathy for the plight of the suffering inmates. A few guards, who could be classified as "good guards," resisted the temptation of power and were at times considerate of the prisoners' condition, doing little things like giving one an apple, another a cigarette, and so on.

Although vastly different from the SPE in the extent of its horror and complexity of the system that spawned and sustained it, there is one interesting parallel between the Nazi SS doctors involved in the death camp at Auschwitz and our SPE guards. Like our guards, those doctors could be categorized as falling into three groups. According to Robert Jay Lifton in *Nazi Doctors*, there were "zealots

who participated eagerly in the extermination process and even did 'extra work' on behalf of killing; those who went about the process more or less methodically and did no more or no less than they felt that they had to do; and those who participated in the extermination process only reluctantly."[11]

In our study, being a good guard who did his job reluctantly meant "goodness by default." Doing minor nice deeds for the prisoners simply contrasted with the demonic actions of their shift mates. As noted previously, none of them ever intervened to prevent the "bad guards" from abusing the prisoners; none complained to the staff, left their shift early or came to work late, or refused to work overtime in emergencies. Moreover, none of them even demanded overtime pay for doing tasks they may have found distasteful. They were part of the "Evil of Inaction Syndrome," which will be discussed more fully later.

Recall that the best good guard, Geoff Landry, shared the night shift with the worst guard, Hellmann, and he never once made any attempt to get him to "chill out," never reminded him that this was "just an experiment," that there was no need to inflict so much suffering on the kids who were just role-playing prisoners. Instead, as we have seen from his personal accounts, Geoff simply suffered in silence—along with the prisoners. Had he energized his conscience into constructive action, this good guard might have had a significant impact in mitigating the escalating abuse of the prisoners on his shift.

In my many years of experience teaching at a variety of universities, I have found that most students are not concerned with power issues because they have enough to get by in their world, where intelligence and hard work get them to their goals. Power is a concern when people either have a lot of it and need to maintain it or when they have not much power and want to get more. However, power itself becomes a goal for many because of all the resources at the disposal of the powerful. The former statesman Henry Kissinger described this lure as "the aphrodisiac of power." That lure attracts beautiful young women to ugly, old, but powerful men.

Prisoner Pathologies

> Wherever anyone is against his will, that is to him a prison.
>
> —Epictetus, *Discourses*, second century A.D.

Our initial interest was not so much in the guards as in how those assigned the prisoner role would adapt to their new lowly, powerless status. Having spent the summer enmeshed in the psychology of imprisonment course I had just cotaught at Stanford, I was primed to be on their side. Carlo Prescott had filled us with vivid tales of abuse and degradation at the hands of guards. From other former prisoners, we heard firsthand the horror stories of prisoners sexually abusing other prisoners and gang wars. Thus, Craig, Curt, and I were privately pulling for

the prisoners, hoping that they would resist any pressures the guards could muster against them and maintain their personal dignity despite the external signs of inferiority they were forced to wear. I could imagine myself a Paul Newman kind of wisely resistant prisoner, as portrayed in the movie *Cool Hand Luke.* I could never imagine myself as his jailor.[12]

We were pleased when the prisoners rebelled so soon, challenging the hassling of the menial tasks the guards assigned them, the arbitrary enforcement of rules, and the exhausting count lineups. Their expectations about what they would be doing in the "study of prison life" to which our newspaper ad had recruited them had been violated. They had anticipated a little menial labor for a few hours mixed with time to read, relax, play some games, and meet new people. That, in fact, was what our preliminary agenda called for—before the prisoners' rebellion and before the guards took control of matters. We had even planned to have movie nights for them.

The prisoners were particularly upset by the constant abuse rained on them day and night, the lack of privacy and relief from staff surveillance, the arbitrary enforcement of rules and random punishments, and being forced to share their barren, cramped quarters. When the guards turned to us for help after the rebellion started, we backed off and made it clear that their decisions would prevail. We were observers who did not want to intrude. I was not yet fully submerged in the superintendent's mentality at that early stage; rather, I was acting as the principal investigator, interested in data on how these mock guards would react to this emergency.

The breakdown of Doug-8612, coming so soon after he had helped to engineer a rebellion, caught us all off guard, if you will excuse the pun. We were all shaken by his shrill voice screaming opposition to everything that was wrong in the way the prisoners were being treated. Even when he shouted, "It's a fucking simulation, not a prison, and fuck Dr. *Zimbargo*!" I could not help but admire his spunk. We could not bring ourselves to believe that he was really suffering as much as he seemed to be. Recall my conversation with him when he first wanted to be released and I invited him to consider the option of becoming a "snitch" in return for a hassle-free time as a prisoner.

Recall further that Craig Haney had made the difficult decision to deal with Doug-8612's sudden breakdown by releasing him after only thirty-six hours into the experiment.

> As experimenters, none of us had predicted an event like this, and, of course, we had devised no contingency plan to cover it. On the other hand, it was obvious that this young man was more disturbed by his brief experience in the Stanford Prison than any of us had expected. . . . So, I decided to release Prisoner 8612, going with the ethical, humanitarian decision over the experimental one.

How did we explain this violation of our expectations that no one could have such a severe stress reaction so quickly? Craig remembers our wrong-headed causal attribution:

> We quickly seized on an explanation that felt as natural as it was reassuring—he must have broken down because he was weak or had some kind of defect in his personality that accounted for his oversensitivity and overreaction to the simulated prison conditions! In fact, we worried that there had been a flaw in our screening process that had allowed a "damaged" person somehow to slip through undetected. It was only later that we appreciated this obvious irony: we had "dispositionally explained" the first truly unexpected and extraordinary demonstration of situational power in our study by resorting to precisely the kind of thinking we had designed the study to challenge and critique.[13]

Let's go back and review the final reactions to this experience by Doug-8612 to appreciate his level of confusion at that time:

"I decided I want out, and then I went to talk to you guys and everything, and you said 'No' and you bullshitted me and everything, and I came back and I realized you were bullshitting me, and that made me mad, so I decided I'm getting out and I was going to do anything, and I made up several schemes whereby I could get out. The easiest one and that wouldn't hurt anybody or hurt any equipment was to just act mad or upset, so I chose that one. When I was in the Hole, I purposely kind of built it up and I knew that when I went to talk with Jaffe, I didn't want to release the energy in the Hole, I wanted to release in front of Jaffe, so I knew I'd get out, and then, even while I was being upset, I was manipulating and I was being upset, you know—how could you act upset unless you *were* upset . . . it's like a crazy person can't act crazy unless he really is kinda crazy, you know? I don't know whether I was upset or whether I was induced. . . . I was mad at the black guy, and what was his name, Carter? Something like that and you, Dr. Zimbardo, for making the contract like I was a serf or something . . . and the way you played with me afterwards, but what can you do, you had to do that, your people had to do it in an experiment."[14]

WHY SITUATIONS MATTER

Within certain powerful social settings, human nature can be transformed in ways as dramatic as the chemical transformation in Robert Louis Stevenson's captivating fable of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The enduring interest in the SPE over many decades comes, I think, from the experiment's startling revelation of "transformation of character"—of good people suddenly becoming perpetrators of evil as guards or pathologically passive victims as prisoners in response to situational forces acting on them.

Good people can be induced, seduced, and initiated into behaving in evil ways. They can also be led to act in irrational, stupid, self-destructive, antisocial, and mindless ways when they are immersed in "total situations" that impact human nature in ways that challenge our sense of the stability and consistency of individual personality, of character, and of morality.[15]

We want to believe in the essential, unchanging goodness of people, in their power to resist external pressures, in their rational appraisal and then rejection of situational temptations. We invest human nature with God-like qualities, with moral and rational faculties that make us both just and wise. We simplify the complexity of human experience by erecting a seemingly impermeable boundary between Good and Evil. On one side are Us, Our Kin, and Our Kind; on the other side of that line we cast Them, Their Different Kin, and Other Kind. Paradoxically, by creating this myth of our invulnerability to situational forces, we set ourselves up for a fall by not being sufficiently vigilant to situational forces.

The SPE, along with much other social science research (presented in chapters 12 and 13), reveals a message we do not want to accept: that most of us can undergo significant character transformations when we are caught up in the crucible of social forces. What we imagine we would do when we are outside that crucible may bear little resemblance to who we become and what we are capable of doing once we are inside its network. The SPE is a clarion call to abandon simplistic notions of the Good Self dominating Bad Situations. We are best able to avoid, prevent, challenge, and change such negative situational forces only by recognizing their potential power to "infect us," as it has others who were similarly situated. It is well for us to internalize the significance of the recognition by the ancient Roman comedy writer Terence that "Nothing by humans is alien to me."

This lesson should have been taught repeatedly by the behavioral transformation of Nazi concentration camp guards, and of those in destructive cults, such as Jim Jones's Peoples Temple, and more recently by the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo cult. The genocide and atrocities committed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda, Burundi, and recently in Sudan's Darfur region also provide strong evidence of people surrendering their humanity and compassion to social power and abstract ideologies of conquest and national security.

Any deed that any human being has ever committed, however horrible, is possible for any of us—under the right or wrong situational circumstances. That knowledge does not excuse evil; rather, it democratizes it, sharing its blame among ordinary actors rather than declaring it the province only of deviants and despots—of Them but not Us.

The primary simple lesson the Stanford Prison Experiment teaches is that *situations matter.* Social situations can have more profound effects on the behavior and mental functioning of individuals, groups, and national leaders than we might believe possible. Some situations can exert such powerful influence over us

that we can be led to behave in ways we would not, could not, predict was possible in advance.[16]

Situational power is most salient in novel settings, those in which people cannot call on previous guidelines for their new behavioral options. In such situations the usual reward structures are different and expectations are violated. Under such circumstances, personality variables have little predictive utility because they depend on estimations of imagined future actions based on characteristic past reactions in familiar situations—but rarely in the kind of new situation currently being encountered, say by a new guard or prisoner.

Therefore, whenever we are trying to understand the cause of any puzzling, unusual behavior, our own or that of others, we should start out with a situational analysis. We should yield to dispositional analyses (genes, personality traits, personal pathologies, and so on) only when the situationally based detective work fails to make sense of the puzzle. My colleague Lee Ross adds that such an approach invites us to practice "attributional charity." That means we start not by blaming the actor for the deed but rather, being charitable, we first investigate the scene for situational determinants of the act.

However, attributional charity is easier said than practiced because most of us have a powerful mental bias—the "fundamental attribution error"—that prevents such reasonable thinking.[17] Societies that promote individualism, such as the United States and many other Western nations, have come to believe that dispositions matter more than situations. We overemphasize personality in explaining any behavior while concurrently underemphasizing situational influences. After reading this book, I hope you will begin to notice how often you see this dual principle in action in your own thinking and in decisions of others. Let's consider next some of the features that make situations matter, as illustrated in our prison study.

The Power of Rules to Shape Reality

Situational forces in the SPE combined a number of factors, none of which was very dramatic alone but that together were powerful in their aggregation. One of the key features was the power of rules. Rules are formal, simplified ways of controlling informal complex behavior. They work by externalizing regulations, by establishing what is necessary, acceptable, and rewarded and what is unacceptable and therefore punished. Over time, rules come to have an arbitrary life of their own and the force of legal authority even when they are no longer relevant, are vague, or change with the whims of the enforcers.

Our guards could justify most of the harm they did to the prisoners by referencing "the Rules." Recall, for example, the agony the prisoners had to endure to memorize the set of seventeen arbitrary rules that the guards and the warden had invented. Consider also the misuse of Rule 2 about eating at mealtimes to punish Clay-416 for refusing to eat his filthy sausages.

Some rules are essential for the effective coordination of social behavior, such as audiences listening while performers speak, drivers stopping at red traffic lights, and people not cutting into queues. However, many rules are merely screens for dominance by those who make them or those charged with enforcing them. Naturally, the last rule, as with the SPE rules, always includes punishment for violation of the other rules. Therefore, there must be someone or some agency willing and able to administer such punishment, ideally doing so in a public arena that can serve to deter other potential rule breakers. The comedian Lenny Bruce had a funny routine describing the development of rules to govern who could and could not throw shit over fences onto a neighbor's property. He described the creation of police as guardians of the "no-shit-in-my-backyard" rule. The rules and their enforcers are inherent in situational power. However, it is the System that hires the police and creates the prisons for convicted rule breakers.

When Roles Become Real

> Once you put a uniform on, and are given a role, I mean, a job, saying "your job is to keep these people in line," then you're certainly not the same person if you're in street clothes and in a different role. You really become that person once you put on the khaki uniform, you put on the glasses, you take the nightstick, and you act the part. That's your costume and you have to act accordingly when you put it on.
>
> —Guard Hellmann

When actors enact a fictional character, they often have to take on roles that are dissimilar to their sense of personal identity. They learn to talk, walk, eat, and even to think and to feel as demanded by the role they are performing. Their professional training enables them to maintain the separation of character and identity, to keep self in the background while playing a role that might be dramatically different from who they really are. However, there are times when even for some trained professionals those boundaries blur and the role takes over even after the curtain comes down or the camera's red light goes off. They become absorbed in the intensity of the role and their intensity spills over to direct their offstage life. The play's audience ceases to matter because the role is now within the actor's mind.

A fascinating example of this effect of a dramatic role becoming a "tad too real" comes from the British television series *The Edwardian Country House.* Nineteen people, chosen from some eight thousand applicants, lived the lives of British servants working on a posh country estate in this "reality television" drama. Although the person chosen to play the head butler in charge of the staff expected to follow the period's rigidly hierarchical standards of behavior, he was "fright-

ened" by the ease with which he became an autocratic master. This sixty-five-year-old architect was not prepared to slip so readily into a role that allowed him to exercise absolute power over a household of underservants whom he bossed: "Suddenly you realize that you don't have to speak. All I had to do was lift my finger up and they would keep quiet. And that is a frightening thought—it's appalling." A young woman who played the role of a housemaid but who in real life is a tourist information officer, began to feel like an invisible person. She described how she and the others so quickly adapted to their subservient role: "I was surprised, then scared at the way we all became squashed. We learned so quickly that you don't answer back, and you feel subservient."[18]

Typically, roles are tied to specific situations, jobs, and functions, such as being a professor, doorman, cab driver, minister, social worker, or porn actor. They are enacted when one is in that situation—at home, school, church, or factory, or onstage. Roles can usually be set aside when one returns to his or her "normal" other life. Yet some roles are insidious, are not just scripts that we enact only from time to time; they can become who we are most of the time. They are internalized even as we initially acknowledge them as artificial, temporary, and situationally bound. We become father, mother, son, daughter, neighbor, boss, worker, helper, healer, whore, soldier, beggar man, thief, and many more.

To complicate matters further, we all must play multiple roles, some conflicting, some that may challenge our basic values and beliefs. As in the SPE, what starts out as the "just playing a role" caveat to distinguish it from the real individual can have a profound impact when the role behavior gets rewarded. The "class clown" gets attention he can't get from displaying special academic talents but then is never again taken seriously. Even shyness can be a role initially enacted to avoid awkward social encounters, a situational awkwardness, and when practiced enough the role morphs into a shy person.

Just as discomfiting, people can do terrible things when they allow the role they play to have rigid boundaries that circumscribe what is appropriate, expected, and reinforced in a given setting. Such rigidity in the role shuts off the traditional morality and values that govern their lives when they are in "normal mode." The ego-defense mechanism of *compartmentalization* allows us to mentally bind conflicting aspects of our beliefs and experiences into separate chambers that prevent interpretation or cross talk. A good husband can then be a guiltless adulterer; a saintly priest can then be a lifelong pederast; a kindly farmer can then be a heartless slave master. We need to appreciate the power that role-playing can have in shaping our perspectives, for better as well as for worse, as when adopting the teacher or nurse role translates into a life of sacrifice for the good of one's students and patients.

Role Transitions from Healer to Killer

The worst-case scenario was the Nazi SS doctors who were assigned the role of selecting concentration camp inmates for extermination or for "experiments." They

were socialized away from their usual healing role into the new role, assisting with killing, by means of a group consensus that their behavior was necessary for the common good, which led them to adopt several extreme psychological defenses against facing the reality of their complicity in the mass murder of Jews. Again we turn to the detailed account of these processes by social psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton.

When a new doctor would come on the scene and be initially horrified by what he witnessed, he would ask:

> "How can these things be done here?" Then there was something like a general answer . . . which clarified everything. What is better for him [the prisoner]—whether he croaks [*verreckt*] in shit or goes to heaven in [a cloud of] gas? And that settled the whole matter for the initiates [*Eingeweihten*].
>
> Mass killing was the unyielding *fact of life* to which everyone was expected to adapt.

Framing the genocide of the Jews as the "Final Solution" (*Endlösung*) served a dual psychological purpose: "it stood for mass murder without sounding or feeling like it; and it kept the focus primarily on problem solving." It transformed the whole matter into a difficult problem that had to be solved by whatever means were necessary to achieve a pragmatic goal. The intellectual exercise deleted emotions and compassion from the doctor's daily rounds.

However, their job in selecting inmates for annihilation was both so "onerous, so associated with extraordinary evil" that these highly educated doctors had to utilize every possible psychological defense against avoiding the reality of their complicity in these murders. For some, "psychic numbing," detaching affect from cognition, became the norm; for others there was a schizophrenic solution of "doubling." The polarities of cruelty and decency in the same doctor at different times would "call forth two radically different psychological constellations within the self: one based on 'values generally accepted' and the education and background of a 'normal person'; the other based on 'this [Nazi-Auschwitz] ideology with values quite different from those generally accepted.' " These twin tendencies shifted back and forth from day to day.[19]

Reciprocal Roles and Their Scripts

It is also the case that some roles require reciprocal partnerships; for the guard role to have meaning, somebody has to play prisoner. One can't be a prisoner unless someone is willing to be the guard. In the SPE, no explicit training was required for the performance of roles, no manual of best practices. Recall on Day 1 the awkwardness of the guards and the prisoners' frivolity as each were feeling out their new strange roles. However, very soon, our participants were able to slip easily into their roles as the nature of the power differential at the base of the guard–prisoner symbiosis became clearer.

The initial script for guard or prisoner role-playing came from the participants' own experiences with power and powerlessness, of their observation of interactions between parents (traditionally, Dad is guard, Mom the prisoner), of their responses to the authority of doctors, teachers, and bosses, and finally from the cultural inscriptions written upon them by movie accounts of prison life. Society had done the training for us. We had only to record the extent of their improvisation with the roles they played—as our data.

There is abundant evidence that virtually all of our participants at one time or another experienced reactions that went well beyond the surface demands of role-playing and penetrated the deep structure of the psychology of imprisonment. Initially, some of the guards' reactions were probably influenced by their orientation, which outlined the kind of atmosphere we wished to create in order to simulate the reality of imprisonment. But whatever general demands those stage settings may have outlined for them to be "good actors," they should not have been operative when the guards were in private or believed that we were not observing them.

Postexperimental reports told us that some guards had been especially brutal when they were alone with a prisoner on a toilet run outside the Yard, pushing him into a urinal or against a wall. The most sadistic behaviors we observed took place during the late-night and early-morning shifts, when, as we learned, the guards didn't believe that we were observing or recording them, in a sense, when the experiment was "off." In addition, we have seen that guard abuse of prisoners escalated to new, higher levels each day despite the prisoners' nonresistance and the obvious signs of their deterioration as the full catastrophe of imprisonment was achieved. In one taped interview, a guard laughingly recalled apologizing for having pushed a prisoner on the first day, but by Day 4, he thought nothing of shoving them around and humiliating them.

Craig Haney's discerning analysis reveals the transformation in the power infusing the guards. Consider this encounter with one of them that took place after only a few days into the study:

> Just as with the prisoners, I also had interviewed all of [the guards] before the experiment began and felt I had gotten to know them as individuals, albeit only briefly. Perhaps because of this, I really felt no hostility toward them as the study proceeded and their behavior became increasingly extreme and abusive. But it was obvious to me that because I insisted on talking privately with the prisoners—ostensibly "counseling" them, and occasionally instructed the guards to refrain from their especially harsh and gratuitous mistreatment, they now saw me as something of a traitor. Thus, describing an interaction with me, one of the guards wrote in his diary: "The psychologist rebukes me for handcuffing and blindfolding a prisoner before leaving the (counseling) office, and I resentfully reply that

> it is both necessary (for) security and my business anyway." Indeed, he had told me off. In a bizarre turn of events, I was put in my place for failing to uphold the emerging norms of a simulated environment I had helped to create by someone whom I had randomly assigned to his role.[20]

In considering the possible biasing of the guard orientation, we are reminded that the prisoners had no orientation at all. What did they do when they were in private and could escape the oppression they repeatedly experienced on the Yard? Rather than getting to know one another and discussing nonprison realities, we learned that they obsessed about the vicissitudes of their current situation. They embellished their prisoner role rather than distancing from it. So, too, with our guards: information we gathered about them when they were in their quarters preparing to enter or leave a shift reveals that they rarely exchanged personal, nonprison information. Instead, they talked about "problem prisoners," upcoming prison issues, reactions to our staff—never the usual guy stuff that college students might have been expected to share during a break. They did not tell jokes, laugh, or reveal any personal emotion to their peers, which they easily could have done to lighten the situation or distance themselves from the role. Recall Christina Maslach's earlier description of the transformation of the sweet, sensitive young man she had just met into the brutish John Wayne once he was in uniform and in his power spot on the Yard.

Adult Role-Playing in the SPE

I want to add two final points about the power of roles and the use of roles to justify transgression before moving to our final lessons. Let's go beyond the roles our volunteers played to recall the roles played to the hilt by the visiting Catholic priest, the head of our Parole Board, the public defender, and the parents on Visiting Nights. The parents not only accepted our show of the prison situation as benign and interesting rather than hostile and destructive, but they allowed us to impose a set of arbitrary rules on them, as we had done to their children, to constrain their behavior. We counted on their playing the embedded roles of conforming, law-abiding, middle-class citizens who respect authority and rarely challenge the system directly. Similarly, we knew that our middle-class prisoners were unlikely to jump the guards directly even when they were desperate and outnumbered them by as much as nine to two, when a guard was off the Yard. Such violence was not part of their learned role behavior, as it might have been with lower-class participants, who would be more likely to take matters into their own hands. There was not even evidence that the prisoners even fantasized such physical attacks.

The reality of any role depends on the support system that demands it and keeps it in bounds, not allowing alternate reality to intrude. Recall that when the mother of Prisoner Rich-1037 complained about his sad state, I spontaneously

activated my Institutional Authority role and challenged her observation, implying that there must have been a personal problem with 1037, not an operational problem with our prison.

In retrospect, my role transformation from usually compassionate teacher to data-focused researcher to callous prison superintendent was most distressing. I did improper or bizarre things in that new, strange role, such as undercutting this mother's justified complaints and becoming agitated when the Palo Alto police officer refused my request to move our prisoners to the city jail. I think that because I so fully adopted the role it helped to make the prison "work" as well as it did. However, by adopting that role, with its focus on the security and maintenance of "my prison," I failed to appreciate the need to terminate the experiment as soon as the second prisoner went over the edge.

Roles and Responsibility for Transgressions

To the extent that we can both live in the skin of a role and yet be able to separate ourselves from it when necessary, we are in a position to "explain away" our personal responsibility for the damage we cause by our role-based actions. We abdicate responsibility for our actions, blaming them on that role, which we convince ourselves is alien to our usual nature. This is an interesting variant of the Nuremberg Trial defense of the Nazi SS leaders: "I was only following orders." Instead the defense becomes "Don't blame me, I was only playing my role at that time in that place—that isn't the real me."

Remember Hellmann's justification for his abusive behavior toward Clay-416 that he described in their television interview. He argued that he had been conducting "little experiments of my own" to see how far he could push the prisoners so that they might rebel and stand up for their rights. In effect, he was proposing that he had been mean to stimulate them to be good; their rebellion would be his primary reward for being so cruel. Where is the fallacy in this post hoc justification? It can be readily exposed in how he handled the sausage rebellion by Clay-416 and Sarge's "bastard" rebellion: not with admiration for their standing up for rights or principles but rather with rage and more extreme abuse. Here Guard Hellmann was using the full power of being the ultimate guard, able to go beyond the demands of the situation to create his own "little experiment" to satisfy his personal curiosity and amusement.

In a recent interview with a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* on a retrospective investigation of the aftermath of the SPE, Hellmann and Doug-8612 both offered the same reasoning for why they acted as they did, the one being "cruel," the other "crazy"—they were merely *acting* those roles to please Zimbardo.[21] Could be? Maybe they were acting new parts in the Japanese movie *Roshomon*, where everyone has a different view of what really happened.

Anonymity and Deindividuation

In addition to the power of rules and roles, situational forces mount in power with the introduction of uniforms, costumes, and masks, all disguises of one's usual appearance that promote anonymity and reduce personal accountability. When people feel anonymous in a situation, as if no one is aware of their true identity (and thus that no one probably cares), they can more easily be induced to behave in antisocial ways. This is especially so if the setting grants permission to enact one's impulses or to follow orders or implied guidelines that one would usually disdain. Our silver reflecting sunglasses were one such tool for making the guards, the warden, and me seem more remote and impersonal in our dealings with the prisoners. Their uniforms gave the guards a common identity, as did the necessity of referring to them in the abstract as, "Mr. Correctional Officer."

A body of research (to be explored in a later chapter) documents the excesses to which deindividuation facilitates violence, vandalism, and stealing in adults as in children—when the situation supports such antisocial actions. You may recognize this process in literature as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies.* When all members of a group of individuals are in a deindividuated state, their mental functioning changes: they live in an expanded-present moment that makes past and future distant and irrelevant. Feelings dominate reason, and action dominates reflection. In such a state, the usual cognitive and motivational processes that steer their behavior in socially desirable paths no longer guide people. Instead, their Apollonian rationality and sense of order yield to Dionysian excess and even chaos. Then it becomes as easy to make war as to make love, without considering the consequences

I am reminded of a Vietnamese saying, attributed to the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh: "in order to fight each other, baby chicks of the same mother hen paint their faces different colors." It is a quaint way to describe the role of deindividuation in facilitating violence. It is worth noticing, as we shall see, that one of the guards in the infamous Tier 1A at Abu Ghraib's torture center painted his face silver and black in the pattern of the rock group Insane Clown Posse, while he was on duty and posed for one of the many photos that documented prisoner abuse. We will have much more to say later about deindividuation processes as they contributed to the Abu Ghraib abuses.

Cognitive Dissonance That Rationalizes Evil

An interesting consequence of playing a role publicly that is contrary to one's private beliefs is the creation of *cognitive dissonance.* When there is a discrepancy between our behavior and beliefs, and when actions do not follow from relevant attitudes, a condition of cognitive dissonance is created. Dissonance is a state of tension that can powerfully motivate change either in one's public behavior or in one's private views in efforts to reduce the dissonance. People will go to remark-

able lengths to bring discrepant beliefs and behavior into some kind of functional coherence. The greater the discrepancy, the stronger the motivation to achieve consonance and the more extreme changes we can expect to see. There is little dissonance if you harm someone when you have a lot of good reasons—your life was being threatened, it was part of your job as a soldier, you were ordered to act by a powerful authority, or you were given ample rewards for an action that was contrary to your pacifist beliefs.

Oddly enough, the dissonance effect becomes *greater* as the justification for such behavior *decreases*, for instance, when a repugnant action is carried out for little money, without threat, and with only minimally sufficient justification or inadequate rationale provided for the action. Dissonance mounts, and the attempts to reduce it are greatest, when the person has a sense of free will or when she or he does not notice or fully appreciate the situational pressures urging enactment of the discrepant action. When the discrepant action has been public, it cannot be denied or modified. Thus, the pressure to change is exerted on the softer elements of the dissonance equation, the internal, private elements—values, attitudes, beliefs, and even perceptions. An enormous body of research supports such predictions.[22]

How could dissonance motivate the changes we observed in our SPE guards? They had freely volunteered to work long, hard shifts for a small wage of less than $2 an hour. They were given minimal direction on how to play their difficult role. They had to sustain the role consistently over eight-hour work shifts for days and nights whenever they were in uniform, on the Yard, or in the presence of others, whether prisoners or parents or other visitors. They had to return to that role after sixteen-hour breaks from the SPE routine when they were off duty. Such a powerful source of dissonance was probably a major cause for internalizing the public role behaviors and for providing private supporting cognitive and affective response styles that made for the increasingly assertive and abusive behavior over time.

There is more. Having made the commitment to some action dissonant with their personal beliefs, guards felt great pressure to make sense of it, to develop reasons why they were doing something contrary to what they really believed and what they stood for morally. Sensible human beings can be deceived into engaging in irrational actions under many disguised dissonance commitment settings. Social psychology offers ample evidence that when that happens, smart people do stupid things, sane people do crazy things, and moral people do immoral things. After they have done them, they offer "good" rationalizations of why they did what they cannot deny having done. People are less rational than they are adept at *rationalizing*—explaining away discrepancies between their private morality and actions contrary to it. Doing so allows them to convince themselves and others that rational considerations guided their decision. They are insensitive to their own strong motivation to maintain consistency in the face of such dissonance.

The Power of Social Approval

Typically, people are also unaware of an even stronger force playing on the strings of their behavioral repertoire: the *need for social approval.* The need to be accepted, liked, and respected—to seem normal and appropriate, to fit in—is so powerful that we are primed to conform to even the most foolish and outlandish behaviors that strangers tell us is the right way to act. We laugh at the many *Candid Camera* episodes that reveal this truth, but rarely do we notice the times we ourselves are the *Candid Camera* "stars" in our own lives.

In addition to the dissonance effects, pressures to conform were also operative on our guards. Group pressure from other guards placed significant importance on being a "team player," conforming to an emergent norm that demanded dehumanizing the prisoners in various ways. The good guard was a group deviant, and he suffered in silence by being outside the socially rewarding circle of the other guards on his shift. The tough guard on each shift was emulated by at least one other guard on each shift.

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

The power that the guards assumed each time they donned their military-style uniforms was matched by the powerlessness the prisoners felt when wearing their wrinkled smocks with ID numbers sewn on their fronts. The guards had billy clubs, whistles, and sunglasses that disguised their eyes; the prisoners had a chained ankle and a stocking cap to contain their long hair. These situational differences were not inherent in the cloth or the hardware; rather, the source of their power is to be found in the psychological material that went into each group's subjective constructions of the meaning of these uniforms.

To understand how much situations matter, we need to discover the ways in which any given behavioral setting is perceived and interpreted by the people acting within it. It is the *meaning* that people assign to various components of the situation that creates its social reality. Social reality is more than a situation's physical features. It is the way actors view their situation, their current behavioral stage, which engages a variety of psychological processes. Such mental representations are beliefs that can modify how any situation is perceived, usually to make it fit or be assimilated into the actor's expectations and personal values.

Such beliefs create expectations, which in turn can gain strength when they become self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, in a famous experiment (by the psychologist Robert Rosenthal and the school principal Lenore Jacobson), when teachers were led to believe that certain children in their elementary school classes were "late bloomers," those children actually came to excel academically—even though researchers had chosen their names at random.[23] The teachers' positive conceptions of the latent talent of these children fed back to modify their behavior toward these children in ways that fostered the children's enhanced academic

performance. Thus, this group of ordinary pupils proved the "Pygmalion Effect" by becoming what they were expected to be—academically outstanding. Sadly, the opposite is likely to occur even more frequently when teachers expect poor performance from certain kinds of pupils—from minority backgrounds or in some classes even from male students. Teachers then unconsciously treat them in ways that validate those negative stereotypes, and those students performing less well than they are capable.

In the SPE, the student volunteers could have elected to quit at any time. No guns or legal statutes bound them to their imprisonment, only a subject selection form on which they promised to do their best to last the full two weeks. The contract was merely a research contract between university researchers, a university human subjects research committee, and university students—all assumed initially that they could exercise free will and leave whenever they chose not to continue. However, as was obvious in the events that unfolded on the second day, the prisoners came to believe that it was a prison being run by psychologists and not by the State. They persuaded themselves, based on the quip by Doug-8612, that no one could leave of his own volition. Thus, none of them ever said, "I quit this experiment." Instead, the exit strategy for many became the passive one of forcing us to release them because of their extreme psychological distress. Their social construction of this new reality cemented them in the oppressive situation being created by the guards' capricious and hostile actions. The prisoners themselves became their own guards.

Another aspect of the way social reality was constructed in this research lies in the "release deal" that prisoners were offered at the end of their parole hearing. We framed the situation in terms of the power of the parole board to grant a parole if a prisoner were willing to forfeit all the money he had earned as a "prisoner." Even though most acquiesced to this deal, being willing to leave without any remuneration for the days they had in fact worked as "research subjects," none made the slightest attempt to leave at that point—to quit "the experiment." Instead, they accepted the social reality of parole over that of personal liberty to act in one's best self-interest. Each one allowed himself to be handcuffed, his head hooded, and led away from this near freedom back down to the prison dungeon.

Dehumanization: The Other as Nothing Worthwhile

> Kill a Gook for God
>
> —Penned on helmet of a U.S. soldier in Vietnam

One of the worst things that we can do to our fellow human beings is deprive them of their humanity, render them worthless by exercising the psychological process of dehumanization. This occurs when the "others" are thought not to possess the same feelings, thoughts, values, and purposes in life that we do. Any

human qualities that these "others" share with us are diminished or are erased from our awareness. This is accomplished by the psychological mechanisms of intellectualization, denial, and the isolation of affect. In contrast to human relationships, which are subjective, personal, and emotional, dehumanized relationships are objectifying, analytical, and empty of emotional or empathic content.

To use Martin Buber's terms, humanized relationships are "I–Thou," while dehumanized relationships are "I–It." Over time, the dehumanizing agent is often sucked into the negativity of the experience, and then the "I" itself changes, to produce an "It–It" relationship between objects, or between agency and victim. The misperception of certain others as subhuman, bad humans, inhuman, infrahuman, dispensable, or "animals" is facilitated by means of labels, stereotypes, slogans, and propaganda images.[24]

Sometimes dehumanization serves an adaptive function for an agent who must suspend his or her usual emotional response in an emergency, a crisis, or a work situation that demands invading the privacy of others. Surgeons may have to do so when performing operations that violate another person's body, as may first responders to a disaster. The same is often true when a job requires processing large numbers of people in one's caseload or daily schedule. Within some caring professions, such as clinical psychology, social work, and medicine, this process is called "detached concern." The actor is put into the paradoxical position of having to dehumanize clients in order to better assist or cure them.[25]

Dehumanization typically facilitates abusive and destructive actions toward those so objectified. It is hard to imagine that the following characterizations made by our guards were directed toward their prisoners—other college students who, but for a fateful coin flip, would have been wearing their uniforms: "I made them call each other names and clean toilets out with their bare hands. I practically considered the prisoners *cattle*, and I kept thinking I have to watch out for them in case they try something."

Or, from another of the SPE guards: "I was tired of seeing the prisoners in their rags and smelling the strong odors of their bodies that filled the cells. I watched them tear at each other on orders given by us."

The Stanford Prison Experiment created an ecology of dehumanization, just as real prisons do, in a host of direct, constantly repeated messages. It started with the loss of freedom and extended to the loss of privacy and finally to the loss of personal identity. It separated inmates from their past, their community, and their families and substituted for their normal reality a current reality that forced them to live with other prisoners in an anonymous cell with virtually no personal space. External, coercive rules and arbitrary decisions by guards dictated their behavior. More subtly, in our prison, as in all prisons I know about, emotions were suppressed, inhibited, and distorted. Tender, caring emotions were absent among both guards and prisoners after only a few days.

In institutional settings, the expression of human emotions is contained to

the extent that they represent impulsive, often unpredictable individual reactions when uniformity of mass reactions is the expected norm. Our prisoners were dehumanized in many ways by the treatment of the guards and by degrading institutional procedures. However, they soon added to their own dehumanization by suppressing their emotional responses except when they "broke down." Emotions are essential to humanness. Holding emotions in check is essential in prisons because emotions are a sign of weakness that reveal one's vulnerability both to the guards and to other prisoners. We will explore more fully the destructive effects of dehumanization as it relates to moral disengagement in chapter 13.

SERENDIPITY SHINES ITS SPOTLIGHT ON THE SPE

What transformed our experiment into a major example of the psychology of evil was a series of dramatic, unexpected events that occurred shortly after our study ended—a massacre at California's San Quentin State Prison and a massacre at New York State's Attica Correctional Facility. These two events helped to catapult into national prominence a little academic experiment designed to test a theoretical notion of situational power. Here I will only outline key aspects of these events and their consequences for the SPE and me. Please see www.lucifereffect.com for a fuller treatment of the details along with the concurrent rise of the Black Panther Party and the Weather Underground radical student group.

The day after the SPE was terminated, a number of guards and prisoners were killed at San Quentin Prison in an alleged escape attempt headed by the black political prison activist George Jackson. Three weeks later, across the country in upstate New York, prisoners rioted at Attica Prison. They took over the prison and held nearly forty guards and civilian staff as hostages for five days. Instead of negotiating the prisoners' demands to change their conditions of oppression and the dehumanization they were experiencing, New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller ordered state troopers to retake the prison by all means necessary. They shot and killed more than forty of the inmates and hostages in the yard and wounded many others. The temporal proximity of these two events put prison conditions on center stage. I was invited to give testimonies to several congressional committees based on extensions of what I had learned from the SPE to prisons in general. I also became an expert witness for one of the six prisoners involved in the San Quentin State Prison massacre. Around that time, a media correspondent who saw me in a televised debate with San Quentin's associate warden decided to do a documentary on the SPE on national television (NBC's *Chronolog*, November 1971). A *Life* magazine feature soon followed, and the SPE was off and running.

PUTTING THE SPE INTO ITS ZEITGEIST FRAME

To appreciate more fully the extent of the character transformations in our student prisoners and guards that were induced by their experience in our mock prison, it is well to consider the Zeitgeist of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was a time to reject authority, to "trust no one over thirty," to oppose the "military/industrial establishment," to participate in antiwar rallies, to join in civil rights and women's rights causes. It was a time for young people to rebel against the rigid societal and parental conformity that had so restricted their parents in the 1950s. It was a time to experiment with sex, drugs, and rock and roll and to let your hair grow long, "to let it all hang out." It was a time to be a "hippie," to go to "be-ins" and "love-ins," to be a San Francisco "flower child" with flowers in your hair, to be a pacifist, and especially to be an individualist. The Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary, that generation's intellectual acid guru, offered a triple prescription for young people everywhere: "tune out" of traditional society; "turn on" to mind-altering drugs; and "tune in" to one's inner nature.

The rise of the Youth Culture, with its dramatic rebellion against injustice and oppression, was centered on the immorality of the Vietnam War, its obscene daily body counts, and an administration unwilling to admit its error, cut bait and exit for seven bloody years. These values were in the wind blowing across European and Asian youth movements. Europeans were even more militant than their American counterparts in vigorously challenging the establishment. They openly rebelled against both political and academic orthodoxy. In direct opposition to what they considered reactionary, repressive regimes, students in Paris, Berlin, and Milan "manned the barricades." Many were socialists who challenged fascist and Communist totalitarianism, and they deplored the financial restrictions on access to higher education.

The student volunteers in our study, as a group, emerged from this youth culture of rebellion, personal experimentation, and the rejection of authority and conformity. We might have expected the subjects in our experiment to be more resistant to institutional forces than they were, to resist complying with the dominance of the "System" that I imposed on them. We did not anticipate that they would adopt such a power-prone mentality when they became guards because none of our volunteers preferred to be a guard when he was given that option. Even Tough Guard Hellmann wanted to be a prisoner rather than a guard, because, as he told us, "most people resent guards."

Virtually all of our student volunteers felt that becoming a prisoner was a more likely possibility for them in the future; they were not going to college in order to get jobs as prison guards, and they might get arrested for various minor infractions someday. I take this to mean that there was not a predilection among those assigned to be guards to be abusive or domineering in the ways they later

were. They did not bring into the Stanford Prison Experiment any tendencies to harm, abuse, or dominate others. If anything, we might say they brought in tendencies to be caring of other people in accordance with the contemporary social conditioning of their era. Similarly, there was no reason to expect the students role-playing prisoners to break down so quickly, if at all, given their initially positive mental and physical health. It is important to keep this temporal and cultural context in mind when considering later attempted replications of our study by researchers in totally different eras.

WHY SYSTEMS MATTER THE MOST

The most important lesson to be derived from the SPE is that Situations are created by *Systems*. Systems provide the institutional support, authority, and resources that allow Situations to operate as they do. After we have outlined all the situational features of the SPE, we discover that a key question is rarely posed: "Who or what made it happen that way?" Who had the power to design the behavioral setting and to maintain its operation in particular ways? Therefore, who should be held responsible for its consequences and outcomes? Who gets the credit for successes, and who is blamed for failures? The simple answer in the case of the SPE is—me! However, finding that answer is not such a simple matter when we deal with complex organizations, such as failing educational or correctional systems, corrupt megacorporations, or the system that was created at Abu Ghraib Prison.

System Power involves authorization or institutionalized permission to behave in prescribed ways or to forbid and punish actions that are contrary to them. It provides the "higher authority" that gives validation to playing new roles, following new rules, and taking actions that would ordinarily be constrained by preexisting laws, norms, morals, and ethics. Such validation usually comes cloaked in the mantle of *ideology*. Ideology is a slogan or proposition that usually legitimizes whatever means are necessary to attain an ultimate goal. Ideology is the "Big Kahuna," which is not challenged or even questioned because it is so apparently "right" for the majority in a particular time and place. Those in authority present the program as good and virtuous, as a highly valuable moral imperative.

The programs, policies, and standard operating procedures that are developed to support an ideology become an essential component of the System. The System's procedures are considered reasonable and appropriate as the ideology comes to be accepted as sacred.

During the era when fascist military juntas governed around the world from the Mediterranean to Latin America, from the 1960s to 1970s, dictators always sounded their call to arms as the necessary defense against a "threat to national security" allegedly posed by socialists or Communists. Eliminating that threat necessitated state-sanctioned torture by the military and civil police. It also legitimized assassination by death squads of all suspected "enemies of the state."

In the United States at the present time, the same alleged threats to national security have frightened citizens into willingly sacrificing their basic civil rights to gain an illusion of security. That ideology in turn has been the centerpiece justifying a preemptive war of aggression against Iraq. That ideology was created by the System in power, which in turn created new subordinate Systems of war management, homeland security management, and military prison management—or absence thereof, in default of serious postwar planning.

My scholarly fascination with the mind control strategy and tactics outlined in George Orwell's classic novel *1984*[26] should have made me aware of System power sooner in my professional life. "Big Brother" is the System that ultimately crushes individual initiative and the will to resist its intrusions. For many years, discussion of the SPE did not even include a Systems-level analysis because the original dialogue was framed as the contest between the dispositional and situational ways of understanding human behavior. I ignored the bigger problem of considering that framing provided by the System. It was really only after I became engaged in understanding the dynamics of the widespread abuses in the many military prisons in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Cuba that the Systems level of analysis became glaringly obvious.

The Nobel Laureate physicist Richard Feynman showed that the tragic disaster of the space shuttle *Challenger* was due not to human error but to a systemic problem with "official management." NASA's top guns insisted on the launch despite the doubts of both of their engineers and the expressed concerns of the manufacturer of a critical component (which became the flawed O-ring that caused the disaster). Feynman argues that NASA's motivation may well have been "to assure the government of NASA perfection and success in order to ensure the supply of funds."[27] In later chapters, we will adopt the point of view that Systems as well as Situations matter to aid in our understanding of what went wrong at the Stanford and Abu Ghraib Prisons.

In contrast to NASA's system that failed when it tried to live up to its politically motivated slogan of "faster, better, cheaper" was the horrific success of the Nazi system of mass extermination. Here was a tightly integrated top-down system of Hitler's cabinet, the National Socialist politicians, bankers, Gestapo officers, SS troops, engineers, doctors, architects, chemists, educators, train conductors, and more, each doing its part in this concentrated attempt at the genocide of all European Jews and other enemies of the State.

Concentration camps had to be built, along with extermination camps and their specifically designed crematoria, and new forms of lethally effective poison gas had to be perfected. Propaganda specialists had to design campaigns in film, newspapers, magazines, and posters that denigrated and dehumanized the Jews as a menace. Teachers and preachers had to prepare the youth to become blindly obedient Nazis who could justify engaging in the "final solution of the Jewish question."[28]

A new language had to be developed with innocuous-sounding words con-

cealing the truth of human cruelty and destruction, such as: *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment); *Sonderaktion* (special action), *Umsiedlung* (resettlement), and *Evakuierrung* (evacuation). "Special treatment" was the code name for the physical extermination of people, sometimes shortened to SB for efficiency. SS head Reinhard Heydrich outlined basic principles of security during the war in a 1939 statement: "A distinction must be made between those who may be dealt with in the usual way and those who must be given special treatment [*Sonderbehandlung*]. The latter case covers subjects who, due to their most objectionable nature, their dangerousness, or their ability to serve as tools of propaganda for the enemy, are suitable for elimination, without respect for persons, by merciless treatment (usually by execution)."[29]

For the Nazi doctors who were enlisted to make the selections of inmates for extermination or experimentation, there was often a question of split loyalty—"of conflicting oaths, contradictions between murderous cruelty and momentary kindness which SS doctors seemed to manifest continuously during their time in Auschwitz. For the schism tended not to be resolved. Its persistence was part of the overall psychological equilibrium that enabled the SS doctor to do his deadly work. He became integrated into a large, brutal, highly functional system. . . . Auschwitz was a collective effort."[30]

It is reasonable to conclude that there is something about this little experiment that has enduring value not only among social scientists but also even more strongly among the general public. I now believe that special something is the dramatic transformation of human nature, not by Dr. Jekyll's mysterious chemicals, which turned him into the evil Mr. Hyde, but rather by the power of social situations and the Systems that create and sustain them. My colleagues and I are pleased that we have been able "to give psychology a way into the public consciousness" in an informative, interesting, and entertaining way that enables all of us to understand something so basic and disturbing about human nature.

Now it is time to broaden our empirical foundation beyond this one experiment as we turn in the next several chapters to review a variety of research from many sources that more fully informs us about how much situations can matter in turning good people into evildoers.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Investigating Social Dynamics: Power, Conformity, and Obedience

I believe that in all men's lives at certain periods, and in many men's lives at all periods between infancy and extreme old age, one of the most dominant elements is the desire to be inside the local Ring and the terror of being left outside. . . . Of all the passions the passion for the Inner Ring is most skilful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things.

—C. S. Lewis, "The Inner Ring" (1944)[1]

Motives and needs that ordinarily serve us well can lead us astray when they are aroused, amplified, or manipulated by situational forces that we fail to recognize as potent. This is why evil is so pervasive. Its temptation is just a small turn away, a slight detour on the path of life, a blur in our sideview mirror, leading to disaster.

In trying to understand the character transformations of the good young men in the Stanford Prison Experiment, I previously outlined a number of psychological processes that were pivotal in perverting their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and actions. We saw how the basic need to belong, to associate with and be accepted by others, so central to community building and family bonding, was diverted in the SPE into conformity with newly emergent norms that enabled the guards to abuse the prisoners.[2] We saw further that the basic motive for consistency between our private attitudes and public behavior allowed for dissonant commitments to be resolved and rationalized in violence against one's fellows.[3]

I will argue that the most dramatic instances of directed behavior change and "mind control" are not the consequence of exotic forms of influence, such as hypnosis, psychotropic drugs, or "brainwashing," but rather the systematic manipulation of the most mundane aspects of human nature over time in confining settings.[4]

It is in this sense, I believe what the English scholar C. S. Lewis proposed—that a powerful force in transforming human behavior, pushing people across the boundary between good and evil, comes from the basic desire to be "in" and not "out." If we think of social power as arrayed in a set of concentric circles from the most powerful central or inner ring moving outward to the least socially significant outer ring, we can appreciate his focus on the centripetal pull of that central

circle. Lewis's "Inner Ring" is the elusive Camelot of acceptance into some special group, some privileged association, that confers instant status and enhanced identity. Its lure for most of us is obvious—who does not want to be a member of the "in-group"? Who does not want to know that she or he has been tried and found worthy of inclusion in, of ascendance into, a new, rarified realm of social acceptability?

Peer pressure has been identified as one social force that makes people, especially adolescents, do strange things—anything—to be accepted. However, the quest for the Inner Ring is nurtured from within. There is no peer-pressure power without that push from self-pressure for Them to want You. It makes people willing to suffer through painful, humiliating initiation rites in fraternities, cults, social clubs, or the military. It justifies for many suffering a lifelong existence climbing the corporate ladder.

This motivational force is doubly energized by what Lewis called the "terror of being left outside." This fear of rejection when one wants acceptance can cripple initiative and negate personal autonomy. It can turn social animals into shy introverts. The imagined threat of being cast into the out-group can lead some people to do virtually anything to avoid their terrifying rejection. Authorities can command total obedience not through punishments or rewards but by means of the double-edged weapon: the lure of acceptance coupled with the threat of rejection. So strong is this human motive that even strangers are empowered when they promise us a special place at their table of shared secrets—"just between you and me."[5]

A sordid example of these social dynamics came to light recently when a forty-year-old woman pleaded guilty to having sex with five high school boys and providing them and others with drugs and alcohol at weekly sex parties in her home for a full year. She told police that she had done it because she wanted to be a "cool mom." In her affidavit, this newly cool mom told investigators that she had never been popular with her classmates in high school, but orchestrating these parties enabled her to begin "feeling like one of the group."[6] Sadly, she caught the wrong Inner Ring.

Lewis goes on to describe the subtle process of initiation, the indoctrination of good people into a private Inner Ring that can have malevolent consequences, turning them into "scoundrels." I cite this passage at length because it is such an eloquent expression of how this basic human motive can be imperceptibly perverted by those with the power to admit or deny access to their Inner Ring. It will set the stage for our excursion into the experimental laboratories and field settings of social scientists who have investigated such phenomena in considerable depth.

> To nine out of ten of you the choice which could lead to scoundrelism will come, when it does come, in no very dramatic colors. Obviously bad men, obviously threatening or bribing, will almost certainly not appear. Over a drink or a cup of coffee, disguised as a triviality and sandwiched between

> two jokes, from the lips of a man, or woman, whom you have recently been getting to know rather better and whom you hope to know better still—just at the moment when you are most anxious not to appear crude, or naive or a prig—the hint will come. It will be the hint of something, which is not quite in accordance with the technical rules of fair play, something that the public, the ignorant, romantic public, would never understand. Something which even the outsiders in your own profession are apt to make a fuss about, but something, says your new friend, which "we"—and at the word "we" you try not to blush for mere pleasure—something "we always do." And you will be drawn in, if you are drawn in, not by desire for gain or ease, but simply because at that moment, when the cup was so near your lips, you cannot bear to be thrust back again into the cold outer world. It would be so terrible to see the other man's face—that genial, confidential, delightfully sophisticated face—turn suddenly cold and contemptuous, to know that you had been tried for the Inner Ring and rejected. And then, if you are drawn in, next week it will be something a little further from the rules, and next year something further still, but all in the jolliest, friendliest spirit. It may end in a crash, a scandal, and penal servitude; it may end in millions, a peerage and giving the prizes at your old school. But you will be a scoundrel.

RESEARCH REVELATIONS OF SITUATIONAL POWER

The Stanford Prison Experiment is a facet of the broad mosaic of research that reveals the power of social situations and the social construction of reality. We have seen how it focused on power relationships among individuals within an institutional setting. A variety of studies that preceded and followed it have illuminated many other aspects of human behavior that are shaped in unexpected ways by situational forces.

Groups can get us to do things we ordinarily might not do on our own, but their influence is often indirect, simply modeling the normative behavior that the group wants us to imitate and practice. In contrast, authority influence is more often direct and without subtlety: "You do what I tell you to do." But because the demand is so open and bold-faced, one can decide to disobey and not follow the leader. To see what I mean, consider this question: To what extent would a good, ordinary person resist against or comply with the demand of an authority figure that he harm, or even kill, an innocent stranger? This provocative question was put to experimental test in a controversial study on blind obedience to authority. It is a classic experiment about which you have probably heard because of its "shocking" effects, but there is much more of value embedded in its procedures that we will extract to aid in our quest to understand why good people can be induced to behave badly. We will review replications and extensions of this clas-

sic study and again ask the question posed of all such research: What is its external validity, what are real-world parallels to the laboratory demonstration of authority power?

Beware: Self-Serving Biases May Be at Work

Before we get into the details of this research, I must warn you of a bias you likely possess that might shield you from drawing the right conclusions from all you are about to read. Most of us construct self-enhancing, self-serving, egocentric biases that make us feel special—never ordinary, and certainly "above average."[7] Such cognitive biases serve a valuable function in boosting our self-esteem and protecting against life's hard knocks. They enable us to explain away failures, take credit for our successes, and disown responsibility for bad decisions, perceiving our subjective world through rainbow prisms. For example, research shows that 86 percent of Australians rate their job performance as "above average," and 90 percent of American business managers rate their performance as superior to that of their average peer. (Pity that poor average dude.)

Yet these biases can be maladaptive as well by blinding us to our similarity to others and distancing us from the reality that people just like us behave badly in certain toxic situations. Such biases also mean that we don't take basic precautions to avoid the undesired consequences of our behavior, assuming it won't happen to us. So we take sexual risks, driving risks, gambling risks, health risks, and more. In the extreme version of these biases, most people believe that they are less vulnerable to these self-serving biases than other people, even after being taught about them.[8]

That means when you read about the SPE or the many studies in this next section, you might well conclude that *you* would not do what the majority has done, that you would, of course, be the exception to the rule. That statistically unreasonable belief (since most of us share it) makes you even more vulnerable to situational forces precisely because you underestimate their power as you overestimate yours. You are convinced that you would be the good guard, the defiant prisoner, the resistor, the dissident, the nonconformist, and, most of all, the Hero. Would that it were so, but heroes are a rare breed—some of whom we will meet in our final chapter.

So I invite you to suspend that bias for now and imagine that what the majority has done in these experiments is a fair base rate for you as well. At the very least, please consider that you can't be certain of whether or not you could be as readily seduced into doing what the average research participant has done in these studies—if you were in their shoes, under the same circumstances. I ask you to recall what Prisoner Clay-416, the sausage resister, said in his postexperimental interview with his tormenter, the "John Wayne" guard. When taunted with "What kind of guard would you have been if you were in my place?" he replied modestly, "I really don't know."

It is only through recognizing that we are all subject to the same dynamic forces in the human condition, that humility takes precedence over unfounded pride, that we can begin to acknowledge our vulnerability to situational forces. In this vein, recall John Donne's eloquent framing of our common interrelatedness and interdependence:

> All mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated. . . . As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come: so this bell calls us all. . . . No man is an island, entire of itself . . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.
>
> (*Meditations* 27)

Classic Research on Conforming to Group Norms

One of the earliest studies on conformity, in 1935, was designed by a social psychologist from Turkey, Muzafer Sherif.[9] Sherif, a recent immigrant to the United States, believed that Americans in general tended to conform because their democracy emphasized mutually shared agreements. He devised an unusual means of demonstrating conformity of individuals to group standards in a novel setting.

Male college students were individually ushered into a totally dark room in which there was a stationary spot of light. Sherif knew that without any frame of reference, such a light appears to move about erratically, an illusion called the "autokinetic effect." At first, each of these subjects was asked individually to judge the movement of the light. Their judgments varied widely; some saw movement of a few inches, while others reported that the spot moved many feet. Each person soon established a range within which most of his reports would fall. Next, he was put into a group with several others. They gave estimates that varied widely, but in each group a norm "crystallized" wherein a range of judgments and an average-norm judgment emerged. After many trials, the other participants left, and the individual, now alone, was asked again to make estimates of the movement of the light—the test of his conformity to the new norm established in that group. His judgments now fell in this new group-sanctioned range, "departing significantly from his earlier personal range."

Sherif also used a confederate who was trained to give estimates that varied in their latitude from a small to a very large range. Sure enough, the naive subject's autokinetic experience mirrored that of the judgments of this devious confederate rather than sticking to his previously established personal perceptual standard.

Asch's Conformity Research: Getting into Line

Sherif's conformity effect was challenged in 1955 by another social psychologist, Solomon Asch,[10] who believed that Americans were actually more independent than Sherif's work had suggested. Asch believed that Americans could act autonomously, even when faced with a majority who saw the world differently from them. The problem with Sherif's test situation, he argued, was that it was so ambiguous, without any meaningful frame of reference or personal standard. When challenged by the alternative perception of the group, the individual had no real commitment to his original estimates so just went along. Real conformity required the group to challenge the basic perception and beliefs of the individual—to say that X was Y, when clearly that was not true. Under those circumstances, Asch predicted, relatively few would conform: most would be staunchly resistant to this extreme group pressure that was so transparently wrong.

What actually happened to people confronted with a social reality that conflicted with their basic perceptions of the world? To find out, let me put you into the seat of a typical research participant.

You are recruited for a study of visual perception that begins with judging the relative size of lines. You are shown cards with three lines of differing lengths and asked to state out loud which of the three is the same length as a comparison line on another card. One is shorter, one is longer, and one is exactly the same length as the comparison line. The task is a piece of cake for you. You make few mistakes, just like most others (less than 1 percent of the time). But you are not alone in this study; you are flanked by a bunch of peers, seven of them, and you are number eight. At first, your answers are like theirs—all right on. But then unusual things start to happen. On some trials, each of them in turn reports seeing the long line as the same length as the medium line or the short line the same as the medium one. (Unknown to you, the other seven are members of Asch's research team who have been instructed to give incorrect answers unanimously on specific "critical" trials.) When it is your turn, they all look at you as you look at the card with the three lines. You are clearly seeing something different than they are, but do you say so? Do you stick to your guns and say what you know is right, or do you go along with what everyone else says is right? You face that same group pressure on twelve of the total eighteen trials where the group gives answers that are wrong, but they are accurate on the other six trials interspersed into the mix.

If you are like most of the 123 actual research participants in Asch's study, you would yield to the group about 70 percent of the time on some of those critical, wrong-judgment trials. Thirty percent of the original subjects conformed on the majority of trials, and only a quarter of them were able to maintain their independence throughout the testing. Some reported being aware of the differences between what they saw and the group consensus, but they felt it was easier to go along with the others. For others the discrepancy created a conflict that was re-

solved by coming to believe that the group was right and their perception was wrong! All those who yielded underestimated how much they had conformed, recalling yielding much less to the group pressure than had actually been the case. They remained independent—in their minds but not in their actions.

Follow-up studies showed that, when pitted against just one person giving an incorrect judgment, a participant exhibits some uneasiness but maintains independence. However, with a majority of three people opposed to him, errors rose to 32 percent. On a more optimistic note, however, Asch found one powerful way to promote independence. By giving the subject a partner whose views were in line with his, the power of the majority was greatly diminished. Peer support decreased errors to one fourth of what they had been when there was no partner—and this resistance effect endured even after the partner left.

One of the valuable additions to our understanding of why people conform comes from research that highlights two of the basic mechanisms that contribute to group conformity.[11] We conform first out of *informational needs:* other people often have ideas, views, perspectives, and knowledge that helps us to better navigate our world, especially through foreign shores and new ports. The second mechanism involves *normative needs:* other people are more likely to accept us when we agree with them than when we disagree, so we yield to their view of the world, driven by a powerful need to belong, to replace differences with similarities.

Conformity and Independence Light Up the Brain Differently

New technology, not available in Asch's day, offers intriguing insights into the role of the brain in social conformity. When people conform, are they rationally deciding to go along with the group out of normative needs, or are they actually changing their perceptions and accepting the validity of the new though erroneous information provided by the group? A recent study utilized advanced brain-scanning technology to answer this question.[12] Researchers can now peer into the active brain as a person engages in various tasks by using a scanning device that detects which specific brain regions are energized as they carry out various mental tasks. The process is known as functional magnetic resonance imaging (FMRI). Understanding what mental functions various brain regions control tells us what it means when they are activated by any given experimental task.

Here's how the study worked. Imagine that you are one of thirty-two volunteers recruited for a study of perception. You have to mentally rotate images of three-dimensional objects to determine if the objects are the same as or different from a standard object. In the waiting room, you meet four other volunteers, with whom you begin to bond by practicing games on laptop computers, taking photos of one another, and chatting. (They are really actors—"confederates," as they are called in psychology—who will soon be faking their answers on the test trials so that they are in agreement with one another but not with the correct responses

that you generate.) You are selected as the one to go into the scanner while the others outside look at the objects first as a group and then decide if they are the same or different. As in Asch's original experiment, the actors unanimously give wrong answers on some trials, correct answers on others, with occasional mixed group answers thrown in to make the test more believable. On each round, when it is your turn at bat, you are shown the answers given by the others. You have to decide if the objects are the same or different—as the group assessed them or as you saw them?

As in Asch's experiments, you (as the typical subject) would cave in to group pressure, on average giving the group's wrong answers 41 percent of the time. When you yield to the group's erroneous judgment, your conformity would be seen in the brain scan as changes in selected regions of the brain's cortex dedicated to vision and spatial awareness (specifically, activity increases in the right intraparietal sulcus). Surprisingly, there would be no changes in areas of the forebrain that deal with monitoring conflicts, planning, and other higher-order mental activities. On the other hand, if you make independent judgments that go against the group, your brain would light up in the areas that are associated with emotional salience (the right amygdala and right caudate nucleus regions). This means that resistance creates an emotional burden for those who maintain their independence—autonomy comes at a psychic cost.

The lead author of this research, the neuroscientist Gregory Berns, concluded that "We like to think that seeing is believing, but the study's findings show that seeing is believing what the group tells you to believe." This means that other people's views, when crystallized into a group consensus, can actually affect how we perceive important aspects of the external world, thus calling into question the nature of truth itself. It is only by becoming aware of our vulnerability to social pressure that we can begin to build resistance to conformity when it is not in our best interest to yield to the mentality of the herd.

Minority Power to Impact the Majority

Juries can become "hung" when a dissenter gets support from at least one other person and together they challenge the dominant majority view. But can a small minority turn the majority around to create new norms using the same basic psychological principles that usually help to establish the majority view?

A research team of French psychologists put that question to an experimental test. In a color-naming task, if two confederates among groups of six female students consistently called a blue light "green," almost a third of the naive majority subjects eventually followed their lead. However, the members of the majority did not give in to the consistent minority when they were gathered together. It was only later, when they were tested individually, that they responded as the minority had done, shifting their judgments by moving the boundary between blue and green toward the green of the color spectrum.[13]

Researchers have also studied minority influence in the context of simulated jury deliberations, where a disagreeing minority prevents unanimous acceptance of the majority point of view. The minority group was never well liked, and its persuasiveness, when it occurred, worked only gradually, over time. The vocal minority was most influential when it had four qualities: it persisted in affirming a consistent position, appeared confident, avoided seeming rigid and dogmatic, and was skilled in social influence. Eventually, the power of the many may be undercut by the persuasion of the dedicated few.

How do these qualities of a dissident minority—especially its persistence—help to sway the majority? Majority decisions tend to be made without engaging the systematic thought and critical thinking skills of the individuals in the group. Given the force of the group's normative power to shape the opinions of the followers who conform without thinking things through, they are often taken at face value. The persistent minority forces the others to process the relevant information more mindfully.[14] Research shows that the decisions of a group as a whole are more thoughtful and creative when there is minority dissent than when it is absent.[15]

If a minority can win adherents to their side even when they are wrong, there is hope for a minority with a valid cause. In society, the majority tends to be the defender of the status quo, while the force for innovation and change comes from the minority members or individuals either dissatisfied with the current system or able to visualize new and creative alternative ways of dealing with current problems. According to the French social theorist Serge Moscovici,[16] the conflict between the entrenched majority view and the dissident minority perspective is an essential precondition of innovation and revolution that can lead to positive social change. An individual is constantly engaged in a two-way exchange with society—adapting to its norms, roles, and status prescriptions but also acting upon society to reshape those norms.

BLIND OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY: MILGRAM'S SHOCKING RESEARCH

"I was trying to think of a way to make Asch's conformity experiment more humanly significant. I was dissatisfied that the test of conformity was judgments about lines. I wondered whether groups could pressure a person into performing an act whose human import was more readily apparent; perhaps behaving aggressively toward another person, say by administering increasingly severe shocks to him. But to study the group effect . . . you'd have to know how the subject performed without any group pressure. At that instant, my thought shifted, zeroing in on this experimental control. Just how far would a person go under the experimenter's orders?"

These musings, from a former teaching and research assistant of Solomon Asch, started a remarkable series of studies by a social psychologist, Stanley Mil-

gram, that have come to be known as investigations of "blind obedience to authority." His interest in the problem of obedience to authority came from deep personal concerns about how readily the Nazis had obediently killed Jews during the Holocaust.

"[My] laboratory paradigm . . . gave scientific expression to a more general concern about authority, a concern forced upon members of my generation, in particular upon Jews such as myself, by the atrocities of World War II. . . . The impact of the Holocaust on my own psyche energized my interest in obedience and shaped the particular form in which it was examined."[17]

I would like to re-create for you the situation faced by a typical volunteer in this research project, then go on to summarize the results, outline ten important lessons to be drawn from this research that can be generalized to other situations of behavioral transformations in everyday life, and then review extensions of this paradigm by providing a number of real-world parallels. (See the Notes for a description of my personal relationship with Stanley Milgram.[18])

Milgram's Obedience Paradigm

Imagine that you see the following advertisement in the Sunday newspaper and decide to apply. The original study involved only men, but women were used in a later study, so I invite all readers to participate in this imagined scenario.

Public Announcement

WE WILL PAY YOU $4.00 FOR ONE HOUR OF YOUR TIME

Persons Needed for a Study of Memory

*We will pay five hundred New Haven men to help us complete a scientific study of memory and learning. The study is being done at Yale University.

*Each person who participates will be paid $4.00 (plus 50c carfare) for approximately 1 hour's time. We need you for only one hour: there are no further obligations. You may choose the time you would like to come (evenings, weekdays, or weekends).

*No special training, education, or experience is needed. We want:

Factory workers	Businessmen	Construction workers
City employees	Clerks	Salespeople
Laborers	Professional people	White-collar workers
Barbers	Telephone workers	Others

All persons must be between the ages of 20 and 50. High school and college students cannot be used.

*If you meet these qualifications, fill out the coupon below and mail it now to Professor Stanley Milgram, Department of Psychology, Yale University, New Haven. You will be notified later of the specific time and place of the study. We reserve the right to decline any application.

*You will be paid $4.00 (plus 50c carfare) as soon as you arrive at the laboratory.

TO:
PROF. STANLEY MILGRAM, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY, YALE UNIVERSITY, NEW HAVEN, CONN. I want to take part in this study of memory and learning. I am between the ages of 20 and 50. I will be paid $4.00 (plus 50c carfare) if I participate.

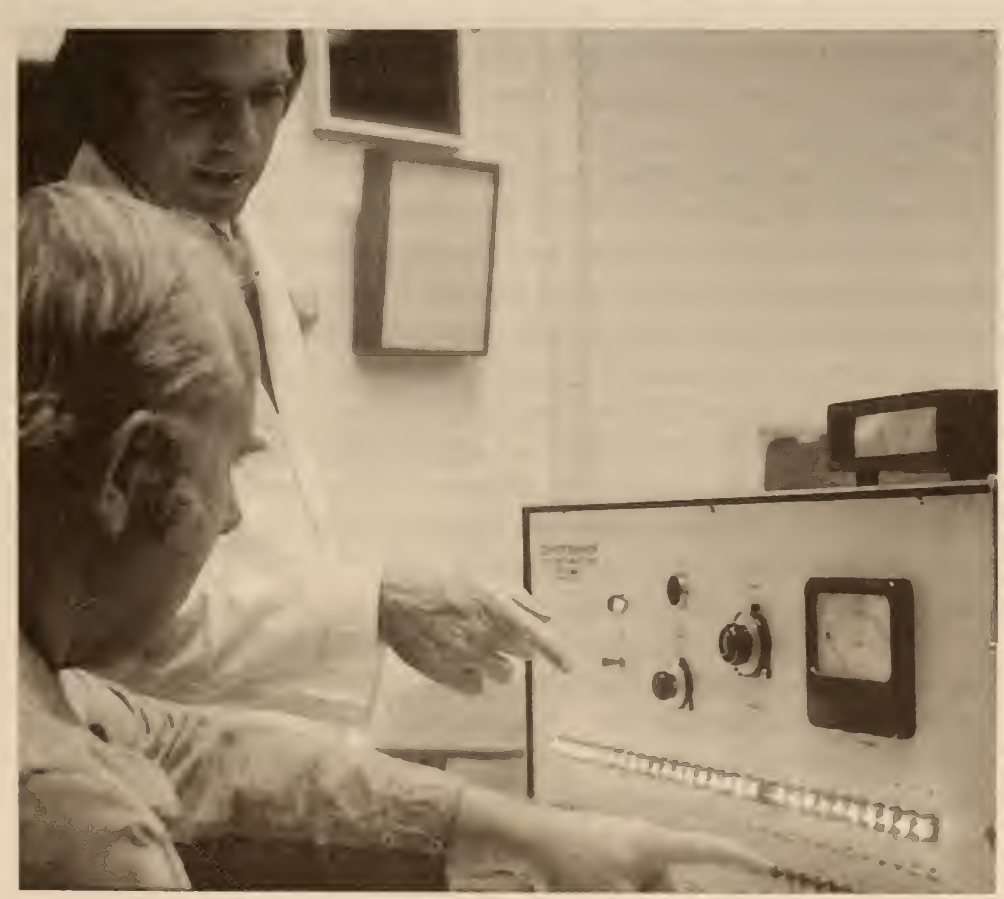
A researcher whose serious demeanor and gray laboratory coat convey scientific importance greets you and another applicant at your arrival at a Yale University laboratory in Linsly-Chittenden Hall. You are here to help scientific psychology find ways to improve people's learning and memory through the use of punishment. He tells you why this new research may have important practical consequences. The task is straightforward: one of you will be the "teacher" who gives the "learner" a set of word pairings to memorize. During the test, the teacher gives each key word, and the learner must respond with the correct association. When right, the teacher gives a verbal reward, such as



"Good" or "That's right." When wrong, the teacher is to press a lever on an impressive-looking shock apparatus that delivers an immediate shock to punish the error.

The shock generator has thirty switches, starting from a low level of 15 volts and increasing by 15 volts at each higher level. The experimenter tells you that every time the learner makes a mistake, you have to press the next higher voltage switch. The control panel indicates both the voltage level of each of the switches and a corresponding description of the level. The tenth level (150 volts) is "Strong Shock"; the 13th level (195 volts) is "Very Strong Shock"; the 17th level (255 volts) is "Intense Shock"; the 21st level (315 volts) is "Extremely Intense Shock"; the 25th level (375 volts) is "Danger, Severe Shock"; and at the 29th and 30th levels (435 and 450 volts) the control panel is simply marked with an ominous XXX (the pornography of ultimate pain and power).

You and another volunteer draw straws to see who will play each role; you are to be the teacher, and the other volunteer will be the learner. (The drawing is rigged, and the other volunteer is a confederate of the experimenter who always plays the learner.) He is a mild-mannered, middle-aged man whom you help escort to the next chamber. "Okay, now we are going to set up the learner so he can get some punishment," the researcher tells you both. The learner's arms are



strapped down and an electrode is attached to his right wrist. The shock generator in the next room will deliver the shocks to the learner—if and when he makes any errors. The two of you communicate over the intercom, with the experimenter standing next to you. You get a sample shock of 45 volts, the third level, a slight tingly pain, so you now have a sense of what the shock levels mean. The experimenter then signals the start of your trial of the "memory improvement" study.

Initially, your pupil does well, but soon he begins making errors, and you start pressing the shock switches. He complains that the shocks are starting to hurt. You look at the experimenter, who nods to continue. As the shock levels increase in intensity, so do the learner's screams, saying he does not think he wants to continue. You hesitate and question whether you should go on, but the experimenter insists that you have no choice but to do so.

Now the learner begins complaining about his heart condition and you dissent, but the experimenter still insists that you continue. Errors galore; you plead with your pupil to concentrate to get the right associations, you don't want to hurt him with these very-high-level, intense shocks. But your concerns and motivational messages are to no avail. He gets the answers wrong again and again. As the shocks intensify, he shouts out, "I can't stand the pain, let me out of here!" Then he says to the experimenter, "You have no right to keep me here! Let me out!" Another level up, he screams, "I absolutely refuse to answer any more! Get me out of here! You can't hold me here! My heart's bothering me!"

Obviously you want nothing more to do with this experiment. You tell the experimenter that you refuse to continue. You are not the kind of person who harms other people in this way. You want out. But the experimenter continues to insist that you go on. He reminds you of the contract, of your agreement to participate fully. Moreover, he claims responsibility for the consequences of your shocking actions. After you press the 300-volt switch, you read the next keyword, but the learner doesn't answer. "He's not responding," you tell the experimenter. You want him to go into the other room and check on the learner to see if he is all right. The experimenter is impassive; he is not going to check on the learner. Instead he tells you, "If the learner doesn't answer in a reasonable time, about five seconds, consider it wrong," since errors of omission must be punished in the same way as errors of commission—that is a rule.

As you continue up to even more dangerous shock levels, there is no sound coming from your pupil's shock chamber. He may be unconscious or worse! You are really distressed and want to quit, but nothing you say works to get your exit from this unexpectedly distressing situation. You are told to follow the rules and keep posing the test items and shocking the errors.

Now try to imagine fully what your participation as the teacher would be. I am sure you are saying, "No way would I ever go all the way!" Obviously, you

would have dissented, then disobeyed and just walked out. You would never sell out your morality for four bucks! But had you actually gone all the way to the last of the thirtieth shock levels, the experimenter would have insisted that you repeat that XXX switch two more times, for good measure! Now, that is really rubbing it in your face. Forget it, no sir, no way; you are out of there, right? So how far up the scale do you predict that *you* would you go before exiting? How far would the average person from this small city go in this situation?

The Outcome Predicted by Expert Judges

Milgram described his experiment to a group of forty psychiatrists and then asked them to estimate the percentage of American citizens who would go to each of the thirty levels in the experiment. On average, they predicted that less than 1 percent would go all the way to the end, that only sadists would engage in such sadistic behavior, and that most people would drop out at the tenth level of 150 volts. They could not have been more wrong! These experts on human behavior were totally wrong because, first, they ignored the situational determinants of behavior in the procedural description of the experiment. Second, their training in traditional psychiatry led them to rely too heavily on the dispositional perspective to understand unusual behavior and to disregard situational factors. They were guilty of making the fundamental attribution error (FAE)!

The Shocking Truth

In fact, in Milgram's experiment, two of every three (65 percent) of the volunteers went all the way up the maximum shock level of 450 volts. The vast majority of people, the "teachers," shocked their "learner-victim" over and over again despite his increasingly desperate pleas to stop.

And now I invite you to venture another guess: What was the dropout rate after the shock level reached 330 volts—with only silence coming from the shock chamber, where the learner could reasonably be presumed to be unconscious? Who would go on at that point? Wouldn't every sensible person quit, drop out, refuse the experimenter's demands to go on shocking him?

Here is what one "teacher" reported about his reaction: "I didn't know what the hell was going on. I think, you know, maybe I'm killing this guy. I told the experimenter that I was not taking responsibility for going further. That's it." But when the experimenter reassured him that he would take the responsibility, the worried teacher obeyed and continued to the very end.[19]

And almost everyone who got that far did the same as this man. How is that possible? If they got that far, why did they continue on to the bitter end? One reason for this startling level of obedience may be related to the teacher's not knowing how to exit from the situation, rather than just blind obedience. Most participants dissented from time to time, saying they did not want to go on, but the experimenter did not let them out, continually coming up with reasons why

they had to stay and prodding them to continue testing their suffering learner. Usually protests work and you can get out of unpleasant situations, but nothing you say affects this impervious experimenter, who insists that you must stay and continue to shock errors. You look at the shock panel and realize that the easiest exit lies at the end of the last shock lever. A few more lever presses is the fast way out, with no hassles from the experimenter and no further moans from the now-silent learner. Voilà! 450 volts is the easy way out—achieving your freedom without directly confronting the authority figure or having to reconcile the suffering you have already caused with this additional pain to the victim. It is a simple matter of up and then out.

Variations on an Obedience Theme

Over the course of a year, Milgram carried out nineteen different experiments, each one a different variation of the basic paradigm of: experimenter/teacher/learner/memory testing/errors shocked. In each of these studies he varied one social psychological variable and observed its impact on the extent of obedience to the unjust authority's pressure to continue to shock the "learner-victim." In one study, he added women; in others he varied the physical proximity or remoteness of either the experimenter-teacher link or the teacher-learner link; had peers rebel or obey before the teacher had the chance to begin; and more.

In one set of experiments, Milgram wanted to show that his results were not due to the authority power of Yale University—which is what New Haven is all about. So he transplanted his laboratory to a run-down office building in downtown Bridgeport, Connecticut, and repeated the experiment as a project, ostensibly of a private research firm with no apparent connection to Yale. It made no difference; the participants fell under the same spell of this situational power.

The data clearly revealed the extreme pliability of human nature: almost everyone could be totally obedient or almost everyone could resist authority pressures. It all depended on the situational variables they experienced. Milgram was able to demonstrate that compliance rates could soar to over 90 percent of people continuing the 450-volt maximum or be reduced to less than 10 percent—by introducing just one crucial variable into the compliance recipe.

Want maximum obedience? Make the subject a member of a "teaching team," in which the job of pulling the shock lever to punish the victim is given to another person (a confederate), while the subject assists with other parts of the procedure. Want people to resist authority pressures? Provide social models of peers who rebelled. Participants also refused to deliver the shocks if the learner said he wanted to be shocked; that's masochistic, and they are not sadists. They were also reluctant to give high levels of shock when the experimenter filled in as the learner. They were more likely to shock when the learner was remote than in proximity. In each of the other variations on this diverse range of ordinary

American citizens, of widely varying ages and occupations and of both genders, it was possible to elicit low, medium, or high levels of compliant obedience with a flick of the situational switch—as if one were simply turning a "human nature dial" within their psyches. This large sample of a thousand ordinary citizens from such varied backgrounds makes the results of the Milgram obedience studies among the most generalizable in all the social sciences.

> When you think of the long and gloomy history of man, you will find far more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience than have been committed in the name of rebellion.
>
> —C. P. Snow, "Either-Or" (1961)

Ten Lessons from the Milgram Studies: Creating Evil Traps for Good People

Let's outline some of the procedures in this research paradigm that seduced many ordinary citizens to engage in this apparently harmful behavior. In doing so, I want to draw parallels to compliance strategies used by "influence professionals" in real-world settings, such as salespeople, cult and military recruiters, media advertisers, and others.[20] There are ten methods we can extract from Milgram's paradigm for this purpose:

1. Prearranging some form of contractual obligation, verbal or written, to control the individual's behavior in pseudolegal fashion. (In Milgram's experiment, this was done by publicly agreeing to accept the tasks and the procedures.)
2. Giving participants meaningful roles to play ("teacher," "learner") that carry with them previously learned positive values and automatically activate response scripts.
3. Presenting basic rules to be followed that seem to make sense before their actual use but can then be used arbitrarily and impersonally to justify mindless compliance. Also, systems control people by making their rules vague and changing them as necessary but insisting that "rules are rules" and thus must be followed (as the researcher in the lab coat did in Milgram's experiment or the SPE guards did to force prisoner Clay-416 to eat the sausages).
4. Altering the semantics of the act, the actor, and the action (from "hurting victims" to "helping the experimenter," punishing the former for the lofty goal of scientific discovery)—replacing unpleasant reality with desirable rhetoric, gilding the frame so that the real picture is disguised. (We can see the same semantic framing at work in advertising, where, for example, bad-tasting mouthwash is framed as good for you because it kills germs and tastes like medicine is expected to taste.)

5. Creating opportunities for the diffusion of responsibility or abdication of responsibility for negative outcomes; others will be responsible, or the actor won't be held liable. (In Milgram's experiment, the authority figure said, when questioned by any "teacher," that he would take responsibility for anything that happened to the "learner.")
6. Starting the path toward the ultimate evil act with a small, seemingly insignificant first step, the easy "foot in the door" that swings open subsequent greater compliance pressures, and leads down a slippery slope.[21] (In the obedience study, the initial shock was only a mild 15 volts.) This is also the operative principle in turning good kids into drug addicts, with that first little hit or sniff.
7. Having successively increasing steps on the pathway that are gradual, so that they are hardly noticeably different from one's most recent prior action. "Just a little bit more." (By increasing each level of aggression in gradual steps of only 15-volt increments, over the thirty switches, no new level of harm seemed like a noticeable difference from the prior level to Milgram's participants.)
8. Gradually changing the nature of the authority figure (the researcher, in Milgram's study) from initially "just" and reasonable to "unjust" and demanding, even irrational. This tactic elicits initial compliance and later confusion, since we expect consistency from authorities and friends. Not acknowledging that this transformation has occurred leads to mindless obedience (and it is part of many "date rape" scenarios and a reason why abused women stay with their abusing spouses).
9. Making the "exit costs" high and making the process of exiting difficult by allowing verbal dissent (which makes people feel better about themselves) while insisting on behavioral compliance.
10. Offering an ideology, or a big lie, to justify the use of any means to achieve the seemingly desirable, essential goal. (In Milgram's research this came in the form of providing an acceptable justification, or rationale, for engaging in the undesirable action, such as that science wants to help people improve their memory by judicious use of reward and punishment.) In social psychology experiments, this tactic is known as the "cover story" because it is a cover-up for the procedures that follow, which might be challenged because they do not make sense on their own. The real-world equivalent is known as an "ideology." Most nations rely on an ideology, typically, "threats to national security," before going to war or to suppress dissident political opposition. When citizens fear that their national security is being threatened, they become willing to surrender their basic freedoms to a government that offers them that exchange. Erich Fromm's classic analysis in *Escape from Freedom* made us aware of this trade-off, which Hitler and other dictators have long used to gain and maintain power: namely, the claim that they will be able to provide security in

exchange for citizens giving up their freedoms, which will give them the ability to control things better.[22]

Such procedures are utilized in varied influence situations where those in authority want others to do their bidding but know that few would engage in the "end game" without first being properly prepared psychologically to do the "unthinkable." In the future, when you are in a compromising position where your compliance is at stake, thinking back to these stepping-stones to mindless obedience may enable you to step back and not go all the way down the path—*their* path. A good way to avoid crimes of obedience is to assert one's personal authority and always take full responsibility for one's actions.[23]

Replications and Extensions of the Milgram Obedience Model

Because of its structural design and its detailed protocol, the basic Milgram obedience experiment encouraged replication by independent investigators in many countries. A recent comparative analysis was made of the rates of obedience in eight studies conducted in the United States and nine replications in European, African, and Asian countries. There were comparably high levels of compliance by research volunteers in these different studies and nations. The majority obedience effect of a mean 61 percent found in the U.S. replications was matched by the 66 percent obedience rate found across all the other national samples. The range of obedience went from a low of 31 percent to a high of 91 percent in the U.S. studies, and from a low of 28 percent (Australia) to a high of 88 percent (South Africa) in the cross-national replications. There was also stability of obedience over decades of time as well as over place. There was no association between when a study was done (between 1963 and 1985) and degree of obedience.[24]

Obedience to a Powerful Legitimate Authority

In the original obedience studies, the subjects conferred authority status on the person conducting the experiment because he was in an institutional setting and was dressed and acted like a serious scientist, even though he was only a high school biology teacher paid to play that role. His power came from being perceived as a representative of an authority system. (In Milgram's Bridgeport replication described earlier, the absence of the prestigious institutional setting of Yale reduced the obedience rate to 47.5 percent compared to 65 percent at Yale, although this drop was not a statistically significant one.) Several later studies showed how powerful the obedience effect can be when legitimate authorities exercise their power within their power domains.

When a college professor was the authority figure telling college student volunteers that their task was to train a puppy by conditioning its behavior using electric shocks, he elicited 75 percent obedience from them. In this experiment, both the "experimenter-teacher" and the "learner" were "authentic." That is, college students acted as the teacher, attempting to condition a cuddly little puppy,

the learner, in an electrified apparatus. The puppy was supposed to learn a task, and shocks were given when it failed to respond correctly in a given time interval. As in Milgram's experiments, they had to deliver a series of thirty graded shocks, up to 450 volts in the training process. Each of the thirteen male and thirteen female subjects individually saw and heard the puppy squealing and jumping around the electrified grid as they pressed lever after lever. There was no doubt that they were hurting the puppy with each shock they administered. (Although the shock intensities were much lower than indicated by the voltage labels appearing on the shock box, they were still powerful enough to evoke clearly distressed reactions from the puppy with each successive press of the shock switches.)

As you might imagine, the students were clearly upset during the experiment. Some of the females cried, and the male students also expressed a lot of distress. Did they refuse to continue once they could see the suffering they were causing right before their eyes? For all too many, their personal distress did not lead to behavioral disobedience. About half of the males (54 percent) went all the way to 450 volts. The big surprise came from the women's high level of obedience. Despite their dissent and weeping, 100 percent of the female college students obeyed to the full extent possible in shocking the puppy as it tried to solve an insoluble task! A similar result was found in an unpublished study with adolescent high school girls. (The typical finding with human "victims," including Milgram's own findings, is that there are no male-female gender differences in obedience.[25])

Some critics of the obedience experiments tried to invalidate Milgram's findings by arguing that subjects quickly discover that the shocks are fake, and that is why they continue to give them to the very end.[26] This study, conducted back in 1972 (by psychologists Charles Sheridan and Richard King), removes any doubt that Milgram's high obedience rates could have resulted from subjects' disbelief that they were actually hurting the learner-victim. Sheridan and King showed that there was an obvious visual connection between a subject's obedience reactions and a puppy's pain. Of further interest is the finding that half of the males who disobeyed lied to their teacher in reporting that the puppy had learned the insoluble task, a deceptive form of disobedience. When students in a comparable college class were asked to predict how far an average woman would go on this task, they estimated 0 percent—a far cry from 100 percent. (However, this faulty low estimate is reminiscent of the 1 percent figure given by the psychiatrists who assessed the Milgram paradigm.) Again this underscores one of my central arguments, that it is difficult for people to appreciate fully the power of situational forces acting on individual behavior when they are viewed outside the behavioral context.

Physicians' Power over Nurses to Mistreat Patients

If the relationship between teachers and students is one of power-based authority, how much more so is that between physicians and nurses? How difficult is it, then, for a nurse to disobey an order from the powerful authority of the doctor—when she knows it is wrong? To find out, a team of doctors and nurses tested obedience in their authority system by determining whether nurses would follow or disobey an illegitimate request by an unknown physician in a real hospital setting.[27]

Each of twenty-two nurses individually received a call from a staff doctor whom she had never met. He told her to administer a medication to a patient immediately, so that it would take effect by the time he arrived at the hospital. He would sign the drug order then. He ordered her to give his patient 20 milligrams of the drug "Astrogen." The label on the container of Astrogen indicated that 5 milliliters was usual and warned that 10 milliliters was the maximum dose. His order doubled that high dose.

The conflict created in the minds of each of these caregivers was whether to follow this order from an unfamiliar phone caller to administer an excessive dose of medicine or follow standard medical practice, which rejects such unauthorized orders. When this dilemma was presented as a hypothetical scenario to a dozen nurses in that hospital, ten said they would refuse to obey. However, when other nurses were put on the hot seat where they were faced with the physician's imminent arrival (and possible anger at being disobeyed), the nurses almost unanimously caved in and complied. All but one of twenty-two nurses put to the real test started to pour the medication (actually a placebo) to administer to the patient—before the researcher stopped them from doing so. That solitary disobedient nurse should have been given a raise and a hero's medal.

This dramatic effect is far from isolated. Equally high levels of blind obedience to doctors' almighty authority showed up in a recent survey of a large sample of registered nurses. Nearly half (46 percent) of the nurses reported that they could recall a time when they had in fact "carried out a physician's order that you felt could have had harmful consequences to the patient." These compliant nurses attributed less responsibility to themselves than they did to the physician when they followed an inappropriate command. In addition, they indicated that the primary basis of social power of physicians is their "legitimate power," the right to provide overall care to the patient.[28] They were just following what they construed as legitimate orders—but then the patient died. Thousands of hospitalized patients die needlessly each year due to a variety of staff mistakes, some of which, I assume, include such unquestioning obedience of nurses and tech aides to physicians' wrong orders.

Deadly Obedience to Authority

This potential for authority figures to exercise power over subordinates can have disastrous consequences in many domains of life. One such example is found in the dynamics of obedience in commercial airline cockpits, which have been shown to lead to many airline accidents. In a typical commercial airline cockpit, the captain is the central authority over a first officer and sometimes a flight engineer, and the might of that authority is enforced by organizational norms, the military background of most pilots, and flight rules that make the pilot directly responsible for operating the aircraft. Such authority can lead to flight errors when the crew feels forced to accept the "authority's definition of the situation," even when the authority is wrong.

An investigation of thirty-seven serious plane accidents where there were sufficient data from voice recorders revealed that in 81 percent of these cases, the first officer did not properly monitor or challenge the captain when he had made errors. Using a larger sample of seventy-five plane accidents as the context for evaluating destructive obedience, the author of this study concludes, "If we assume that both monitoring and challenging errors are due to excessive obedience, we may conclude that excessive obedience may cause as many as 25% of all airplane accidents."[29]

Administrative Obedience to Authority

In modern society people in positions of authority rarely punish others with physical violence as in the Milgram paradigm. What is more typical is, *mediated violence*, where authorities pass along orders to underlings who carry them out or the violence involves verbal abuse that undercuts the self-esteem and dignity of the powerless. Authorities often take actions that are punitive and whose consequences are not directly observable. For example, giving hostile feedback to someone that knowingly will disrupt their performance and adversely affect their chances of getting a job qualifies as a form of such socially mediated violence.

A team of Dutch researchers assessed the extension of authority-based obedience to such a situation in a series of ingenious experiments involving twenty-five separate studies of nearly 500 participants from 1982 to 1985 at Utrecht University in the Netherlands.[30] In their "administrative obedience paradigm" the experimenter told the research participant, acting as administrator, to make a series of fifteen "stress remarks" to a job applicant (a trained accomplice) in the next room. Specifically, the subjects were instructed to administer a job selection test to the applicant—if he passed the test, he would get the job; if he failed, he would remain unemployed.

They were also instructed to disturb and stress the applicant while giving him the test. These fifteen graded remarks were critical of his test performance and also denigrated his personality, such as "That was really stupid of you." As the participant-administrators delivered these ever-more-hostile remarks, they

"placed the applicant under such intense psychological strain that he did not perform satisfactorily and consequently failed to get the job." In addition, they were told by the researchers to continue despite any protests from the applicant. Any dissent by the participant-administrators was countered with up to four prods by the experimenter to continue the hostile remarks before they were finally permitted to stop if they were adamant. Finally, and most significantly, the subjects were informed that the ability to work under stress was *not* an essential job requirement, but the procedure had to be followed because it assisted the experimenter's research project, which was studying how stress affects test performance. Causing distress and hurting another person's job chances had no further use than the researcher's collection of some data. In the control condition, subjects could stop making the stress remarks at any point they chose.

When asked to predict whether they would make all the stress remarks under these circumstances, more than 90 percent of a separate set of comparable Dutch respondents said they would not comply. Again, the "outsider's view" was way off base: fully 91 percent of the subjects obeyed the authoritative experiment to the very end of the line. This same degree of extreme obedience held up even when personnel officers were used as the subjects despite their professional code of ethics for dealing with clients. Similarly high obedience was found when subjects were sent advance information several weeks before their appearance at the laboratory so that they had time to reflect on the nature of their potentially hostile role.

How might we generate *disobedience* in this setting? You can choose among several options: Have several peers rebel before the subject's turn, as in Milgram's study. Or notify the subject of his or her legal liability if the applicant-victim were harmed and sued the university. Or eliminate the authority pressure to go all the way, as in the control condition of this research—where no one fully obeyed.

Sexual Obedience to Authority: The Strip-Search Scam

"Strip-search scams" have been perpetrated in a number of fast-food restaurant chains throughout the United States. This phenomenon demonstrates the pervasiveness of obedience to an anonymous but seemingly important authority. The modus operandi is for an assistant store manager to be called to the phone by a male caller who identifies himself as a police officer named, say, "Scott." He needs their urgent help with a case of employee theft at that restaurant. He insists on being called "Sir" in their conversation. Earlier he has gotten relevant inside information about store procedures and local details. He also knows how to solicit the information he wants through skillfully guided questions, as stage magicians and "mind readers" do. He is a good con man.

Ultimately Officer "Scott" solicits from the assistant manager the name of the attractive young new employee who, he says, has been stealing from the shop and is believed to have contraband on her now. He wants her to be isolated in the rear room and held until he or his men can pick her up. The employee is detained there

and is given the option by the "Sir, Officer," who talks to her on the phone, of either being strip-searched then and there by a fellow employee or brought down to headquarters to be strip-searched there by the police. Invariably, she elects to be searched now since she knows she is innocent and has nothing to hide. The caller then instructs the assistant manager to strip search her; her anus and vagina are searched for stolen money or drugs. All the while the caller insists on being told in graphic detail what is happening, and all the while the video surveillance cameras are recording these remarkable events as they unfold. But this is only the beginning of a nightmare for the innocent young employee and a sexual and power turn-on for the caller-voyeur.

In a case in which I was an expert witness, this basic scenario then included having the frightened eighteen-year-old high school senior engage in a series of increasingly embarrassing and sexually degrading activities. The naked woman is told to jump up and down and to dance around. The assistant manager is told by the caller to get some older male employee to help confine the victim so she can go back to her duties in the restaurant. The scene degenerates into the caller insisting that the woman masturbate herself and have oral sex with the older male, who is supposedly containing her in the back room while the police are slowly wending their way to the restaurant. These sexual activities continue for several hours while they wait for the police to arrive, which of course never happens.

This bizarre authority influence in absentia seduces many people in that situation to violate store policy, and presumably their own ethical and moral principles, to sexually molest and humiliate an honest, churchgoing young employee. In the end, the store personnel are fired, some are charged with crimes, the store is sued, the victims are seriously distressed, and the perpetrator in this and similar hoaxes—a former corrections officer—is finally caught and convicted.

One reasonable reaction to learning about this hoax is to focus on the dispositions of the victim and her assailants, as naive, ignorant, gullible, weird individuals. However, when we learn that this scam has been carried out successfully in sixty-eight similar fast-food settings in thirty-two different states, in a half-dozen different restaurant chains, and with assistant managers of many restaurants around the country being conned, with both male and female victims, our analysis must shift away from simply blaming the victims to recognizing the power of situational forces involved in this scenario. So let us not underestimate the power of "authority" to generate obedience to an extent and of a kind that is hard to fathom.

Donna Summers, assistant manager at McDonald's in Mount Washington, Kentucky, fired for being deceived into participating in this authority phone hoax, expresses one of the main themes in our *Lucifer Effect* narrative about situational power. "You look back on it, and you say, I wouldn't a done it. But unless you're put in that situation, at that time, how do you know what you would do. You don't."[31]

In her book *Making Fast Food: From the Frying Pan into the Fryer,* the Canadian

sociologist Ester Reiter concludes that obedience to authority is the most valued trait in fast-food workers. "The assembly-line process very deliberately tries to take away any thought or discretion from workers. They are appendages to the machine," she said in a recent interview. Retired FBI special agent Dan Jablonski, a private detective who investigated some of these hoaxes, said, "You and I can sit here and judge these people and say they were blooming idiots. But they aren't trained to use common sense. They are trained to say and think, 'Can I help you?' "[32]

THE NAZI CONNECTION: COULD IT HAPPEN IN YOUR TOWN?

Recall that one of Milgram's motivations for initiating his research project was to understand how so many "good" German citizens could become involved in the brutal murder of millions of Jews. Rather than search for dispositional tendencies in the German national character to account for the evil of this genocide, he believed that features of the situation played a critical role: that obedience to authority was a "toxic trigger" for wanton murder. After completing his research, Milgram extended his scientific conclusions to a very dramatic prediction about the insidious and pervasive power of obedience to transform ordinary American citizens into Nazi death camp personnel: "If a system of death camps were set up in the United States of the sort we had seen in Nazi Germany, one would be able to find sufficient personnel for those camps in any medium-sized American town."[33]

Let us briefly consider this frightening prediction in light of five very different but fascinating inquiries into this Nazi connection with ordinary people willingly recruited to act against a declared "enemy of the state." The first two are classroom demonstrations by creative teachers with high school and grade school children. The third is by a former graduate student of mine who determined that American college students would indeed endorse the "final solution" if an authority figure provided sufficient justification for doing so. The last two directly studied Nazi SS and German policemen.

Creating Nazis in an American Classroom

Students in a Palo Alto, California, high school world history class were, like many of us, not able to comprehend the inhumanity of the Holocaust. How could such a racist and deadly social-political movement have thrived, and how could the average citizen have been ignorant of or indifferent to the suffering it imposed on fellow Jewish citizens? Their inventive teacher, Ron Jones, decided to modify his medium in order to make the message meaningful to these disbelievers. To do so, he switched from the usual didactic teaching method to an experiential learning mode.

He began by telling the class that they would simulate some aspects of the German experience in the coming week. Despite this forewarning, the role-playing "experiment" that took place over the next five days was a serious matter

for the students and a shock for the teacher, not to mention the principal and the students' parents. Simulation and reality merged as these students created a totalitarian system of beliefs and coercive control that was all too much like that fashioned by Hitler's Nazi regime.[34]

First, Jones established new rigid classroom rules that had to be obeyed without question. All answers must be limited to three words or less and preceded by "Sir," as the student stood erect beside his or her desk. When no one challenged this and other arbitrary rules, the classroom atmosphere began to change. The more verbally fluent, intelligent students lost their positions of prominence as the less verbal, more physically assertive ones took over. The classroom movement was named "The Third Wave." A cupped-hand salute was introduced along with slogans that had to be shouted in unison on command. Each day there was a new powerful slogan: "Strength through discipline"; "Strength through community"; "Strength through action"; and "Strength through pride." There would be one more reserved for later on. Secret handshakes identified insiders, and critics had to be reported for "treason." Actions followed the slogans—making banners that were hung about the school, enlisting new members, teaching other students mandatory sitting postures, and so forth.

The original core of twenty history students soon swelled to more than a hundred eager new Third Wavers. The students then took over the assignment, making it their own. They issued special membership cards. Some of the brightest students were ordered out of class. The new authoritarian in-group was delighted and abused their former classmates as they were taken away.

Jones then confided to his followers that they were part of a nationwide movement to discover students who were willing to fight for political change. They were "a select group of young people chosen to help in this cause," he told them. A rally was scheduled for the next day at which a national presidential candidate was supposed to announce on TV the formation of a new Third Wave Youth program. More than two hundred students filled the auditorium at Cubberly High School in eager anticipation of this announcement. Exhilarated Wave members wearing white-shirted uniforms with homemade armbands posted banners around the hall. While muscular students stood guard at the door, friends of the teacher posing as reporters and photographers circulated among the mass of "true believers." The TV was turned on, and everyone waited—and waited—for the big announcement of their next collective goose steps forward. They shouted, "Strength through discipline!"

Instead, the teacher projected a film of the Nuremberg rally; the history of the Third Reich appeared in ghostly images. "Everyone must accept the blame—no one can claim that they didn't in some way take part." That was the final frame of the film and the end of the simulation. Jones explained the reason to all the assembled students for this simulation, which had gone way beyond his initial intention. He told them that the new slogan for them should be "Strength through

understanding." Jones went on to conclude, "You have been manipulated. Shoved by your own desires into the place you now find yourselves."

Ron Jones got into trouble with the administration because the parents of the rejected classmates complained about their children being harassed and threatened by the new regime. Nevertheless, he concluded that many of these youngsters had learned a vital lesson by personally experiencing the ease with which their behavior could be so radically transformed by obeying a powerful authority within the context of a fascistlike setting. In his later essay about the "experiment," Jones noted that "In the four years I taught at Cubberly High School, no one ever admitted to attending the Third Wave rally. It was something we all wanted to forget." (After leaving the school a few years later, Jones began working with special education students in San Francisco. A powerful docudrama of this simulated Nazi experience, titled "The Wave," captured some of this transformation of good kids into pseudo Hitler Youth.[35])

Creating Little Elementary School Beasties: Brown Eyes Versus Blue Eyes

The power of authorities is demonstrated not only in the extent to which they can command obedience from followers, but also in the extent to which they can define reality and alter habitual ways of thinking and acting. Case in point: Jane Elliott, a popular third-grade schoolteacher in the small rural town of Riceville, Iowa. Her challenge: how to teach white children from a small farm town with few minorities about the meaning of "brotherhood" and "tolerance." She decided to have them experience personally what it feels like to be an underdog and also the top dog, either the victim or the perpetrator of prejudice.[36]

This teacher arbitrarily designated one part of her class as superior to the other part, which was inferior—based only on their eye color. She began by informing her students that people with blue eyes were superior to those with brown eyes and gave a variety of supporting "evidence" to illustrate this truth, such as George Washington's having blue eyes and, closer to home, a student's father (who, the student had complained, had hit him) having brown eyes.

Starting immediately, said Ms. Elliott, the children with blue eyes would be the special "superior" ones and the brown-eyed ones would be the "inferior" group. The allegedly more intelligent blue-eyes were given special privileges, while the inferior brown-eyes had to obey rules that enforced their second-class status, including wearing a collar that enabled others to recognize their lowly status from a distance.

The previously friendly blue-eyed kids refused to play with the bad "brown-eyes," and they suggested that school officials should be notified that the brown-eyes might steal things. Soon fistfights erupted during recess, and one boy admitted hitting another "in the gut" because, "He called me brown-eyes, like being a black person, like a Negro." Within one day, the brown-eyed children began to do more poorly in their schoolwork and became depressed, sullen, and angry. They described themselves as "sad," "bad," "stupid," and "mean."

The next day was turnabout time. Mrs. Elliott told the class that she had been wrong—it was really the brown-eyed children who were superior and the blue-eyed ones who were inferior, and she provided specious new evidence to support this chromatic theory of good and evil. The blue-eyes now switched from their previously "happy," "good," "sweet," and "nice" self-labels to derogatory labels similar to those adopted the day before by the brown-eyes. Old friendship patterns between children temporarily dissolved and were replaced by hostility until this experiential project was ended and the children were carefully and fully debriefed and returned to their joy-filled classroom.

The teacher was amazed at the swift and total transformation of so many of her students whom she thought she knew so well. Mrs. Elliott concluded, "What had been marvelously cooperative, thoughtful children became nasty, vicious, discriminating little third-graders. . . . It was ghastly!"

Endorsing the Final Solution in Hawaii: Ridding the World of Misfits

Imagine that you are a college student at the University of Hawaii (Manoa campus) among 570 other students in any of several large evening school psychology classes. Tonight your teacher, with his Danish accent, alters his usual lecture to reveal a threat to national security being created by the population explosion (a hot topic in the early 1970s).[37] This authority describes the emerging threat to society posed by the rapidly increasing number of people who are physically and mentally unfit. The problem is convincingly presented as a high-minded scientific project, endorsed by scientists and planned for the benefit of humanity. You are then invited to help in "the application of scientific procedures to eliminate the mentally and emotionally unfit." The teacher further justifies the need to take action with an analogy to capital punishment as a deterrent against violent crime. He tells you that your opinions are being solicited because you and the others assembled here are intelligent and well educated and have high ethical values. It is flattering to think that you are in this select company. (Recall the lure of C. S. Lewis's "Inner Ring.") In case there might be any lingering misgivings, he provides assurances that much careful research would be carried out before action of any kind would be taken with these misfit human creatures.

At this point, he wants only your opinions, recommendations, and personal views on a simple survey to be completed now by you and the rest of the students in the auditorium. You begin answering the questions because you have been persuaded that this is a new vital issue about which your voice matters. You diligently answer each of the seven questions and discover that there is a lot of uniformity between your answers and those of the rest of the group.

Ninety percent of you agree that there will always be some people more fit for survival than others.

Regarding killing of the unfit: 79 percent wanted one person to be responsible for the killing and another to carry out the act; 64 percent preferred anonymity for those who pressed the button with only one button causing death

though many were pressed; 89 percent judged that painless drugs would be the most efficient and humane method of inducing death.

If required by law to assist, 89 percent wanted to be the one who assisted in the decisions, while 9 percent preferred to assist with the killings or both. Only 6 percent of the students *refused* to answer.

Most incredibly, fully 91 percent of all student respondents agreed with the conclusion that "under extreme circumstances it is entirely just to eliminate those judged most dangerous to the general welfare"!

Finally, a surprising 29 percent supported this "final solution" even if it had to be applied to their own families![38]

So these American college students (night school students and thus older than usual) were willing to endorse a deadly plan to kill off all others who were judged by some authorities to be less fit to live than they were—after only a brief presentation by their teacher-authority. Now we can see how ordinary, even intelligent Germans could readily endorse Hitler's "Final Solution" against the Jews, which was reinforced in many ways by their educational system and strengthened by systematic government propaganda.

Ordinary Men Indoctrinated into Extraordinary Killing

One of the clearest illustrations of my exploration of how ordinary people can be made to engage in evil deeds that are alien to their past history and moral values comes from a remarkable discovery by the historian Christopher Browning. He recounts that in March 1942 about 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, but a mere eleven months later about 80 percent were dead. In this short period of time, the *Endlösung* (Hitler's "Final Solution") was energized by means of an intense wave of mobile mass murder squads in Poland. This genocide required mobilization of a large-scale killing machine at the same time that able-bodied German soldiers were needed on the collapsing Russian front. Because most Polish Jews lived in small towns and not large cities, the question that Browning raised about the German high command was "where had they found the manpower during this pivotal year of the war for such an astounding logistical achievement in mass murder?"[39]

His answer came from archives of Nazi war crimes, which recorded the activities of Reserve Battalion 101, a unit of about five hundred men from Hamburg, Germany. They were elderly family men, too old to be drafted into the Army; they came from working-class and lower-middle-class backgrounds, and they had no military police experience. They were raw recruits sent to Poland without warning of, or any training in, their secret mission—the total extermination of all Jews living in the remote villages of Poland. In just four months they shot to death at point-blank range at least 38,000 Jews and had another 45,000 deported to the concentration camp at Treblinka.

Initially, their commander told them that this was a difficult mission that must be obeyed by the battalion. However, he added that any individual could re-

fuse to execute these men, women, and children. The records indicate that at first about half the men refused and let the other police reservists engage in the mass murder. But over time, social modeling processes took over, as did guilt-induced persuasion by those reservists who had been doing the shooting, along with the usual group conformity pressures of "how would they be seen in the eyes of their comrades." By the end of their deadly journey, up to 90 percent of the men in Battalion 101 were blindly obedient to their battalion leader and were personally involved in the shootings. Many of them posed proudly for photographs of their up-close and personal killing of Jews. Like those who took photos of the prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib Prison, these policemen posed in their "trophy photos" as proud destroyers of the Jewish menace.

Browning makes it clear that there was no special selection of these men, nor self-selection, nor self-interest or careerism that could account for these mass murders. Instead, they were as "ordinary" as can be imagined—until they were put into a novel situation in which they had "official" permission and encouragement to act sadistically against people who were arbitrarily labeled as the "enemy." What is most evident in Browning's penetrating analysis of these daily acts of human evil is that these ordinary men were part of a powerful authority system, a political police state with ideological justifications for destroying Jews and intense indoctrination of the moral imperatives of discipline and loyalty and duty to the state.

Interestingly, for the argument that I have been making that experimental research can have real-world relevance, Browning compared the underlying mechanisms operating in that far-off land at that distant time to the psychological processes at work in both the Milgram obedience studies and our Stanford Prison Experiment. The author goes on to note, "Zimbardo's spectrum of guard behavior bears an uncanny resemblance to the groupings that emerged within Reserve Police Battalion 101" (p. 168). He shows how some became sadistically "cruel and tough," enjoying the killing, whereas others were "tough, but fair" in "playing the rules," and a minority qualified as "good guards" who refused to kill and did small favors for the Jews.

The psychologist Ervin Staub (who as a child survived the Nazi occupation of Hungary in a "protected house") concurs that most people under particular circumstances have a capacity for extreme violence and destruction of human life. From his attempt to understand the roots of evil in genocide and mass violence around the world, Staub has come to believe that "Evil that arises out of ordinary thinking and is committed by ordinary people is the norm, not the exception. . . . Great evil arises out of ordinary psychological processes that evolve, usually with a progression along the continuum of destruction." He highlights the significance of ordinary people being caught up in situations where they can learn to practice evil acts that are demanded by higher-level authority systems: "Being part of a system shapes views, rewards adherence to dominant views, and makes deviation psychologically demanding and difficult."[40]

Having lived through the horrors of Auschwitz, John Steiner (my dear friend and sociologist colleague) returned for decades to Germany to interview hundreds of former Nazi SS men, from privates to generals. He needed to know what had made these men embrace such unspeakable evil day in and day out. Steiner found that many of these men were high on the F-Scale measure of authoritarianism, which attracted them to the subculture of violence in the SS. He refers to them as "sleepers," people with certain traits that are latent and may never be expressed except when particular situations activate these violent tendencies. He concludes that "the situation tended to be the most immediate determinant of SS behavior," rousing "sleepers" into active killers. However, from his massive interview data Steiner also found that these men had led normal—violence-free—lives both before and after their violent years in the concentration camp setting.[41]

Steiner's extensive experience with many of the SS men at a personal and scholarly level led him to advance two important conclusions about institutional power and the role enactment of brutality: "Institutional support for roles of violence has apparently far more extensive effects than generally realized. When implicit, and especially explicit, social sanctions support such roles, people tend to be attracted to them who may not only derive satisfaction from the nature of their work but are quasiexecutioners in feeling as well as action."

Steiner goes on to describe how roles can trump character traits: "[It] has become evident that not everyone playing a brutal role has to have sadistic traits of character. Those who continued in roles originally not conducive to their personality often changed their values (i.e., had a tendency to adjust to what was expected of them in these roles). There were SS members who clearly identified with and enjoyed their positions. Finally there were those who were repulsed and sickened by what they were ordered to do. They tried to compensate by helping inmates whenever possible. (This writer's life was saved by SS personnel on several occasions.)"

It is important to acknowledge that the many hundreds of thousands of Germans who became perpetrators of evil during the Holocaust were not doing so simply because they were following the orders given by authorities. Obedience to an authority system that gave permission and reward for murdering Jews was built on a scaffold of intense anti-Semitism that existed in Germany and other European nations at that time. This prejudice was given direction and resolve by the German chain of command to ordinary Germans, who became "Hitler's willing executioners," in the analysis by the historian Daniel Goldhagen.[42]

Although it is important to note the motivating role of Germans' hatred of Jews, Goldhagen's analysis suffers from two flaws. First, historical evidence shows that from the early nineteenth century on there was less anti-Semitism in Germany than in neighboring countries such as France and Poland. He also errs in minimizing the influence of Hitler's authority system—a network that glorified racial fanaticism and the particular situations created by the authorities, like the concentration camps, which mechanized genocide. It was the interaction of per-

sonal variables of German citizens with situational opportunities provided by a System of fanatical prejudice that combined to empower so many to become willing or unwilling executioners for their state.

THE BANALITY OF EVIL

In 1963, the social philosopher Hannah Arendt published what was to become a classic of our times, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.* She provides a detailed analysis of the war crimes trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi figure who personally arranged for the murder of millions of Jews. Eichmann's defense of his actions was similar to the testimony of other Nazi leaders: "I was only following orders." As Arendt put it, "[Eichmann] remembered perfectly well that he would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do—to ship millions of men, women, and children to their death with great zeal and the most meticulous care" (p. 25).[43]

However, what is most striking in Arendt's account of Eichmann is all the ways in which he seemed absolutely ordinary:

> Half a dozen psychiatrists had certified him as "normal"—"More normal, at any rate, than I am after having examined him," one of them was said to have exclaimed, while another had found that his whole psychological outlook, his attitude toward his wife and children, mother and father, brothers, sisters, and friends, was "not only normal but most desirable" (pp. 25–26).

Through her analysis of Eichmann, Arendt reached her famous conclusion:

> The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together, for it implied . . . that this new type of criminal . . . commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or feel that he is doing wrong (p. 276).
>
> It was as though in those last minutes [of Eichmann's life] he was summing up the lesson that this long course in human wickedness had taught us—the lesson of the fearsome, word-and-thought-defying banality of evil (p. 252).

Arendt's phrase "the banality of evil" continues to resonate because genocide has been unleashed around the world and torture and terrorism continue to be common features of our global landscape. We prefer to distance ourselves from such a fundamental truth, seeing the madness of evildoers and senseless violence of tyrants as dispositional characters within their personal makeup. Arendt's

analysis was the first to deny this orientation by observing the fluidity with which social forces can prompt normal people to perform horrific acts.

Torturers and Executioners: Pathological Types or Situational Imperatives?

There is little doubt that the systematic torture by men of their fellow men and women represents one of the darkest sides of human nature. Surely, my colleagues and I reasoned, here was a place where dispositional evil would be manifest among torturers who did their daily dirty deeds for years in Brazil as policemen sanctioned by the government to get confessions by torturing "subversive" enemies of the state.

We began by focusing on the torturers, trying to understand both their psyches and the ways they were shaped by their circumstances, but we had to expand our analytical net to capture their comrades in arms who chose or were assigned to another branch of violence work: death squad executioners. They shared a "common enemy": men, women, and children who, though citizens of their state, even neighbors, were declared by "the System" to be threats to the country's national security—as socialists and Communists. Some had to be eliminated efficiently, while others, who might hold secret information, had to be made to yield it up by torture, confess to their treason, and then be killed.

In carrying out this mission, these torturers could rely in part on the "creative evil" embodied in torture devices and techniques that had been refined over centuries since the Inquisition by officials of the Catholic Church and later of many nation-states. However, they had to add a measure of improvisation when dealing with particular enemies to overcome their resistance and resiliency. Some of them claimed innocence, refused to acknowledge their culpability, or were tough enough not to be intimidated by most coercive interrogation tactics. It took time and emerging insights into human weaknesses for these torturers to become adept at their craft. By contrast, the task of the death squads was easy. With hoods for anonymity, guns, and group support, they could dispatch their duty to country swiftly and impersonally: "just business." For a torturer, the work could never be just business. Torture always involves a personal relationship; it is essential for the torturer to understand what kind of torture to employ, what intensity of torture to use on a certain person at a certain time. Wrong kind or too little—no confession. Too much—the victim dies before confessing. In either case, the torturer fails to deliver the goods and incurs the wrath of the senior officers. Learning to determine the right kind and degree of torture that yields up the desired information elicits abounding rewards and flowing praise from one's superiors.

What kind of men could do such deeds? Did they need to rely on sadistic impulses and a history of sociopathic life experiences to rip and tear the flesh of fellow beings day in and day out for years on end? Were these violence workers a breed apart from the rest of humanity, bad seeds, bad tree trunks, and bad flowers? Or is it conceivable that they could be ordinary people, programmed to carry out their deplorable acts by means of some identifiable and replicable training

programs? Could we identify a set of external conditions, situational variables, that had contributed to the making of these torturers and killers? If their evil actions were not traceable to inner defects but rather attributable to outer forces acting on them—the political, economic, social, historical, and experiential components of their police training—we might be able to generalize across cultures and settings and discover some of the operative principles responsible for this remarkable human transformation.

The sociologist and Brazil expert Martha Huggins, the Greek psychologist and torture expert Mika Haritos-Fatouros, and I interviewed several dozen of these violence workers in depth at various venues in Brazil. (For a summary of our methods and detailed findings about these violence workers, see Huggins, Haritos-Fatouros, and Zimbardo[44]). Mika had done a similar, earlier study of torturers trained by the Greek military junta, and our results were largely congruent with hers.[45] We found that sadists are selected out of the training process by trainers because they are not controllable, get off on the pleasure of inflicting pain, and thus do not sustain the focus on the goal of extraction of confessions. Thus, from all the evidence we could muster, torturers and death squad executioners were not unusual or deviant in any way prior to practicing their new roles, nor were there any persisting deviant tendencies or pathologies among any of them in the years following their work as torturers and executioners. Their transformation was entirely explainable as being the consequence of a number of situational and systemic factors, such as the training they were given to play this new role; their group camaraderie; acceptance of the national security ideology; and their learned belief in socialists and Communists as enemies of their state. Other situational influences contributing to the new behavioral style included being made to feel special, above and better than their peers in public service by being awarded this special assignment; the secrecy of their duties being shared only with comrades in arms; and the constant pressure to produce results regardless of fatigue or personal problems.

We reported many detailed case studies that document the ordinariness of the men engaged in these most heinous of acts, sanctioned by their government, and secretly supported by the CIA at that point in the Cold War (1964–1985) against Soviet communism. The account *Torture in Brazil*, by members of the Catholic Archdiocese of São Paulo, provides detailed information of the extensive involvement of CIA agents in the torture training of Brazilian police.[46] Such information is consistent with all that is known of the systematic instruction in interrogation and torture offered at the "School of the Americas" to operatives from countries sharing a common enemy in communism.[47]

However, my colleagues and I believe that such deeds are reproducible at any time in any nation when there is an obsession with threats to national security. Before the fears and excesses engendered by the recent "war against terrorism," there was the nearly perpetual "war against crime" in many urban centers. In

New York City's police department, that "war" spawned "the commandos of the NYPD." This insular police team was given free rein to hunt down alleged rapists, robbers, and muggers as local conditions dictated. They wore T-shirts with their motto, "There is no hunting like the hunting of men." Their battle cry was "We own the night." Such a professionalized police culture was comparable to that of the Brazilian police-torturers we had studied. One of their notable atrocities was the murder of an African immigrant (Amadou Diallo, from Guinea), gunning him down with more than forty bullets while he tried to pull out his wallet to give them his ID.[48] Sometimes "bad shit happens," but usually there are identifiable situational and systemic forces operating to make it happen.

Suicide Bombers: Mindless Fanatics or Mindful Martyrs?

Amazingly, what holds true for these violence workers is comparable to the transformation of young Palestinians from students into suicide bombers intent on killing innocent Israeli civilians. Recent media accounts converge on the findings from more systematic analyses of the process of becoming a suicidal killer.[49]

Who adopts this fatalistic role? Is it poor, desperate, socially isolated, illiterate young people with no career and no future? Not at all. According to the results of a recent study of four hundred al-Qaeda members, three quarters of that sample came from the upper or middle class. This study by the forensic psychiatrist Marc Sageman also found other evidence of the normality and even superiority of these youths turned suicide bombers. The majority, 90 percent, came from caring, intact families. Two thirds had gone to college; two thirds were married; and most had children and jobs in science and engineering. "These are the best and brightest of their society in many ways," Sageman concludes.[50]

Anger, revenge, and outrage at perceived injustice are the motivational triggers for deciding to die for the cause. "People desire death when two fundamental needs are frustrated to the point of extinction," according to the psychologist Thomas Joiner in his treatise *Why People Die by Suicide.* The first need is one we have pointed to as central to conformity and social power, the need to belong with or connect to others. The second need is the need to feel effective with or to influence others.[51]

Ariel Merari, an Israeli psychologist who has studied this phenomenon extensively for many years, outlines the common steps on the path to these explosive deaths.[52] First, senior members of an extremist group identify young people who appear to have an intense patriotic fervor based on their declarations at a public rally against Israel or their support of some Islamic cause or Palestinian action. Next, they are invited to discuss how seriously they love their country and hate Israel. They are asked to commit to being trained. Those who do commit become part of a small secret cell of three to five youths. They learn the tricks of the trade from their elders: bomb making, disguise, and selecting and timing targets.

Finally, they make public their private commitment by making a videotape,

declaring themselves to be "the living martyr" for Islam (*"al-shahid-al-hai"*). In one hand they hold the Koran, in the other a rifle; the insignia on their headband declares their new status. This video binds them to the final deed, because it is sent to their families. The recruits are also told the Big Lie that not only will they earn a place beside Allah, but their relatives will also be entitled to a high place in Heaven because of their martyrdom. The suicidal pie is sweetened with a sizable financial incentive, or a monthly pension, that goes to their family.

Their photo is emblazoned on posters that will be put on walls everywhere in the community the moment they succeed in their mission—to become inspirational models for the next round of suicide bombers. To stifle their concerns about the pain from wounds inflicted by exploding nails and other bomb parts, the recruits are assured that before the first drop of their blood touches the ground they will already be seated at the side of Allah, feeling no pain, only pleasure. The die is cast; their minds have been carefully prepared to do what is ordinarily unthinkable. Of course, the rhetoric of dehumanization serves to deny the humanity and innocence of their victims.

In these systematic ways a host of normal, angry young men and women become transformed into heroes and heroines. Their lethal actions model self-sacrifice and total commitment as true believers to the cause of the oppressed. That message is sent loud and clear to the next cadre of young suicide bombers in waiting.

We can see that this program utilizes a variety of social psychological and motivational principles to assist in turning collective hatred and general frenzy into a dedicated, seriously calculated program of indoctrination and training for individuals to become youthful living martyrs. It is neither mindless nor senseless, only a very different mind-set and with different sensibilities than we have been used to witnessing among young adults in most countries.

For his new film, *Suicide Killers*, the French filmmaker Pierre Rehov interviewed many Palestinians in Israeli jails who were caught before detonating their bombs or had abetted would-be attacks. His conclusion about them resonates with the analyses presented here: "Every single one of them tried to convince me it was the right thing to do for moralistic reasons. These aren't kids who want to do evil. These are kids who want to do good. . . . The result of this brainwashing was kids who were very good peope inside (were) believing so much that they were doing something great."[53]

The suicide, the murder, of any young person is a gash in the fabric of the human family that we elders from every nation must unite to prevent. To encourage the sacrifice of youth for the sake of advancing the ideologies of the old must be considered a form of evil that transcends local politics and expedient strategies.

"Perfect 9/11 Soldiers" and "Ordinary British Lads" Are Bombing Us

Two final examples of the "ordinariness" of mass murderers are worth mentioning. The first comes from an in-depth study of the 9/11 hijackers, whose suicidal

terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., resulted in the deaths of nearly three thousand innocent civilians. The second comes from the London police reports of suspected suicide bombers of London's Underground and a double-decker bus in June 2005 that resulted in scores of deaths and serious injuries.

The carefully researched portraits of several of the 9/11 terrorists by the reporter Terry McDermott in *Perfect Soldiers* underscores just how ordinary these men were in their everyday lives.[54] His research led McDermott to an ominous conclusion: "It is likely that there are a great many more men just like them" out there throughout the world. One review of this book takes us back to Arendt's banality-of-evil thesis, updated for our new era of global terrorism. *The New York Times*' reviewer Michiko Kakutani offers us a scary postscript: "Perfect Soldiers replaces the caricatures of outsize 'evil geniuses' and 'wild-eyed fanatics' with portraits of the 9/11 plotters as surprisingly mundane people, people who might easily be our neighbors or airplane seatmates."[55]

That frightening scenario was played out in the subsequent coordinated attacks on London's transit system by a team of suicide bombers, "mundane murderers," who anonymously rode a subway train or a bus. To their friends, relatives, and neighbors in the northern England city of Leeds, these young Muslim men were "ordinary British lads."[56] Nothing in their past history would mark them as dangerous; indeed, everything about them enabled these "ordinary lads" to fit in seamlessly in their town, at their jobs. One was a skilled cricket player who gave up drinking and women to lead a more devout life. Another was the son of a local businessman who ran a fish-and-chips shop. Another was a counselor who worked effectively with disabled children and had recently become a father and moved his family into a new home. Unlike the 9/11 hijackers, who had raised some suspicions as foreigners seeking flight training in the United States, these young men were homegrown, flying well below any police radar. "It's completely out of character for him. Someone must have brainwashed him and made him do it," reflected a friend of one of them.

"The most terrifying thing about suicide bombers is their sheer normality," concludes Andrew Silke, an expert on the subject.[57] He notes that in all the forensic examinations of the bodies of dead suicide bombers there have never been traces of alcohol or drugs. Their mission is undertaken with a clear mind and dedication.

And as we have seen, whenever there has been a student shooting in a school, as in Columbine High School in the United States, those who thought they knew the perpetrators typically report, "He was such a good kid, from a respectable family . . . you just can't believe he would do it." This harkens back to the point I raised in our first chapter—how well do we really know other people?—and its corollary—how well do we know ourselves to be certain of how we would behave in novel situations under intense situational pressures?

THE ULTIMATE TEST OF BLIND OBEDIENCE TO AUTHORITY: KILLING YOUR CHILDREN ON COMMAND

Our final extension of the social psychology of evil from artificial laboratory experiments to real-world contexts comes to us from the jungles of Guyana, where an American religious leader persuaded more than nine hundred of his followers to commit mass suicide or be killed by their relatives and friends on November 28, 1978. Jim Jones, the pastor of Peoples Temple congregations in San Francisco and Los Angeles, set out to create a socialist utopia in this South American nation, where brotherhood and tolerance would be dominant over the materialism and racism he loathed in the United States. But over time and place Jones was transformed from the caring, spiritual "father" of this large Protestant congregation into an Angel of Death—a truly cosmic transformation of Luciferian proportions. For now I want only to establish the obedience to authority link between Milgram's basement laboratory in New Haven and this jungle–killing field.[58]

The dreams of the many poor members of the Peoples Temple for a new and better life in this alleged utopia were demolished when Jones instituted extended forced labor, armed guards, total restriction of all civil liberties, semistarvation diets, and daily punishments amounting to torture for the slightest breach of any of his many rules. When concerned relatives convinced a congressman to inspect the compound, along with a media crew, Jones arranged for them to be murdered as they were leaving. He then gathered almost all of the members who were at the compound and gave a long speech in which he exhorted them all to take their lives by drinking poison, cyanide-laced Kool-Aid. Those who refused were forced to drink by the guards or shot trying to escape, but it appears as though most obeyed their leader.

Jones was surely an egomaniac; he had all of his speeches and proclamations, and even his torture sessions tape-recorded—including this last-hour suicide drill. In it Jones distorts reality, lies, pleads, makes false analogies, appeals to ideology and to transcendent future lives, and outright insists that they follow his orders, as his staff is efficiently distributing the deadly poison to the more than nine hundred members gathered around him. Some excerpts from that last hour convey a sense of the death-dealing tactics he used to induce total obedience to an authority gone mad:

> Please get us some medication. It's simple. It's simple. There's no convulsions with it [of course there are, especially for the children]. . . . Don't be afraid to die. You'll see, there'll be a few people land out here. They'll torture some of our children here. They'll torture our people. They'll torture our seniors. We cannot have this. . . . Please, can we hasten? Can we hasten with that medication? You don't know what you've done. I tried. . . . Please. For God's sake, let's get on with it. We've lived—we've lived as no

> other people lived and loved. We've had as much of this world as you're gonna get. Let's just be done with it. Let's be done with the agony of it. [Applause.]. . . . Who wants to go with their child has a right to go with their child. I think it's humane. I want to go—I want to see you go, though. . . . It's not to be afeared. It is not to be feared. It is a friend. It's a friend . . . sitting there, show your love for one another. Let's get gone. Let's get gone. Let's get gone. [Children crying.]. . . . Lay down your life with dignity. Don't lay down with tears and agony. There's nothing to death. . . . it's just stepping over to another plane. Don't be this way. Stop this hysterics. . . . No way for us to die. We must die with some dignity. We must die with some dignity. We will have no choice. Now we have some choice. . . . Look children, it's just something to put you to rest. Oh, God. [Children crying.]. . . . Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, Mother, please. Mother, please, please, please. Don't—don't do this. Don't do this. Lay down your life with your child. [The full transcript is available online; see the Notes.[59]]

And they did, and they died for "Dad." The power of charismatic tyrannical leaders, like Jim Jones and Adolf Hitler, endures even after they do terrible things to their followers, and even after their demise. Whatever little good they may have done earlier somehow comes to dominate the legacy of their evil deeds in the minds of the faithful. Consider the example of a young man, Gary Scott, who followed his father into the Peoples Temple but was expelled for being disobedient. In his statement as he called the National Call-In following the broadcast of the NPR show "Father Cares: The Last of Jonestown," by James Reston, Jr., Gary describes how he was punished for an infraction of the rules. He was beaten, whipped, sexually abused, and forced to endure his worst fear of having a boa constrictor crawling all over him. But, more important, listen to the articulation of his enduring reaction to this torment. Does he hate Jim Jones? Not one bit. He has become a "true believer," a "faithful follower." Even though his father died in Jonestown at that poison fount, and he himself was brutally tortured and humiliated, Gary publically states that he still admires and even loves his "dad"—Jim Jones. Not even George Orwell's omnipotent *1984* Party could honestly claim such a victory.

Now we need to go beyond conformity and authority obedience. Powerful as these are, they are only starters. In the confrontation of potential perpetrators and victims, like guard and prisoner, torturer and sufferer, suicide bomber and civilian victims, there are processes that operate to change the psychological makeup of one or the other. Deindividuation makes the perpetrator anonymous, thereby reducing personal accountability, responsibility, and self-monitoring. This allows perpetrators to act without conscience-inhibiting limits. Dehumanization takes away the humanity of potential victims, rendering them as animallike, or as nothing. We will also inquire about conditions that make bystanders to evil become passive observers and not active intruders, helpers, or whistle-blowing he-

roes. That slice of the evil of inaction is really a cornerstone of evil because it allows perpetrators to believe that others who knew what was going on accepted and approved it even if only by their silence.

A fitting conclusion to our investigation of the social dynamics of conformity and obedience comes from the Harvard psychologist Mahrzarin Banaji:

> What social psychology has given to an understanding of human nature is the discovery that forces larger than ourselves determine our mental life and our actions—chief among these forces [is] the power of the social situation.[60]

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Investigating Social Dynamics: Deindividuation, Dehumanization, and the Evil of Inaction

The historical account of humans is a heap of conspiracies, rebellions, murders, massacres, revolutions, banishments, the very worst effects that avarice, faction, hypocrisy, perfidiousness, cruelty, rage, madness, hatred, envy, lust, malice, and ambition could produce. . . . I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.

—Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1727)[1]

Perhaps Jonathan Swift's total condemnation of our human race—of us Yahoos—is a bit extreme, but consider that he wrote this critique several hundred years before the advent of genocides throughout the modern world, before the Holocaust. His views reflect a basic theme in Western literature that "Mankind" has suffered a great fall from its original state of perfection, starting with Adam's act of disobedience against God when he succumbed to Satan's temptation.

The social philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau elaborated this theme of the corrupting influence of social forces by envisioning human beings as "noble, primitive savages" whose virtues were diminished by contact with corrupting society. In stark opposition to this conception of human beings as the innocent victims of an all-powerful, malignant society is the view that people are born evil—genetic bad seeds. Our species is driven by wanton desires, unlimited appetites, and hostile impulses unless people are transformed into rational, reasonable, compassionate human beings by education, religion, and family, or controlled by the discipline imposed upon them by the authority of the State.

Where do you stand in this ages-old debate? Are we born good and then corrupted by an evil society or born evil and redeemed by a good society? Before casting your ballot, consider an alternative perspective. Maybe each of us has the capacity to be a saint or a sinner, altruistic or selfish, gentle or cruel, dominant or submissive, perpetrator or victim, prisoner or guard. Maybe it is our social circumstances that determine which of our many mental templates, our potentials, we develop. Scientists are discovering that embryonic stem cells are capable of becoming virtually any kind of cell or tissue and ordinary skin cells can be turned into embryonic stem cells. It is tempting to expand these biological concepts and

what is now known about the developmental plasticity of the human brain to the "plasticity" of human nature.[2]

What we are is shaped both by the broad systems that govern our lives—wealth and poverty, geography and climate, historical epoch, cultural, political and religious dominance—and by the specific situations we deal with daily. Those forces in turn interact with our basic biology and personality. I have argued earlier that the potential for perversion is inherent in the complexity of the human mind. The impulse toward evil and the impulse toward good together comprise the most fundamental duality in human nature. This conception offers a complex, richer portrait of the pride and puzzles in human actions.

We have examined the power of group conformity and obedience to authority that can dominate and subvert individual initiative. Next, we add insights from research into the domains of deindividuation, dehumanization, and bystander apathy, or the "evil of inaction." This information will complete the foundation for us to fully appreciate how ordinary, good individuals—perhaps even you, gentle reader—can be led at times to do bad things to others, even bad deeds that violate any sense of common decency or morality.

DEINDIVIDUATION: ANONYMITY AND DESTRUCTIVENESS

William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies* asks how a simple change in one's external appearance can trigger dramatic changes in overt behavior. Good British choirboys are transformed into murderous little beasts by simply painting their faces. When food runs out on their desert island, a group of boys, led by Jack Merridew, try to kill a pig—but they can't complete the act because killing has been inhibited by their Christian morality. Then Jack decides to paint his face into a mask, and as he does, a frightening metamorphosis occurs as he sees his reflection in the water:

> He looked in astonishment, no longer at himself but at an awesome stranger. He spilt the water and leapt to his feet, laughing excitedly. Beside the pool his sinewy body held up a mask that drew their eyes and appalled them [the other boys]. He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling. He capered toward Bill, and the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness.

After the other boys in Jack's gang also disguise themselves with painted masks, they are readily able to "Kill the pig. Cut her throat. Spill her blood."[3] Once that alien deed of killing another creature is accomplished, they then relish the fun of killing both animals and their human enemies, notably the intellectual boy nicknamed "Piggy." Might makes right, and all hell breaks loose as Ralph, the good-boy leader, is hunted down by the herd.

Is there any psychological validity to the notion that disguising one's exter-

nal appearance can drastically infect behavioral processes? I attempted to answer that question with a set of studies that helped stimulate a new field of inquiry on the psychology of deindividuation and antisocial behavior.[4]

The Shocking Behavior of Anonymous Women

The basic procedure in this first experiment involved having female college students believe they were delivering a series of painful electric shocks to other women, under the guise of a believable "cover story." They would have multiple opportunities to shock each of two other young women whom they saw and heard from behind a one-way mirror. Half of the student volunteers were randomly assigned to a condition of anonymity, or *deindividuation*, half to a condition where their identity was made salient, or *individuation*. The four college student subjects, in each of the ten separately tested deindividuation groups, had their appearance concealed by hoods and loose, oversized lab coats, their names replaced by numbers, one to four. The experimenter treated them as an anonymous group, not as individuals. These procedures were performed allegedly to mask their nonverbal behavior so that others could not detect their reactions. The comparison group, by contrast, was given name tags that helped to make them feel unique, but everything else was the same for them as for those in the deindividuated groups. Both the deindividuated and the comparison subjects were in four-woman groups, and both were asked to repeatedly shock each of two women "victims" over the course of twenty trials.

The cover story was that the target women were subjects in a study of creativity under stress. The job of our participants was to stress them by administering painful electric shocks while I, as the experimenter in the next room, also behind the mirror, administered the creativity test.

Unlike in the Milgram paradigm, there was no authority directly pressuring them to act aggressively by delivering these painful shocks because I did not interact with them at all during the shock episodes. The students could see me through the observation window along with each of the two women in the alleged creativity study. In addition, there was no group conformity pressure exerted on them because they did not interact with one another, being in separate cubicles adjacent to one another. Finally, there was not even pressure on them to perform the task in order not to violate the rationale for the study. If any one of the four group members delivered a shock, the target woman would act hurt, so there would be sufficient stress induced to impact her creativity. Thus, not shocking would be neither disobedient nor confrontational—one could be merely a passive observer of teammates' shocking instead of an active perpetrator.

The behavior of interest was the *duration* of shock administered—how long each student continued to hold down the shock button after the shock-ready signal appeared. Their decision was not whether to press the shock switch but how quickly to pull their finger off the switch or to keep pressing it down and deliver

longer shocks to the victims. Of course, they could choose not to follow the instructions and refuse to even press the shock switch at all (no one ever did that).

One of the complicit women had been portrayed as very nice, the other as "bitchy," in their tape-recorded interviews. This was done to create divergent attitudes toward them in the minds of their "stress inducers." Actually, they were both research confederates, trained to act as though they were in pain when a shock light lit up and to give a convincing performance that the students in the other room could witness.

Before the experiment began, each of the students in the study was given a sample of the painful shock (of 75 volts) so they knew that it would hurt—but of course, no shock was actually given in the experiment. For each of twenty trials, the women had to decide whether and for how long they would administer this standard level of painful shock to a woman who was seemingly suffering in pain from their actions. Then, after the first target woman left, she was replaced by the second target woman for yet another round of twenty shock trials. Because each member of the four-person experimental and comparison groups was tested in adjacent individual cubicles, their "teammates" could not directly influence their behavior. Nevertheless, they had a sense of being in a group from having been together initially while they listened together to the tape recordings. It is important to note that except for the manipulation of anonymity versus identifiability, everything in the study was identical for both groups.

The results were clear: The women in the deindividuation condition delivered twice as much shock to both victims as did the comparison women who had been randomly assigned to the individuated condition. Moreover, the women who were anonymous shocked both victims equally, the one they had previously rated as pleasant and the other they had rated as unpleasant. It did not matter what they had previously felt about them once they had their finger on the trigger. They also increased shock time for both over the course of the twenty trials, holding their finger down ever longer on the shock switch as their victims twisted and moaned right before them. In contrast, the individuated women discriminated between the likeable and unpleasant targets, shocking the pleasant woman less over time than they did the unpleasant one.

That the anonymous women ignored their previous liking or disliking of the two target women when they had the chance to harm them speaks to a dramatic change in their mentality when in this psychological state of deindividuation. The escalation of shock, with repeated opportunities to administer its painful consequences, appears to be an upward-spiraling effect of the emotional arousal that is being experienced. The agitated behavior becomes self-reinforcing, each action stimulating a stronger, less controlled next reaction. Experientially, it comes not from sadistic motives of wanting to harm others but rather from the energizing sense of one's domination and control over others at that moment in time.

This basic paradigm has been repeated with comparable results in a host of laboratory and field studies, using deindividuating masks, administering white noise, or throwing Styrofoam balls at the target victims, and with military personnel from the Belgian Army as well as with schoolchildren and a variety of college students. Similar escalations of shock over time were also found in a study where teacher-shockers were supposed to be educating their pupil-victims—they too delivered increasing levels of shock across training sessions.[5]

The Stanford Prison Experiment, as you recall, relied on the deindividuating silver reflecting sunglasses for the guards and staff along with standard military-style uniforms. One important conclusion flows from this body of research: anything, or any situation, that makes people feel anonymous, as though no one knows who they are or cares to know, reduces their sense of personal accountability, thereby creating the potential for evil action. This becomes especially true when a second factor is added: if the situation or some agency gives them *permission* to engage in antisocial or violent action against others, as in these research settings, people are ready to go to war. If, instead, the situation conveys merely a reduction of self-centeredness with anonymity and encourages prosocial behavior, people are ready to make love. (Anonymity in party settings often makes for more socially engaging parties.) So William Golding's insight about anonymity and aggression was psychologically valid—but in more complex and interesting ways than he depicted.

> Sure, this robe of mine doth change my disposition.
>
> —William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*

Anonymity can be conferred on others not only with masks but also by the way that people are treated in given situations. When others treat you as if you are not a unique individual but just an undifferentiated "other" being processed by the System, or your existence is ignored, you feel anonymous. The sense of a lack of personal identifiability can also induce antisocial behavior. When a researcher treated college student research volunteers either humanely or as "guinea pigs" in an experiment, guess who ripped him off when he wasn't looking? Later on, these students found themselves alone in the professor-researcher's office with the opportunity to steal coins and pens from a bowl full of them. Those who were in the anonymity condition stole much more often than did the humanely treated students.[6] Kindness can be more than its own reward.

Halloween Aggression by Schoolchildren

What happens when children go to an unusual Halloween party where they put on costumes and are given permission by their teacher to play aggressive games for prizes? Will anonymity plus opportunity to aggress lead children to engage in more aggression over time?

Elementary school children attended a special, experimental Halloween party given by their teacher and supervised by a social psychologist, Scott Fraser.[7] There were many games to play, and the children could win tokens for each game they won. These tokens could be exchanged for gifts at the end of the party. The more tokens you won, the better the toys you could get, so the motivation to win as many tokens as possible was high.

Half the games were nonaggressive in nature, and half involved confrontations between two children to reach the goal. For example, a nonaggressive game might have individual students trying to speedily retrieve a beanbag in a tube, while a potentially aggressive game would entail two students competing to be the first one to get that one beanbag out of the tube. The aggression observed typically involved the competitors' pushing and shoving each other. It was not very extreme but was characteristic of first-stage physical encounters between children.

The experimental design used only one group, in which each child served as his or her own control. This procedure is known as the A-B-A format—pre-baseline/change introduced/post-baseline. The children first played the games without costumes (A), then with costumes (B), then again without costumes (A). Initially, while the games were played, the teacher said the costumes were on the way so they would start the fun while they waited for them to arrive. Then, when the costumes arrived, they were put on in different rooms so the children's identities were not known to each other, and they played the same games but now in costume. In the third phase, the costumes were removed (allegedly to be given to other children in other parties) and the games continued as in the first phase. Each phase of the games lasted about an hour.

The data are striking testimony to the power of anonymity. Aggression among these young schoolchildren increased significantly as soon as they put the costumes on. The percentage of the total time that these children played the aggressive games more than doubled from their initial base level average, up from 42 percent (in A) to 86 percent (in B). Equally interesting was the second major result: aggression had a high negative payoff. The more time a child spent engaged in the aggressive games, the fewer tokens she or he won during that phase of the party. Being aggressive thus cost the children a loss of tokens. Acting in the aggressive games took more time than the nonaggressive games and only one of two contestants could win, so overall, being aggressive lost valued prizes. However, that did not matter when the children were costumed and anonymous. The smallest number of tokens won was during the second, anonymity B, phase, where aggression was highest; only an average of 31 tokens were won, compared to 58 tokens in the A phase.

A third important finding was that there was no carryover of aggressive behavior from the high level in the B phase to the last A-phase level, which was comparable to the initial A phase. The percentage of aggressive acts dropped to 36 percent, and the number of tokens won soared to 79. Thus, we can conclude that

the behavior change brought on by anonymity did not create a dispositional, internal change, but only an outward response change. Change the situation, and behavior changes in lockstep fashion. The use of this A-B-A design also makes apparent that perceived anonymity was sufficient to dramatically alter behavior in each time frame. Anonymity facilitated aggression even though the consequences of that physical aggression were not in the child's best immediate interest of winning tokens exchangeable for fine prizes. Aggression became its own reward. Goals that were distant took a backseat to "the fun and games" of the present moment. (We will see a similar phenomenon operating in some of the Abu Ghraib abuses.)

In a related field study, Halloween trick-or-treaters visiting local homes in their own costumes were more likely to steal goodies when they were anonymous than when identifiable. Friends of the researchers put out bowls filled with candies and others with coins, each of which was labeled "Take one." Going beyond that limit constituted a transgression, stealing. Some children arrived alone, others in groups of friends. In the anonymous condition, the homeowner made it evident that he or she could not tell who they were. With their identities concealed by their costumes, the majority of those in groups stole the candy and money (just as did those college students in the study where they were treated as "guinea pigs"). This was in contrast to the nonanonymous condition, wherein the adult host had first asked them to reveal their identity behind their masks.[8]

Among the more than seven hundred children studied in this natural situation, more transgressions were found when they were in anonymous groups (57 percent) than when anonymous and alone (21 percent). Fewer transgressions occurred when nonanonymous children were alone (8 percent) than when they were in groups of other nonanonymous trick-or-treaters (21 percent). Even when alone and identifiable, the temptation of easy money and delicious treats was too great for some children to pass up. However, adding the full-anonymity dimension turned that singular temptation into an overwhelming passion for most children to take all the goodies they could.

Cultural Wisdom: How to Make Warriors Kill in War but Not at Home

Let's leave the laboratory and the games at children's parties to go back to the real world, where these issues of anonymity and violence may take on life-and-death significance. Specifically, let's look at the differences between societies that go to war without having young male warriors change their appearance and those that always include ritual transformations of appearance by painting faces and bodies or masking the warriors (as in *Lord of the Flies*). Does a change in external appearance make a significant difference in how warring enemies are then treated?

A cultural anthropologist, R. J. Watson,[9] posed that question after reading my earlier work on deindividuation. His data source was the Human Relations Area Files, where information on cultures around the world is archived in the form of

reports of anthropologists, missionaries, psychologists, and others. Watson found two pieces of data on societies in which warriors did or did not change their appearance prior to going to war and the extent to which they killed, tortured, or mutilated their victims, a decidedly deadly dependent variable—the ultimate in outcome measures.

The results are striking confirmation of the prediction that anonymity promotes destructive behavior—when permission is also given to behave in aggressive ways that are ordinarily prohibited. War provides the institutionally approved permission to kill or wound one's adversaries. This investigator found that, of the twenty-three societies for which these two data sets were present, in fifteen warriors changed their appearance. They were the societies that were the most destructive; fully 80 percent of them (twelve of fifteen) brutalized their enemies. By contrast, in seven of eight of the societies in which the warriors did *not* change their appearance before going into battle, they did not engage in such destructive behavior. Another way to look at this data is that 90 percent of the time when victims of battle were killed, tortured, or mutilated, it was by warriors who had first changed their appearance and deindividuated themselves.

Cultural wisdom dictates that a key ingredient in transforming ordinarily nonaggressive young men into warriors who can kill on command is first to change their external appearance. Most wars are about old men persuading young men to harm and kill other young men like themselves. For the young men, it becomes easier to do so if they first change their appearance, altering their usual external façade by putting on military uniforms or masks or painting their faces. With the anonymity thus provided in place, out go their usual internal compassion and concern for others. When the war is won, the culture then dictates that the warriors return to their peacetime status. This reverse transformation is readily accomplished by making the warriors remove their uniforms, take off their masks, wash away the paint, and return to their former personae and peaceful demeanor. In a sense, it is as though they were in a macabre social ritual, unknowingly using the A-B-A paradigm of Fraser's Halloween experiment. Peaceful when identifiable, murderous when anonymous, peaceful again when returned to the identifiable condition.

Certain environments convey a sense of transient anonymity in those who live or behave in their midst, without changing their physical appearance. To demonstrate the impact of the anonymity of place in facilitating urban vandalism, my research team did a simple field study. Recall from chapter 1 that we abandoned cars on the streets near the uptown campus of New York University in the Bronx, New York, and near Stanford University's campus in Palo Alto, California. We photographed and videotaped acts of vandalism against these cars, which were clearly abandoned (license plates removed, hoods raised). In the anonymity of the Bronx setting, several dozen passersby, on the street or in cars, stopped to vandalize the car within forty-eight hours. Most were reasonably well-

dressed adults, who stripped the car of any valuable items or simply destroyed it—all in the daytime. By contrast, over a week's time, not a single passerby engaged in any act of vandalism against the car abandoned in Palo Alto. This demonstration was the only empirical evidence cited in support of the "Broken Windows Theory" of urban crime. Environmental conditions contribute to making some members of society feel that they are anonymous, that no one in the dominant community knows who they are, that no one recognizes their individuality and thus their humanity. When that happens, we contribute to their transformation into potential vandals and assassins. (For full details of this research and Broken Windows Theory, see our Lucifer Effect website.)

Deindividuation Transforms Our Apollonian Nature into a Dionysian Nature

Let's assume that the "good" side of people is the rationality, order, coherence, and wisdom of Apollo, while the "bad" side is the chaos, disorganization, irrationality, and libidinous core of Dionysus. The Apollonian central trait is constraint and the inhibition of desire; it is pitted against the Dionysian trait of uninhibited release and lust. People can become evil when they are enmeshed in situations where the cognitive controls that usually guide their behavior in socially desirable and personally acceptable ways are blocked, suspended, or distorted. The suspension of cognitive control has multiple consequences, among them the suspension of: conscience, self-awareness, sense of personal responsibility, obligation, commitment, liability, morality, guilt, shame, fear, and analysis of one's actions in cost-benefit calculations.

The two general strategies for accomplishing this transformation are: (a) reducing the cues of social accountability of the actor (no one knows who I am or cares to) and (b) reducing concern for self-evaluation by the actor. The first cuts out concern for social evaluation, for social approval, doing so by making the actor feel anonymous—the process of deindividuation. It is effective when one is functioning in an environment that conveys anonymity and diffuses personal responsibility. The second strategy stops self-monitoring and consistency monitoring by relying on tactics that alter one's state of consciousness. This is accomplished by means of taking alcohol or drugs, arousing strong emotions, engaging in hyperintense actions, getting into an expanded present-time orientation where there is no concern for past or future, and projecting responsibility outward onto others rather than inward toward oneself.

Deindividuation creates a unique psychological state in which behavior comes under the control of immediate situational demands and biological, hormonal urges. Action replaces thought, seeking immediate pleasure dominates delaying gratification, and mindfully restrained decisions give way to mindless emotional responses. A state of arousal is often both a precursor to and a consequence of deindividuation. Its effects are amplified in novel or unstructured situations where typical response habits and character traits are nullified. One's

vulnerability to social models and situational cues is heightened; therefore, it becomes as easy to make love as to make war—it all depends on what the situation demands or elicits. In the extreme, there is no sense of right and wrong, no thoughts of culpability for illegal acts or Hell for immoral ones.[10] With inner restraints suspended, behavior is totally under external situational control; outer dominates inner. What is possible and available dominates what is right and just. The moral compass of individuals and groups has then lost its polarity.

The transition from Apollonian to Dionysian mentalities can be swift and unexpected, making good people do bad things, as they live temporarily in the expanded present moment without concerns for the future consequences of their actions. Usual constraints on cruelty and libidinal impulses melt away in the excesses of deindividuation. It is as if there were a short circuit in the brain, cutting off the frontal cortex's planning and decision-making functions, while the more primitive portions of the brain's limbic system, especially its emotion and aggression center in the amygdala, take over.

The Mardi Gras Effect: Communal Deindividuation as Ecstasy

In ancient Greece, Dionysus was unique among the gods. He was seen as creating a new level of reality that challenged traditional assumptions and ways of living. He represented both a force for the liberation of the human spirit from its staid confinement in rational discourse and orderly planning, and a force of destruction: lust without limits and personal pleasure without societal controls. Dionysus was the god of drunkenness, the god of insanity, the god of sexual frenzy and battle lust. Dionysus' dominion includes all states of being that entail the loss of self-awareness and rationality, the suspension of linear time, and the abandonment of the self to those urges in human nature that overthrow codes of behavior and public responsibility.

Mardi Gras has its origins as a pagan, pre-Christian ceremony now recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as occurring on the Tuesday (Fat Tuesday, or Shrove Tuesday) just before Ash Wednesday. That holy day marks the start of the Christian liturgical Season of Lent with its personal sacrifices and abstinence leading to Easter Sunday, forty-six days later. Mardi Gras celebrations begin on the Twelfth Night Feast of the Epiphany, when the three kings visited the newborn Jesus Christ.

In practice, Mardi Gras celebrates the excess of libidinous pleasure seeking, of living for the moment, of "wine, women, and song." Cares and obligations are forgotten while celebrants indulge their sensual nature in communal revelries. It is a Bacchanalian festivity that loosens behavior from its usual constraints and reason-based actions. However, there is always the preconscious awareness that this celebration is transitory, soon to be replaced by even greater than usual limits on personal pleasures and vices with the advent of Lent. "The Mardi Gras effect" involves temporarily giving up the traditional cognitive and moral con-

straints on personal behavior when part of a group of like-minded revelers bent on having fun now without concern for subsequent consequences and liabilities. It is deindividualization in group action.

DEHUMANIZATION AND MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

Dehumanization is the central construct in our understanding of "man's inhumanity to man." Dehumanization occurs whenever some human beings consider other human beings to be excluded from the moral order of being a human person. The objects of this psychological process lose their human status in the eyes of their dehumanizers. By identifying certain individuals or groups as being outside the sphere of humanity, dehumanizing agents suspend the morality that might typically govern reasoned actions toward their fellows.

Dehumanization is a central process in prejudice, racism, and discrimination. Dehumanization stigmatizes others, attributing to them a "spoiled identity." For example, the sociologist Erving Goffman[11] described the process by which those who are disabled are socially discredited. They become not fully human and thus tainted.

Under such conditions, it becomes possible for normal, morally upright, and even usually idealistic people to perform acts of destructive cruelty. Not responding to the human qualities of other persons automatically facilitates inhumane actions. The golden rule then becomes truncated: "Do unto others as you would." It is easier to be callous or rude toward dehumanized "objects," to ignore their demands and pleas, to use them for your own purposes, even to destroy them if they are irritating.[12]

A Japanese general reported that it had been easy for his soldiers to brutally massacre Chinese civilians during Japan's pre–World War II invasion of China, "because we thought of them as *things*, not people like us." This was obviously so during the "Rape of Nanking" in 1937. Recall the description (in chapter 1) of the Tutsis by the woman who orchestrated many of the rapes of them—they were nothing more than "insects," "cockroaches." Similarly, the Nazi genocide of the Jews began by first creating through propaganda films and posters a national perception of these fellow human beings as inferior forms of animal life, as vermin, as voracious rats. The many lynchings of black people by mobs of whites in cities throughout the United States were likewise not considered crimes against humanity because of the stigmatization of them as only "niggers."[13]

Behind the My Lai massacre of hundreds of innocent Vietnamese civilians by American soldiers was the dehumanizing "gooks" label that GIs had for all of those different-looking Asian people.[14] Yesterday's "gooks" have become today's "hajjis" and "towel heads" in the Iraq War as a new corps of soldiers derogates these different-looking citizens and soldiers. "You just sort of try to block out the fact that they're human beings and see them as enemies," said Sergeant Mejia.

who refused to return to action in what he considered an abominable war. "You call them 'hajis', you know? You do all the things that make it easier to deal with killing them and mistreating them."[15]

That such labels and their associated images can have powerful motivating effects was demonstrated in a fascinating controlled laboratory experiment (mentioned in chapter 1, elaborated here).

Experimental Dehumanization: Animalizing College Students

My Stanford University colleague Albert Bandura and his students designed a powerful experiment that elegantly demonstrates the power of dehumanizing labels to foster harm against others.[16]

Seventy-two male volunteers from nearby junior colleges were divided into three-member "supervisory teams" whose task was to punish the inadequate decision making of other college students who were allegedly serving as a group of decision makers. The real subjects of the study were, of course, the students playing the role of supervisors.

On each of twenty-five bargaining trials, the supervisors heard the decision-making team (reported to be in an adjacent room) supposedly formulating collective decisions. The supervisors were given information they used to evaluate the adequacy of the decision on each trial. Whenever a bad decision was made, it was the job of this supervisory team to punish the error by administering a shock. They could choose the shock intensity from a mild level of 1 to a maximum level of 10 on any trial, which all the members of the decision-making team would receive.

The supervisors were told that participants from different social backgrounds were included in this project to increase its generality, but each group of decision makers was composed of people with similar attributes. This was done so that the positive or negative labels soon to be applied to them would hold for the entire group.

The researchers varied two features of this basic situation: how the "victims" were labeled and how personally responsible the supervisors were for the shocks they administered. The volunteers were randomly assigned to three conditions of labeling—dehumanized, humanized, or neutral—and two conditions of responsibility—individualized or diffused.

Let's first consider how the labeling was imposed and its effects. Then we will see how the responsibility variations operated. After settling into the study, each group of participants believed they were overhearing an interchange over the intercom between the research assistant and the experimenter about the questionnaires the decision makers had allegedly completed. The assistant remarked in a brief aside that the personal qualities exhibited by this group confirmed the opinion of the person by whom they had been recruited. In the *dehumanized* condition, the decision makers were characterized as "an animalistic, rotten bunch." By

contrast, in the *humanized* condition, they were characterized as a "perceptive, understanding, and otherwise humanized group." No evaluative references were made about those in the third, *neutral* condition.

It should be made clear that the participants never interacted with their shock victims and therefore could not make such evaluations personally or evaluate their adequacy. The labels were secondhand attributions made about other young college men, supposedly also volunteers functioning in an assigned role in this situation. So did the labels have any effect on how these college students punished those they were allegedly supervising? (There were, in fact, no actual "others," only standardized tape feedback.)

Indeed, the labels stuck and had a big impact on the extent to which the students punished their supervisees. Those labeled in the dehumanizing way, as "animals," were shocked most intensively, and their shock level increased linearly over ten trials. It also climbed higher and higher over trials, up to an average of 7 out of the maximum of 10 for each group of participants. Those labeled "nice" were given the smallest amount of shock, while the unlabeled, neutral group fell in the middle of these two extremes.

Further, during the first trial, there was no difference at all between the three experimental treatments in the level of shock administered—they all administered the same low level of shock. Had the study ended then, the conclusion would have been that the labels made no difference. However, with each successive trial, as the errors of the decision makers allegedly multiplied, the shock levels of the three groups diverged. Those shocking the so-called animals shocked them more intensely over time, a result comparable to the escalating shock level of the deindividuated female college students in my earlier study. That rise in aggressive responding over time, with practice, or with experience illustrates a self-reinforcing effect. Perhaps the pleasure is not so much in inflicting pain as in the sense of power and control one feels in such a situation of dominance—giving others what they deserve to get. The researchers point to the disinhibiting power of labeling to divest other people of their human qualities.

On the plus side in this study, that same arbitrary labeling also resulted in others being treated with greater respect if someone in authority had labeled them positively. Those perceived as "nice" were harmed the least. Thus, the power of humanization to counteract punitiveness is of equal theoretical and social significance as the phenomenon of dehumanization. There is an important message here about the power of words, labels, rhetoric, and stereotyped labeling, to be used for good or evil. We need to refashion the childhood rhyme "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never harm me," to alter the last phrase to "but bad names can kill me, and good ones can comfort me."

Finally, what about the variations in *responsibility* for the level of shock that was being administered? Significantly higher levels of shock were given when participants believed that the shock level was an average response of their team

rather than when it was the direct level of each individual's personal decision. As we have seen before, diffusion of responsibility, in any form it takes, lowers the inhibition against harming others. As one might predict, the very highest levels of shock—and anticipated harm—were administered both when participants felt less personally responsible and when their victims were dehumanized.

When Bandura's research team evaluated how the participants had justified their performance, they found that dehumanization promoted the use of self-absolving justifications, which in turn were associated with increasing punishment. These findings about how people disengage their usual self-sanctions against behaving in ways that are detrimental to others led Bandura to develop a conceptual model of "moral disengagement."

Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement

This model begins by assuming that most people adopt moral standards because of undergoing normal socialization processes during their upbringing. Those standards act as guides for prosocial behavior and deterrents of antisocial behavior as defined by their family and social community. Over time, these external moral standards imposed by parents, teachers, and other authorities become internalized as codes of personal conduct. People develop personal controls over their thoughts and actions that become satisfying and provide a sense of self-worth. They learn to sanction themselves to prevent acting inhumanely and to foster humane actions. The self-regulatory mechanisms are not fixed and static in their relation to a person's moral standards. Rather, they are governed by a dynamic process in which moral self-censure can be selectively activated to engage in acceptable conduct; or, at other times, moral self-censure can be disengaged from reprehensible conduct. Individuals and groups can maintain their sense of moral standards by simply disengaging their usual moral functioning at certain times, in certain situations, for certain purposes. It is as if they shift their morality into neutral gear and coast along without concern for hitting pedestrians until they later shift back to a higher gear, returning to higher moral ground.

Bandura's model goes further in elucidating the specific psychological mechanisms individuals generate to convert their harmful actions into morally acceptable ones as they selectively disengage the self-sanctions that regulate their behavior. Because this is such a fundamental human process, Bandura argues that it helps to explain not only political, military, and terrorist violence but also "everyday situations in which decent people routinely perform activities that further their interests but have injurious human effects."[17]

It becomes possible for any of us to disengage morally from any sort of destructive or evil conduct when we activate one or more of the following four types of cognitive mechanisms.

First, we can redefine our harmful behavior as honorable. Creating moral justification for the action, by adopting moral imperatives that sanctify violence, does this. Creating advantageous comparisons that contrast our righteous behav-

ior to the evil behavior of our enemies also does this. (We only torture them; they behead us.) Using euphemistic language that sanitizes the reality of our cruel actions does this as well. ("Collateral damage" means that civilians have been bombed into dust; "friendly fire" means that a soldier has been murdered by the stupidity or intentional efforts of his buddies.)

Second, we can minimize our sense of a direct link between our actions and its harmful outcomes by diffusing or displacing personal responsibility. We spare ourselves self-condemnation if we do not perceive ourselves as the agents of crimes against humanity.

Third, we can change the way we think about the actual harm done by our actions. We can ignore, distort, minimize, or disbelieve any negative consequences of our conduct.

Finally, we can reconstruct our perception of victims as deserving their punishment, by blaming them for the consequences, and of course, by dehumanizing them, perceiving them to be beneath the righteous concerns we reserve for fellow human beings.

Understanding Dehumanization Is Not Excusing It

It is important once again to add here that such psychological analyses are never intended to excuse or make light of the immoral and illegal behaviors of perpetrators. By making explicit the mental mechanisms people use to disengage their moral standards from their conduct, we are in a better position to reverse the process, reaffirming the need for moral engagement as crucial for promoting empathic humaneness among people.

However, before moving on it is important to make concrete the notion that people in positions of power and authority often reject attempts at causal situational analyses in matters of great national concern. Instead, at least in one recent instance, they have endorsed simplistic dispositional views that would have made Inquisition judges smile.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is a Stanford University professor of political science with a specialization in the Soviet military. Her training should have made her sensitive to systems-level analyses of complex political problems. However, not only was that perspective missing during an interview with Jim Lehrer on his *NewsHour* (July 28, 2005), but instead she championed a dogmatic, simplistic dispositional view. In response to her interviewer's question about whether U.S. foreign policy is promoting rather than eliminating terrorism, Rice attacked any such thinking as "excuse mongering," as she makes it clear that terrorism is simply about "evil people": "When are we going to stop making excuses for the terrorists and saying that somebody is making them do it? No, these are simply evil people who want to kill. And they want to kill in the name of a perverted ideology that really is not Islam, but they somehow want to claim that mantle to say that this is about some kind of grievance. This isn't about some kind of grievance. This is an effort to destroy, rather than to build. And until everybody

in the world calls it by name—the evil that it is—stops making excuses for them, then I think we're going to have a problem."

I Am More Human than You: The Infrahumanization Bias

Beyond perceiving and derogating others in the "out-group" with animallike qualities, people also deny them any "human essence." *Out-group infrahumanization* is a newly investigated phenomenon in which people tend to attribute uniquely human emotions and traits to their in-group and deny their existence in out-groups. It is a form of emotional prejudice.[18]

However, we go further in declaring that the essence of humanness resides primarily in ourselves, more so than in any others, even our in-group members. While we attribute infrahumaness to out-groups, as less than human, we are motivated to see ourselves as more human than others. We deny uniquely human traits and even human nature to others, relative to our own egocentric standard. This *self-humanization bias* is the complement of the other-infrahumanization bias. These tendencies appear to be rather general and multifaceted. A team of Australian researchers concluded their investigation into the perception of humanness with a variant of the famous quote by the ancient Roman writer Terence. He proudly proclaimed, "Nothing human is alien to me." Its ironic twist notes, "Nothing human may be alien to me, but something human is alien to you."[19] (It is unlikely that such an imperial "I" exists among members of collectivist cultures, but we await new research to inform us of the limits of such egocentrism.)

Creating Dehumanized Enemies of the State

Among the operational principles we must add to our arsenal of weapons that trigger evil acts by ordinarily good men and women are those developed by nation-states to incite their own citizens. We learn about some of these principles by considering how nations prepare their young men to engage in deadly wars while also preparing citizens to endorse engaging in wars of aggression. A special form of cognitive conditioning through propaganda helps accomplish this difficult transformation. "Images of the enemy" are created by national media propaganda (in complicity with governments) to prepare the minds of soldiers and citizens to hate those who fit the new category "your enemy." Such mental conditioning is a soldier's most potent weapon. Without it, he might never put another young man in the crosshairs of his gun sight and fire to kill him. It induces a fear of vulnerability among citizens who can imagine what it would be like to be dominated by that enemy.[20] That fear becomes morphed into hatred and a willingness to take hostile action to reduce its threat. It extends its reaches into a willingness to send our children to die or be maimed in battle against that threatening enemy.

In *Faces of the Enemy*, Sam Keen[21] shows how archetypes of the enemy are created by visual propaganda that most nations use against those judged to be the dangerous "them," "outsiders," "enemies." These visual images create a consen-

sual societal paranoia that is focused on the enemy who would do harm to the women, children, homes, and God of that nation's way of life, destroying its fundamental beliefs and values. Such propaganda has been widely practiced on a worldwide scale. Despite national differences in many dimensions, it is still possible to categorize all such propaganda into a select set utilized by *"homo hostilis."* In creating a new evil enemy in the minds of good members of righteous tribes, "the enemy" is: aggressor, faceless, rapist, godless, barbarian, greedy, criminal, torturer, murderer, an abstraction, or a dehumanized animal. Scary images reveal one's nation being consumed by the animals that are most universally feared: snakes, rats, spiders, insects, lizards, gigantic gorillas, octopi, or even "English pigs."

A final point on the consequences of adopting a dehumanized conception of selected others is the unthinkable things that we are willing to do to them once they are officially declared different and undesirable. More than 65,000 American citizens were sterilized against their will during an era (1920s–1940s) when eugenics advocates used scientific justifications to purify the human race by ridding it of all those with undesirable traits. We expect that view from Adolf Hitler but not from one of America's most revered jurists, Oliver Wendell Holmes. He ruled in a majority opinion (1927) that compulsory sterilization laws, far from being unconstitutional, were a social good:

> It is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind. Three generations of imbeciles are enough.[22]

Please recall the research cited in chapter 12 on students at the University of Hawaii who were willing to endorse the "final solution" to eliminate the unfit, even their own family members if necessary.

Both the United States and England have had a long history of involvement in the "war against the weak." They have had their fair share of vocal, influential proponents of eugenics advocating and scientifically justifying plans to rid their nation of the misfits while enhancing the privileged status of the most fit.[23]

THE EVIL OF INACTION: PASSIVE BYSTANDERS

> The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.
>
> —British statesman Edmund Burke
>
> [W]e must learn that passively to accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and thereby to become a participant in its evil.
>
> —Martin Luther King, Jr.[24]

Our usual take on evil focuses on the violent, destructive actions of perpetrators, but the failure to act can also be a form of evil, when helping, dissent, disobedience, or whistle-blowing are required. One of the most critical, least acknowledged contributors to evil goes beyond the protagonists of harm to the silent chorus who look but do not see, who hear but do not listen. Their silent presence at the scene of evil doings makes the hazy line between good and evil even fuzzier. We ask next: Why don't people help? Why don't people act when their aid is needed? Is their passivity a personal defect of callousness, of indifference? Alternatively, are there identifiable social dynamics once again at play?

The Kitty Genovese Case: Social Psychologists to the Rescue, Belatedly

In a major urban center, such as New York City, London, Tokyo, or Mexico City, one is surrounded by literally tens of thousands of people. We walk beside them on the streets, sit near them in restaurants, movies, buses, and trains, wait in line with them—but remain unconnected, as if they do not really exist. For a young woman in Queens, they did not exist when she most needed them.

> For more than half an hour, 38 respectable, law-abiding citizens in Queens [New York] watched a killer stalk and stab a woman in three separate attacks in Kew Gardens. Twice the sound of their voices and the sudden glow of their bedroom lights interrupted him and frightened him off. Each time he returned, sought her out and stabbed her again. Not one person telephoned the police during the assault; one witness called the police after the woman was dead. [*The New York Times*, March 13, 1964]

A recent reanalysis of the details of this case casts doubt upon how many people actually saw the events unfolding and whether they really comprehended what was happening, given that many were elderly and had awoken suddenly in the middle of the night. Nevertheless, there seems to be no question that many residents of this well-kept, usually quiet, almost suburban neighborhood heard the chilling screams and did not help in any way. Kitty died alone on a staircase, where she could no longer elude her crazed murderer.

Yet only a few months later, there was an even more vivid and chilling depiction of how alienated and passive bystanders can be. An eighteen-year-old secretary had been beaten, choked, stripped, and raped in her office. When she finally broke away from her assailant, naked and bleeding, she ran down the stairs of the building to the doorway screaming "Help me! Help me! He raped me!" A crowd of about forty persons gathered on the busy street and watched as the rapist dragged her back upstairs to continue his abuse. No one came to her aid! Only the chance arrival of passing police prevented her further abuse and possible murder (*The New York Times*, May 6, 1964).

Researching Bystander Intervention

Social psychologists heeded the alarm by initiating a series of pioneering studies on bystander intervention. They countered the usual slew of dispositional analyses about what is wrong with the callous New York bystanders by trying to understand what in the *situation* freezes the prosocial actions of ordinary people. At the time, both Bibb Latané and John Darley[25] were professors at New York City universities—Columbia and NYU, respectively—so they were close to the heart of the action. Their field studies were done in a variety of New York City venues, such as on subways and street corners, and in laboratories.

Their research generated a counterintuitive conclusion: the more people who witness an emergency, the *less* likely any of them will intervene to help. Being part of a passively observing group means that each individual assumes that others are available who could or will help, so there is less pressure to initiate action than there is when people are alone or with only one other observer. The mere presence of others diffuses the sense of personal responsibility of any individual to get involved. Personality tests of participants showed no significant relationship between any particular personality characteristics and the speed or likelihood of intervening in staged emergencies.[26]

New Yorkers, like Londoners or others from big cities around the world, are likely to help and will intervene if they are directly asked or when they are alone or with a few others. The more people present who might help in an emergency situation, the more we assume that someone else will step forward, so we do not have to become energized to take any personal risk. Rather than callousness, failure to intervene is not only because one fears for one's life in a violent scenario, but also because one denies the seriousness of the situation, fears doing the wrong thing and looking stupid or worries about the costs of getting involved in "someone else's business." There is also an emergent group norm of passive nonaction.

Want Help? Just Ask for It

A former student of mine, Tom Moriarity, conducted a convincing demonstration that a simple situational feature can facilitate active bystander intervention among New Yorkers.[27] In two scenarios, Tom arranged for a confederate to leave her purse on a table in a public, busy restaurant or her radio on a blanket at a crowded beach. Then another member of his research team would pretend to steal the purse or the radio as Tom recorded the actions of those near the scene of the simulated crime. Half the time virtually no one intervened and let the criminal escape with the goods. However, the other half of the time virtually everyone stopped the criminal in his tracks and prevented the crime. What made the difference?

In the first case, the woman merely asked the person nearby for the time,

making minimal social contact, before leaving the scene temporarily. However, in the second case, she made a simple request to a nearby person to keep an eye on her purse or her radio until she returned. That direct request created a social obligation to protect this stranger's property—an obligation that was honored fully. Want help? Ask for it. Chances are good that you will get it, even from allegedly callous New Yorkers or other large-city folks.

The implications of this research also highlight another theme we have been developing, that social situations are created by and can be modified by people. We are not robots acting on situational demand programs but can change any programming by our creative and constructive actions. The problem is that too often we accept others' definition of the situation and their norms, rather than being willing to take the risk of challenging the norm and opening new channels of behavioral options. One interesting consequence of the line of research on passive and responsive bystanders has been the emergence of a relatively new area of social psychological research on helping and altruism (well summarized in a monograph by David Schroeder and his colleagues).[28]

How Good Are Good Samaritans in a Hurry?

A team of social psychologists staged a truly powerful demonstration that the failure to help strangers in distress is more likely due to situational variables than to dispositional inadequacies.[29] It is one of my favorite studies, so let's role-play with you once again as a participant.

Imagine you are a student studying for the ministry at Princeton University's Theological Seminary. You are on your way to deliver a sermon on the Good Samaritan so that it can be videotaped for a psychology experiment on effective communication. You know the passage from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10, quite well. It is about the only person who stopped to help a victim in distress on the side of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. The Gospel tells us that he will reap his just rewards in Heaven for having been the Good Samaritan on Earth—a biblical lesson for all of us to heed about the virtues of altruism.

Imagine further that as you are heading from the Psychology Department to the videotaping center, you pass a stranger huddled up in an alley in dire distress, on the ground moaning, clearly in need of some aid. Now, can you imagine any conditions that would make you *not* stop to be that Good Samaritan, especially when you are mentally rehearsing the Good Samaritan parable at that very moment?

Rewind to the psychology laboratory. You have been told that you are late for the appointed taping session and so should hurry along. Other theology students were randomly assigned to conditions in which they were told that they had a little time or a lot more time to get to the taping center. But why should time pressure on you (or the others) make a difference if you are a good person, a holy person, a person thinking about the virtue of intervening to help strangers in dis-

tress, as did that old-time Good Samaritan? I am willing to wager that you would like to believe it would *not* make a difference, that in that situation you would stop and help, no matter what the circumstances. And so would the other seminary students come to the aid of the victim in distress.

Guess again: if you took the bet, you lost. The conclusion from the point of view of the victim is this: Don't be a victim in distress when people are late and in a hurry. Almost every one of those seminary students—fully 90 percent of them—passed up the immediately compelling chance to be a Good Samaritan because they were in a hurry to give a sermon about it. They experienced the clash in task demands: to help science or to help a victim. Science won, and the victim was left to suffer. (As you would now expect, the victim was an acting confederate.)

The more time the seminarians believed they had, the more likely they were to stop and help. Thus, the situational variable of *time pressure* accounted for the major variations in who helped and who were passive bystanders. There was no need to resort to dispositional explanations about theology students being callous, cynical, or indifferent, as the nonhelping New Yorkers were assumed to be in the case of poor Kitty Genovese. When the research was replicated, the same result occurred, but when the seminarians were on their way to fulfill a less important task, the vast majority did stop to help. The lesson from this research is to not ask *who* does or does not help but rather *what* the social and psychological features of that situation were when trying to understand situations in which people fail to help those in distress.[30]

The Institutionalized Evil of Inaction

In situations where evil is being practiced, there are perpetrators, victims, and survivors. However, there are often observers of the ongoing activities or people who know what is going on and do not intervene to help or to challenge the evil and thereby enable evil to persist by their inaction.

It is the good cops who never oppose the brutality of their buddies beating up minorities on the streets or in the back room of the station house. It was the good bishops and cardinals who covered over the sins of their predatory parish priests because of their overriding concern for the image of the Catholic Church. They knew what was wrong and did nothing to really confront that evil, thereby enabling these pederasts to continue sinning for years on end (at the ultimate cost to the Church of billions in reparations and many disillusioned followers).[31]

Similarly, it was the good workers at Enron, WorldCom, Arthur Andersen, and hosts of similarly corrupt corporations who looked the other way when the books were being cooked. Moreover, as I noted earlier, in the Stanford Prison Experiment it was the good guards who never intervened on behalf of the suffering prisoners to get the bad guards to lighten up, thereby implicitly condoning their continually escalating abuse. It was I, who saw these evils and limited only physi-

cal violence by the guards as my intervention while allowing psychological violence to fill our dungeon prison. By trapping myself in the conflicting roles of researcher and prison superintendent, I was overwhelmed with their dual demands, which dimmed my focus on the suffering taking place before my eyes. I too was thus guilty of the evil of inaction.

At the level of nation-states, this inaction, when action is required, allows mass murder and genocide to flourish, as it did in Bosnia and Rwanda and has been doing more recently in Darfur. Nations, like individuals, often don't want to get involved and also deny the seriousness of the threat and the need for immediate action. They also are ready to believe the propaganda of the rulers over the pleas of the victims. In addition, there often are internal pressures on decision makers from those who "do business there" to wait it out.

One of the saddest cases I know of the institutional evil of inaction occurred in 1939, when the U.S. government and its humanitarian president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, refused to allow a ship loaded with Jewish refugees to embark in any port. The SS *St. Louis* had come from Hamburg, Germany, to Cuba with 937 Jewish refugees escaping the Holocaust. The Cuban government reversed its earlier agreement to accept them. For twelve days these refugees and the ship's captain tried desperately to get permission from the U.S. government to enter a port in Miami, which was in clear view. Denied permission to enter this or any other port, the ship turned back across the Atlantic. Some refugees were accepted in Britain and other countries, but many finally died in Nazi concentration camps. Imagine being so close to freedom and then dying as a slave laborer.

When incompetence is wedded to indifference and indecision, the outcome is the failure to act when action is essential for survival. The Katrina hurricane disaster in New Orleans (August 2005) is a classic case study in the total failure of multiple, interlocking systems to mobilize the enormous resources at their disposal to prevent the suffering and deaths of many citizens. Despite advance warnings of the impending disaster of the worst kind imaginable, city, state, and national authorities did not engage in the basic preparations needed for evacuation and for the safety of those who could not leave on their own. In addition to the municipal and state authority systems failing to communicate adequately (because of political differences at the top), the response from the Bush administration was nil, too late, and too little when it did come. Incompetent, inexperienced heads of the Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) and of the Department of Homeland Security failed to engage the National Guard, Army reserve units, Red Cross, state police, or Air Force personnel to provide food, water, blankets, medicine, and more for the hundreds of thousands of survivors living in squalor for days and nights on end. A year later, much of the city is still in shambles, with entire neighborhoods decimated and deserted, thousands of homes marked for destruction, but little help has been forthcoming. Touring these desolate areas was heartbreaking for me. Critics contend that the systems'

failed response can be traced to class and racial issues, because most of the survivors who could not evacuate were lower-class African Americans. This evil of inaction has been responsible for the deaths, despair, and disillusion of many citizens of New Orleans. Perhaps as many as half of those who did finally leave may never come home again.[32]

Et tu, Brute?

Each of us has to wonder if, and hope that when the time comes, we will have the courage of our convictions to be a responsive bystander who sounds the alarm when our countrymen and -women are violating their oath of allegiance to country and to humanity. However, we have seen in these chapters that pressures to conform are enormous, to be a team player, not to rock the boat, and not to risk the sanctions against confronting any system. Those forces are often coupled with the top-down power of authority systems to convey expectations indirectly to employees and underlings that unethical and illegal behavior is appropriate under special circumstances—which they define. Many of the recently uncovered scandals at the highest levels of government, in the military, and in business involve the toxic mix of unverbalized authority expectations conveyed to subordinates who want to be accepted in the "Inner Ring," with the tacit approval of a horde of knowingly silent partners.

"Toxic leaders cast their spell broadly. Most of us claim we abhor them. Yet we frequently follow—or at least tolerate—them, be they our employers, our CEOs, our senators, our clergy, or our teachers. When toxic leaders don't appear on their own, we often seek them out. On occasion, we even create them by pushing good leaders over the toxic line." In Jean Lipman-Blumen's penetrating analysis of the dynamic relationship between leaders and followers in *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, we are reminded that recognizing the early signs of toxicity in our leaders can enable us to take preventive medicine, not passively imbibe their seductive poison.[33]

> Throughout history, it has been the inaction of those who could have acted; the indifference of those who should have known better; the silence of the voice of justice when it mattered most; that has made it possible for evil to triumph.
>
> —Haile Selassie, former emperor of Ethiopia

WHY SITUATIONS AND SYSTEMS MATTER

It is a truism in psychology that personality and situations interact to generate behavior; people are always acting within various behavioral contexts. People are both products of their different environments and producers of the environments they encounter.[34] Human beings are not passive objects simply buffeted about by

environmental contingencies. People usually select the settings they will enter or avoid and can change the setting by their presence and their actions, influence others in that social sphere, and transform environments in myriad ways. More often than not, we are active agents capable of influencing the course of events that our lives take and also of shaping our destinies.[35] Moreover, human behavior and human societies are greatly affected by fundamental biological mechanisms as well as by cultural values and practices.[36]

The individual is the coin of the operating realm in virtually all of the major Western institutions of medicine, education, law, religion, and psychiatry. These institutions collectively help create the myth that individuals are always in control of their behavior, act from free will and rational choice, and are thus personally responsible for any and all of their actions. Unless insane or of diminished capacity, individuals who do wrong should know that they are doing wrong and be punished accordingly. Situational factors are assumed to be little more than a set of minimally relevant extrinsic circumstances. In evaluating various contributors to any behavior of interest, the dispositionalists put the big chips on the Person and the chintzy chips on the Situation. That view seemingly honors the dignity of individuals, who should have the inner strength and will power to resist all temptations and situational inducements. Those of us from the other side of the conceptual tracks believe that such a perspective denies the reality of our human vulnerability. Recognizing such common frailties in the face of the kinds of situational forces we have reviewed in our journey thus far is the first step in shoring up resistance to such detrimental influences and in developing effective strategies that reinforce the resilience of both people and communities.

The situationist approach should encourage us all to share a profound sense of humility when we are trying to understand "unthinkable," "unimaginable," "senseless" acts of evil—violence, vandalism, suicidal terrorism, torture, or rape. Instead of immediately embracing the high moral ground that distances us good folks from those bad ones and gives short shrift to analyses of causal factors in that situation, the situational approach gives those "others" the benefit of "attributional charity." It preaches the lesson that any deed, for good or evil, that any human being has ever done, you and I could also do—given the same situational forces.

Our system of criminal legal justice over-relies on commonsense views held by the general public about what things cause people to commit crimes—usually only motivational and personality determinants. It is time for the legal justice system to take into account the substantial body of evidence from the behavioral sciences about the power of the social context in influencing behavior, criminal actions as well as moral ones. My colleagues Lee Ross and Donna Shestowsky have offered a penetrating analysis of the challenges that contemporary psychology poses to legal theory and practice. Their conclusion is that the legal system might adopt the model of medical science and practice by taking advantage of current research on what goes wrong, as well as right, in how the mind and body work:

> The workings of the criminal justice system should not continue to be guided by illusions about cross-situational consistency in behavior, by erroneous notions about the impact of dispositions versus situations in guiding behavior, or by failures to think through the logic of "person by situation" interactions, or even comforting but largely fanciful notions of free will, any more than it should be guided by once common notions about witchcraft or demonic possession.[37]

Situated Identities

Our personal identities are socially situated. We are *where* we live, eat, work, and make love. It is possible to predict a wide range of your attitudes and behavior from knowing any combination of "status" factors—your ethnicity, social class, education, and religion and where you live—more accurately than by knowing your personality traits.

Our sense of identity is in large measure conferred on us by others in the ways they treat or mistreat us, recognize or ignore us, praise us or punish us. Some people make us timid and shy; others elicit our sex appeal and dominance. In some groups we are made leaders, while in others we are reduced to being followers. We come to live up to or down to the expectations others have of us. The expectations of others often become self-fulfilling prophecies. Without realizing it, we often behave in ways that confirm the beliefs others have about us. Those subjective beliefs can create new realities for us. We often become who other people think we are, in their eyes and in our behavior.[38]

Can You Be Judged Sane in an Insane Place?

Situations confer their social identities on us even when it should be obvious that it is not our true personal identity. Recall in the "mock ward" study at Elgin State Mental Hospital (chapter 12) that hospital staff mistreated the "mental patients" on their ward in a variety of ways; however, they were not actually patients but fellow staff members dressed as and playing the role of patients. Similarly, in the Stanford Prison Experiment, everyone knew that the guards were college kids pretending to be guards and that the prisoners were college kids pretending to be prisoners in that mock prison. Did it matter what their real identity was? Not really, as you saw; not after a day or so. They became their situated identities. In addition, I too became The Prison Superintendent in walk, talk, and distorted thought—when I was in that place.

Some situations "essentialize" the roles people are assigned; each person must be what the role demands when he is on that stage set. Image, if you will, that you are a totally normal person who finds yourself hospitalized in a psychiatric ward in a mental hospital. You are there because a hospital admissions officer mistakenly labeled you as "schizophrenic." That diagnosis was based on the fact that you complained to him about "hearing voices," nothing more. You believe that you do not deserve to be there and realize that the way to be released is

to act as normal and as pleasant as you can. Obviously the staff will soon realize there has been some mistake, you are not a mentally ill patient, and send you back home. Right?

Don't count on this happening if you were in that setting. You might never be released, according to a fascinating study conducted by another of my Stanford colleagues, David Rosenhan, with the wonderful title "On Being Sane in Insane Places."[39]

David and seven associates each went through the same scenario of making an appointment with a different mental hospital admissions officer and complaining of hearing voices or noises, "thuds," but giving no other unusual symptoms. Each of them was admitted to their local mental hospital, and as soon as they were dressed in the patient's pajamas and scuffies, they behaved in a pleasant, apparently normal fashion at all times. The big question was how soon the staff would catch on, realize they were really sane, and bid them adieu.

The simple answer in every one of the eight cases, in each of the eight mental wards, was *Never!* If you are in an Insane Place, you must be an Insane Person because Sane People are not Patients in Insane Asylums—so the situated-identity reasoning went. To be released took a lot of doing, after several weeks, and only with help from colleagues and lawyers. Finally, after the suitably sane Eight were checked out, written across each of their hospital charts was the same final evaluation: "Patient exhibits schizophrenia in remission." Meaning that, no matter what, the staff still believed that their madness could erupt again some day—so don't throw away those hospital scuffies!

Assessing Situational Power

At a subjective level, we can say that you have to be embedded within a situation to appreciate its transformative impact on you and others who are similarly situated. Looking in from the outside won't do. Abstract knowledge of the situation, even when detailed, does not capture the affective tone of the place, its nonverbal features, its emergent norms, or the ego involvement and arousal of being a participant. It is the difference between being an audience member at a game show and being the contestant onstage. It is one reason that experiential learning can have such potent effects, as in the classroom demonstrations by Ms. Elliott and Ron Jones we visited earlier. Do you recall that when forty psychiatrists were asked to predict the outcome of Milgram's experimental procedure, they vastly underestimated its powerful authority impact? They said that only 1 percent would go all the way up to the maximum shock level of 450 volts. You have seen just how far off they were. They failed to appreciate fully the impact of the social psychological setting in making ordinary people do what they would not do ordinarily.

How important is situational power? A recent review of 100 years of social psychological research compiled the results of more than 25,000 studies including 8 million people.[40] This ambitious compilation used the statistical technique

of *meta-analysis*, which is a quantitative summary of findings across a variety of studies that reveals the size and consistency of such empirical results. Across 322 separate meta-analyses, the overall result was that this large body of social psychological research generated substantial effect sizes—that the power of social situations is a reliable and robust effect.

This data set was reanalyzed to focus only on research relevant for understanding the social context variables and principles that are involved when ordinary people engage in torture. The Princeton University researcher Susan Fiske found 1,500 separate effect sizes that revealed the consistent and reliable impact of situational variables on behavior. She concluded, "Social psychological evidence emphasizes the power of the social context, in other words, the power of the interpersonal situation. Social psychology has accumulated a century of knowledge across a variety of studies about how people influence each other for good or ill."[41]

LOOKING AHEAD TO APPLES, BARRELS, WHEELERS, AND DEALERS

Now the time has come to collect our analytical gear and move our journey to the far-off foreign land of Iraq to try to understand an extraordinary phenomenon of our times: the digitally documented abuses of Iraqis detained in the prison at Abu Ghraib. Revelations of these violations against humanity moved out from that secret dungeon in Tier 1A, that little shop of horrors, to reverberate around a shocked world. How could this happen? Who was responsible? Why had photographs been taken that implicated the torturers in the act of committing their crimes? These and more questions filled the media for months on end. The president of the United States vowed "to get to the bottom of this." A host of politicians and pundits knowingly proclaimed that it was all the work of a few "bad apples." The abusers were nothing more than a band of sadistic "rogue soldiers."

Our plan is to reexamine what happened and how it happened. We are now adequately prepared to contrast this standard dispositional analysis of identifying the evil perpetrators, the "bad apples," in the otherwise presumably good barrel, with our search for situational determinants—the nature of that bad barrel. We will also review some of the conclusions from various independent investigations into these abuses that will take us beyond situational factors to implicate the System—military and political—in our explanatory mix.