

LIBET, B. (1993) The neural time factor in conscious and unconscious events. In *Experimental and theoretical studies of consciousness*. (Ciba Foundation Symposium 174), 123–146. Chichester: Wiley.

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S. SPENCE

STR: Prins' article was well argued and enlightening. Throughout he did rather limit his discussion by focusing upon those rare and baffling cases which seem to defy rational explanation. This has the effect of making evil, or rather evil acts, seem to require a supernatural explanation. Of some relevance here are two studies from the psychology literature which displayed how easily evil acts could be evoked from ordinary people using straightforward, albeit ingenious, experimental preparations.

Most of Milgram's (1974) subjects were easily persuaded to give near-fatal electric shocks (as they believed) to another person. Although the subjects were not happy about this they nonetheless proceeded to administer the shocks despite the screams and shouts of the 'victim'.

In Zimbardo's simulation of a prison environment the investigators were at pains to use normal healthy volunteers (Haney *et al*, 1973). The experiment had to be halted after six days as the people assigned the role of prison warders had become bullying, cruel and coercive. In this case the 'warders' appeared to be enjoying their opportunity to exercise power over a group who they knew to be wholly innocent. These two somewhat neglected studies illustrate starkly the propensity for evil behaviour from the man or woman in the street given the appropriate circumstances. Since the way in which we construe evil is as suitable a topic for psychological, and indeed psychiatric, enquiry as is the nature of evil itself, I believe they are useful reminders that evil acts are not just something that other people in deviant groups do.

HANEY, C., BANKS, C. & ZIMBARDO, P. G. (1973) Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *International Journal of Criminology & Penology*, 1, 69–97.

MILGRAM, S. (1974) *Obedience to Authority*. New York: Harper & Row.

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AUTHOR'S REPLY: I do not find myself in fundamental disagreement with any of the correspon-

dents, but perhaps a few observations will help to promote further thought and debate.

My former colleague Allen Bartholomew takes me to task for not referring to personality disorder (and in particular to psychopathy). In fact, on p. 299 of my editorial, I do make passing reference to these conditions in connection with the ambivalence of mental health professionals to work with this group of individuals. Bartholomew's comments on the legal position of psychopathic disorder in the State of Victoria are timely in view of the Reed Committee's recent report on the subject in the UK (Dept. of Health and Home Office, 1994).

This theme is developed further by Childs in his Scottish contribution. In this, he suggests a wider remit for psychiatrists in the courts, notably in relation to matters of mental illness. However, I am not sure to what extent mental health professionals 'South of the Border' would wish to espouse the adoption of the flexibility of the Scottish Children's Hearing System in relation to adult cases. Despite this, it has always seemed to me that, as he says, 'Scottish common sense and moderation' in their legal system have much to commend them. (It is worth noting that some of our own innovations have been based upon their sensible practices – for example, our adoption of the notion of Diminished Responsibility in our 1957 Homicide Act.)

Cooklin emphasises the manner in which the Bulger case has tended to demonise children and has placed an undue and unhelpful emphasis upon juvenile misdemeanours, raising the emotional temperature in our discussion of them. She suggests that we underestimate the *immaturity* of children (currently the tendency is to do the reverse) most notably in determining their age for criminal responsibility.

Spence thoughtfully suggests that the harder face of neuroscience may make a substantial contribution to psychiatry's concerns with responsibility. However, a recent contribution by Buchanan (1994) would suggest caution in espousing uncritically too strong a claim in this area. Finally, Paul Whitby reminds us not to rely too heavily upon notorious *causes célèbres* and to make too many extrapolations from them. More importantly perhaps, he alerts us to the capacity of 'ordinary' men and women to perpetrate evil (violent) acts. I address this important phenomenon in some detail in Chapter 7 of the revised edition of *Offenders, Deviants or Patients* (to be published by Routledge in Spring, 1995). All the correspondents indicate the need for a wide-ranging inter-disciplinary debate of this important topic. Perhaps the College should