

Neither Good Nor Bad

Neither Good Nor Bad:
Why Human Beings Behave How They Do

By

Gerhard Besier

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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By Gerhard Besier

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTH	adrenocorticotrophic hormone
ADHD	attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
BdV	Bund der Vertriebenen (Association of Expellees)
BGH	Bundesgerichtshof (Federal Court of Justice in Germany)
Bold	blood oxygen level dependent
CDU/CSU	Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands / Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Democratic Union of Germany / Christian Social Union of Bavaria, Germany)
CNS	central nervous system
COMT	catechol-O-methyltransferase
CRH	corticotropin-releasing hormone
CS	conditioned stimulus
CT	computed tomography
DNA	deoxyribonucleic acid
EEG	electroencephalography
ERPs	event-related potentials
EU	European Union
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FC	frontal cortex
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party, Germany)
fMRI	functional magnetic resonance imaging
GABA	gamma-aminobutyric acid
GDR	German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik)
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei (Secret State Police, Third Reich)
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IfZ	Institut für Zeitgeschichte (Institute for Contemporary History)
IPN	Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (Institute for National Remembrance, Poland)
IQ	intelligence quotient
MfS	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security, GDR)
MP	Member of Parliament
MRI	magnetic resonance imaging

MRT	magnetic resonance tomography
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCO	non-commissioned officer
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party, Third Reich)
OBE	out of body experiences
OC	occipital cortex
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PC	parietal cortex
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism, Germany)
PEA	phenylethylamine
PET	positron emission tomography
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PNS	peripheral nervous system
POW	prisoner of war
PTSD	posttraumatic stress disorder
REM	rapid eye movement
rRNA	ribosomal ribonucleic acid
SA	Sturmabteilung (Storm Detachment, Third Reich)
SAD	seasonal affective disorder
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service, Third Reich)
SDO	social dominance orientation
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany, GDR)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SPECT	single-photon emission computed tomography
SS	Schutzstaffel (Defense Corps, Third Reich)
TC	temporal cortex
TMS	transcranial magnet stimulation
UN	United Nations
US	unconditioned stimulus
USA	United States of America
UV	ultraviolet
VIP	very important person
ZBoWID	Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację (Association of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy, Poland)

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FOREWORD

Gerhard Besier's is an exciting, whilst always precise text combining the disciplines of the historical sciences, brain research and psychology into a single coherent approach. Using this combination of science and humanistic disciplines, he explains why humans are "neither good nor bad" and why "human beings behave as they do"—particularly when faced with moral dilemmas. Genetic predisposition, the specific development of the brain, prenatal and early postnatal affective-emotional experience and socializing processes all combine to affect and modulate human behavior. Our culturally-determined self-concept and norms of behavior also belong to this complex, the elements of which may be rooted in neuronal structures. In addition to these stable factors, specific situations and circumstances also dictate certain kinds of behavior. From a sociological perspective, the actions of power elites are shown to play an essential role in shaping society.

Considering these premises, we have to conclude that the degree of freedom open to humans is limited. Nevertheless, developed societies have agreed that its members are responsible for their own actions, despite awareness of the myriad constraints and determinants to which our decision-making process is subject. Many of our decisions are made below the threshold of consciousness and subjected to retrospective justification. As we do not like knowledge gaps, we construct "fill-ins" to enable a coherent sense of the self and an awareness of others. We constantly work on and refine the storyline of our life. Although conscious of this situation, we persist in our longing for true self-determination, clinging onto a belief in our autonomous control over our own thoughts, emotions, and behavior. We are forced to endure the fact that our carefully developed self-perception and autobiographical narratives are repeatedly shattered by the unpredictable nature of life. Our sense of self requires repeated correction and adjustment, repair, and improvement. The fact that we can forget our failures and reinterpret them in our own favor supports this process of self-development.

Although showing a firm grasp of the relevant specialist literature from a number of fields, the text of this book is animated with examples from everyday life, making it an exciting and engaging book to read. Addressing both experts and students, this book is also indispensable for

all those general readers interested in learning more about human behavior. Stating his arguments clearly, Besier highlights the influence on our behavior of learning functions and social phenomena such as religion. His book is a skillful combination of empirical evidence and philosophical reflection. He does not subscribe to any specific world-view, but discusses the basic questions of human behavior from a range of perspectives. I recommend this book to all readers!

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INTRODUCTION

“The past 30 years have witnessed considerable and intensive international research into the questions of identity, development, human thought and its function. The results of research conducted in a number of fields ranging from Consciousness Studies to Neurology and Psychology all point in the same direction: many of our decisions are made below the surface, steered by our subconscious, emotions and experience and influenced by our environment, prejudice and relationships to other people.

Although we like to conceive of ourselves as rational beings, we are far from being the noble and wise creatures that we like to think.”

David Brooks (2011)¹

When confronted with a range of violent actions perpetrated by lone individuals—gun rampages in schools and youth camps,² abductions, torture, brutal executions, slaughter, cannibalism, rape, imprisonment, parental child-abuse, enslavement and much more, European society exhibits a constant tendency to react in terms of helpless, even perplexed horror. Seeking explanations for the apparently inexplicable, commentators often hurry to declare the perpetrators as “evil.”³ Such an attribution is usually only a code⁴ serving to explain everything or indeed nothing. Moreover, reaching judgments in this way is akin to opening up a moral “bad bank,” to house those individuals who can no longer be accommodated in our socially-constructed reality. After recovering from the initial shock, society then stages a number of memorials—usually with the assistance of the church—and retreats into something approaching a prescribed and ritualized period of mourning. However, whatever the nature of the cruelty and violence, which some people both perpetrate and

¹ Quoted in an interview published in *Der Spiegel*, no. 23, June 6, 2011, 82.

² See Martin Gerke and Heinz Rupp, eds., *Schreiben statt Schweigen: Die Schüler der Albertville-Realschule schreiben zum Amoklauf von Winnenden* (Stuttgart: VEG, 2011).

³ See the title page of *Der Spiegel*, no. 31, August 1, 2011: On the Trace of Evil (*Die Spur des Bösen*).

⁴ See Peter-Andre Alt, *Ästhetik des Bösen* (Munich: Beck, 2010).

even enjoy, we are not justified in styling them as “evil” or the “demonic” counterpart to the—equally illusory—forces of “good.”⁵

Speaking in an interview given in the aftermath of the attacks in Oslo and Utøya of July 22, 2011, the Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg claimed that “something good has emerged from the evil.”⁶ He contested that Norwegian society had reacted to the massacre with an even greater degree of solidarity and a strengthened acceptance of democratic values. In view of such reactions, we should ask ourselves whether it is possible or even right to derive anything meaningful from this act of patently mindless violence.

The crux of the matter is the question of how. What happened to transform Anders Behring Breivik into the perpetrator of a cruel crime; what made him capable of planning and executing a detailed plan in an unfeeling manner and ostensibly in the service of a higher cause? This question is not restricted to individuals: history has repeatedly demonstrated how groups and even entire nations can embark on a criminal plan united by the conviction that they were fighting for a good and just cause. That “ordinary men” are capable of making a swift transition to pursuing crimes of extensive brutality has been demonstrated by the history of a number of dictatorships, not least the two in Germany.⁷ We have to ask ourselves what led them to intern, denounce, plunder, rape, and kill their fellow men. Which circumstances occasioned such actions—what was their motivation?

We should not restrict our focus to the perpetrators of such crimes and the profile which they exhibit. Of equal and pressing importance is the question regarding their victims and the possibility of sketching an independent “victim profile.” We also need to address the question as to those who were both victims and perpetrators alike. Those adapting to the

⁵ See Eugen Sorg, *Die Lust am Bösen: Warum Gewalt nicht heilbar ist* (Munich: Nagel & Kimche in Carl Hanser Verlag, 2011); Michael Günter, *Gewalt entsteht im Kopf* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2011); Jochen Kalka, *Winnenden: Ein Amoklauf und seine Folgen* (Munich: DVA, 2011).

⁶ *Aftenposten*, August 20, 2011.

⁷ See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, victims, bystanders: the Jewish catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992); Gerhard Paul, ed., *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003); Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Gerhard Paul, eds., *Karrieren der Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Täterbiographien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004).

regime⁸ and the few opposing it, also warrant close attention. Why did people act as they did and, in many countries in the world, still do? Which empirical or theoretical models exist to explain this phenomenon?

Applying a number of historical, scientific and social-scientific approaches to this question, the study seeks to produce an integrative portrait of the various social scientific approaches to this question and advance a number of different interpretations for the genesis of such behavior. The study will draw mainly on examples from Europe. In other words, it raises the question as to whether the currently dominant European conception of man is still capable of generating meaningful explanations of human behavior in a way consistent with powerful empirical material and scientific insights.

The past few years have witnessed a new variety of *Kulturkampf* fought on the features pages of German newspapers. Legal scholars,⁹ theologians, philosophers and other academics have been outspoken in their rejection of a number of conclusions presented by research projects conducted by a range of social psychologists, clinical psychologists, behavioral biologists and neurobiologists.¹⁰ Viewed from the perspective

⁸ See Klaus Wallbaum, *Der Überläufer: Rudolf Diels (1900–1957)—Der erste Gestapo-Chef des Hitler-Regimes* (Frankfurt/M.: Lang, Dissertation, 2010); Roman Grafe, ed., *Die Schuld der Mitläufer* (Munich: Pantheon, 2010).

⁹ See Lorenz Böllinger et al., eds., *Gefährliche Menschenbilder: Biowissenschaften, Gesellschaft und Kriminalität* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010); Thomas Stompe and Hans Schanda, eds., *Der freie Wille und die Schuldfähigkeit in Recht, Psychiatrie und Neurowissenschaften* (Berlin: Med. Wiss. Verl.-Ges., 2010).

¹⁰ See Manfred Seitz, "Hat Luther doch Recht? Hirnforschung und Willensfreiheit," *Psychotherapie und Seelsorge* 1 (2005): 26–28; Andreas Klein, *Willensfreiheit auf dem Prüfstand: Ein anthropologischer Grundbegriff in Philosophie, Neurobiologie und Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2009); Uwe Laucken, "Wie kann man der Willensfreiheit den Garaus machen? Argumentationsrezepte für Neurowissenschaftler (und einige Preise, die das Befolgen kostet)," *Gestalt Theory* 28 (2006): 61–97; Alexander Kraus and Birte Kohtz, "Hirnwindungen—Quelle einer historiografischen Wende? Zur Relevanz neurowissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse für die Geschichtswissenschaft," *ZfG* 55 (2007): 842–57. See also the lecture by Jürgen Habermas considering "Freedom and Determinism" given to mark the award of the Kyoto Prize and published in Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 151–80. See also Jürgen Habermas, "The Language Game of Responsible Agency and the Problem of Free Will: How Can Epistemic Dualism Be Reconciled with Ontological Monism?" *Philosophical Explorations* 10 (2007): 13–50. See also the interview with Wolf Singer published in *Süddeutschen Zeitung*, April 24, 2006 and the correspondence between Peter Janich and Wolf Singer, published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), no. 165, July 17, 2008, 29.

of the humanities, neurobiologists and behavioral biologists have been more than assiduous in their occupation of ever-more areas of the anthropological sciences from which they have proceeded to mount an attack on the axiom *actio, reactio* and the associated consequences.¹¹ Speaking of a new “Neuro-Imperialism,” journalists with a pronounced religious background are polemicizing against the neuroscientist Gerhard Roth. As one of their number, an editor of the influential FAZ, Christian Geyer, has asked: “Who is going to stop Roth’s march through the disciplines?”¹²

Resistance to this approach is also widespread amongst philosophers. Accusing neuroscientists of overrating the significance of the brain in determining human action, they argue that such an approach has resulted in the resurgence of the traditional mind-body dichotomy with the brain taking the position of a materialized spirit. This new “mythology of the

According to Habermas, “contemporary secularism often rests on hard naturalism is based on scientific findings.” For him, this raises the question “[...] as to whether the secularized attitude of a sizeable section of society is as equally disagreeable to the normative self-conception of a post-secular society as the fundamentalist tendencies of a mass religious movement?”. Jürgen Habermas, “Die Dialektik der Säkularisierung,” *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 4 (2008): 33–46; 44. The philosopher Christine Zunke accuses the neuro-biologists of transporting implicitly ideological prejudices, working with plausible commonplaces and often overstepping the bounds of their competence. “Whereas Neurophysiology [...] applies the non-reflexive methods of the natural sciences to the brain, traditional philosophy constructs its concepts from reflection on its own thinking. The unity of self-consciousness and the nature of free will, the differentiation between true and false thoughts and the key attributes of human reason are not [...] determined by the nature of the material, but can only be grasped through comprehending reflexive thought.” Christine Zunke, *Kritik der Hirnforschung: Neurophysiologie und Willensfreiheit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2008), 13. See also “Bericht über eine kritische Tagung des Berliner Max Planck Instituts für Wissenschaftsgeschichte,” *FAZ*, no. 47, February 25, 2009, no. 3; Peter Janich, *Kein neues Menschenbild: Zur Sprache der Hirnforschung* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2009). Felix Hasler, *Neuromythologie: Eine Streitschrift gegen die Deutungsmacht der Hirnforschung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2012).

¹¹ See Hans J. Markowitsch, “Warum wir keinen freien Willen haben: Der sogenannte frei Wille aus Sicht der Hirnforschung,” *Psychologische Rundschau* 55 (2004): 163–68, 166. See also Gerhard Roth, “Hume, Willensfreiheit und Hirnforschung,” *Aufklärung und Kritik* 18 (2011): 167–183. See also Michael Gazzaniga, *Who’s in Charge? Free Will and the Science of the Brain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), esp. 205ff.

¹² Christian Geyer, “Gerhard Roth, der Bindestrich-Mann,” *FAZ*, no. 146, June 28, 2010, 26.

brain,”¹³ they argue, is nothing less than a “mereological fallacy”—according a part of a living being the brain—certain characteristics which can in fact only be claimed by the being as a whole. Within this debate, the Berlin philosopher Jan Slaby called upon his discipline to confront those engaged in this new neuro research (which accords itself the status of a new meta-discipline) with genuine questions from a philosophical and epistemological perspective. “Which assumed parameters are being incorporated in the constitution, approach and interpretation of experimental results? Which “back stories” guide such researchers in their endeavors? Which paradigmatic conception of man, life, society, and science underpins their whole endeavors? Which implicit aims guide their research and the applications which they are designed to serve?” These and other questions, as he believes, need to be addressed.¹⁴

A further criticism of this new neuroscience, advanced by Maxwell R. Bennet and Peter M. S. Hacker, focuses on a level of conceptual confusion to which they believe the new movement is subject in drawing wide-ranging conclusions about the nature of mankind from limited empirical data.¹⁵ Seeking to mount a defense of their discipline, Daniel Dennet and John Searle replied that Bennet’s and Hacker’s “remedial program” for the natural sciences is based on normative dogmatic structures taken from the philosophy of language. Instead of conducting an a priori investigation of grammatical logic, semantic work must necessarily be based on empirical findings. Indeed, they argued that only such a step would establish the preconditions necessary for a fruitful debate.¹⁶ Similar methodological reservations have been raised against the application of socio-psychological models in the approach to research in the historical sciences into the motivation and nature of perpetrators. It is argued that failing to address the theoretical implications of such an approach results in

¹³ See Maxwell R. Bennet and Peter M. S. Hacker, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2009); Francisco Ortega and Fernando Vidal, eds., *Neurocultures: Glimpses into an Expanding Universe* (Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2011).

¹⁴ Jan Slaby, “Perspektiven einer kritischen Philosophie der Neurowissenschaften,” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 59 (2011): 375–90, 386. See also Suparna Choudhury and Jan Slaby, eds., *Critical Neuroscience: A Handbook of the Social and Cultural Contexts of Neuroscience* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

¹⁵ See Maxwell R. Bennet, Daniel Dennett, Peter M. S. Hacker, and John Searle, *Neuroscience and Philosophy: Brain, Mind, and Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Ibid.

considerable and inherent contradictions within the findings presented by such investigations.¹⁷

Adding fuel to the fire of this debate, the neurobiologist Wolf Singer has advanced a highly provocative explanation for religious experiences. Subsuming encounters with saints, the Mother of God or even the Lord himself under the label of the “Jesus syndrome,” he explains such phenomena as hallucinations resulting from sleep-deprivation or hyperventilation. Such moments of epiphany, he argues, result from the contraction of certain areas of the brain. Prayer is explained as auto-suggestion and “successes” in this area are categorized as self-fulfilling prophecies.¹⁸ Such arguments infuriate not only churchmen, but also the employees of the oldest university faculties—the theologians.

The extent to which biologists and psychologists advance naturalist causes for human behavior¹⁹—including religion²⁰—raises the question as

¹⁷ See Christoph Schneider, “Täter ohne Eigenschaften? Über die Tragweite sozialpsychologischer Modelle in der Holocaust-Forschung,” *Mittelweg* 36 20 (2011): 3–23.

¹⁸ See, for example, the interview given by Wolf Singer in the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, no. 44, October 23, 2008, 45. See also Wolf Singer and Matthieu Ricard, *Hirnforschung und Meditation: Ein Dialog* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2008).

¹⁹ See e.g. the classical works seeking to explain religion as a natural social phenomenon, above all, Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 2001) and Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006). For an account from the perspective of religious anthropology, see Daniel N. Finkel, Paul Swartwout, and Richard Sosis, “The Socio-Religious Brain: A Developmental Model,” accessed February 13, 2009, <http://www.anth.uconn.edu/faculty/sosis/publications/socioreligiousbrain.pdf>.

²⁰ See Andrew Newberg, Eugene d’Aquili, and Vince Rause, *Why God Won’t Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001); Dimitrios Kapogiannis, et al., “Cognitive and Neural Foundations of Religious Belief,” *PNAS* (2009), doi: 10.1073/pnas.0811717106. It is noteworthy that—in comparison to great number of theologians—a number of religious studies scholars are engaged in close inter-disciplinary exchange with biologists and other researchers investigating the origins and development of religion and the modes in which they function. See Rüdiger Vaas and Michael Blume, *Gott, Gene und Gehirn: Warum Glaube nützt; Die Evolution der Religiosität* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 2009). The unlikelihood of interdisciplinary contacts between Evolutionary Biology and Theology is demonstrated (albeit unwillingly) by the volume edited by Joachim Klose and Jochen Oehler, *Gott oder Darwin? Vernünftiges Reden über Schöpfung und Evolution* (Berlin: Springer, 2008). Even the existence of evil, a central category of Christian anthropology, has been cast into considerable doubt

to whether our perceptions of man and the worldmaster-narratives passed on and altered over time—are in need of fundamental revision.²¹ This applies not only to religiously-influenced world views, but also to those of a humanist and rationalist provenance, themselves the product of the scientific emancipation from traditional transcendental conceptions. The various critiques of these new theses usually focus on the need inherent in all psycho-physiological research for careful interpretation. Nevertheless, whatever their justification, such criticisms must acknowledge the transformation undergone by the social sciences in recent years. No longer attempting to reconstruct reality, modern research in the humanities is more concerned with the representation of perceptions of the self, the other and the enemy.²² Historical research into the nature of stereotypes has long made use of socio-psychological insights,²³ theories of historical socialization²⁴ and research into emotion.²⁵ Contemporary “neuro-cultural

by the findings of both the empirical social sciences and neurobiology and behavioral biology. These findings have, in turn, provoked a considerable number of apologetic writings. See e.g. Paul Josef Cardinal Cordes, *Besiege das Böse mit dem Guten: Grenzen der Psychologie und die Kraft des Glaubens* (Augsburg: Sankt-Ulrich-Verl., 2009).

²¹ See Gerhard Besier, “Täter und Opfer, Zuschauer und Opponenten—Über menschliches Verhalten in Grenzsituationen,” *TD 4* (2007): 375–90. Written from the perspective of behavioral biology and Catholic theology, see Gerd-Heinrich Neumann, *Vorgeschichte als Zukunftsherausforderung: Ein Biologe nimmt Stellung zu Genetik—Evolution—Verhaltensbiologie in ethischer und theologischer Relevanz* (Berlin and Münster: Lit, 2008), esp. 157ff.

²² See e.g. Jörg Baberowski, Hartmut Kaelble, and Jürgen Schriewer, eds., *Selbstbilder und Fremdbilder: Repräsentation sozialer Ordnungen im Wandel* (Frankfurt/M.: Campus-Verl., 2008). In view of the failure of contemporary historians to incorporate the results of social-science led findings and results, many in this discipline see that the “role of social-scientific analysis in constituting reality needs to be incorporated in historiographical reflection. [...] Reading these [analyses] as a source and not a narrative is one of the central requirements currently facing our discipline.” Rüdiger Graf and Kim Christian Priemel, “Zeitgeschichte in der Welt der Sozialwissenschaften: Legitimität und Originalität einer Disziplin,” *VfZ 59* (2011): 479–508, 507.

²³ See Hans Henning Hahn and Elena Mannová, eds., *Nationale Wahrnehmungen und ihre Stereotypisierung: Beiträge zur Historischen Stereotypenforschung* (Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 2007).

²⁴ See Andreas Gestrich, *Vergesellschaftungen des Menschen: Einführung in die Historische Sozialisationsforschung* (Tübingen: Ed. diskord, 1999).

²⁵ See Thomas Anz, “Emotional turn? Beobachtungen zur Gefühlsforschung,” *literaturkritik.de*, no. 12, last modified March 28, 2009, accessed August 27, 2012, [http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=10267](http://www.literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=10267;).; Florian Weber,

history” increasingly subjects memory—one of the constituent elements of historical writing—to considerable question.

These new claims from neuro-research have wide ranging implications. At stake in this new “turn” is nothing less than the reliability of the human memory,²⁶ man’s capacity for rational action²⁷ and his capacity for responsible and self-willed decision-making. What causes people to act in a particular fashion and not another? Are emotions in such processes more powerful than calm consideration? The new findings have also established several qualifications to the premise, so beloved of educational theorists, that as mutable subjects, people are not merely the prisoners of their dispositions and socialization. The most serious question however concerns that central element of modern society: individual human freedom. Are people truly free in their behavior or are their actions pre-

“Von den klassischen Affektenlehren zur Neurowissenschaft und zurück: Wege der Emotionsforschung in den Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften,” *Neue politische Literatur* 53 (2008): 21–42; Ute Frevert, “Was haben die Gefühle in der Geschichte zu suchen?” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 35 (2009): 183–208; Manuel Borutta and Nina Verheyen, eds., *Die Präsenz der Gefühle: Männlichkeit und Emotion in der Moderne* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010); Jan Plamper, *Geschichte und Gefühl Grundlagen der Emotionsgeschichte* (Munich: Siedler, 2012) (English edition is forthcoming).

²⁶ See Johannes Fried, “Erinnerung im Kreuzverhör: Kollektives Gedächtnis, Albert Speer und die Erkenntnis erinnelter Vergangenheit,” in *Historie und Leben: Der Historiker als Wissenschaftler und Zeitgenosse; FS Lothar Gall zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Dieter Hein (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2006), 327–57; idem., “Neurokulturelle Geschichtswissenschaft,” *KZG/CCH* 22 (2009): 49–65; Harald Welzer, “Das kommunikative Gedächtnis und woraus es besteht,” in *Arbeit am Gedächtnis: Für Aleida Assmann (zum 60. Geburtstag)*, ed. Michael C. Frank and Gabriel Rippl (Munich: Fink, 2007), 47–62; Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (Munich: Beck, 2006). See also Nina Leonhard, “Gedächtnis und Kultur—Anmerkungen zum Konzept der ‘Erinnerungskulturen’ in den Kulturwissenschaften,” *Historische Sozialforschung* 33 (2008): 44–357.

²⁷ See Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009); Stephan Schleim and Henrik Walter, “Erst das Gefühl, dann die Moral? Hirnscans legen den Verdacht nahe, dass unsere moralischen Urteile weniger auf rationalen Denkprozessen gründen, als vielmehr in emotionalen Intuitionen,” *Gehirn und Geist* 1, no. 2 (2008): 44–49; Jonah Lehrer, *How We Decide* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009). Even economists are beginning to doubt the classic explanations focusing on rational people and markets. See George A. Akerlof and Robert J. Shiller, *Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy, and Why It Matters for Global Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

determined, the product of biochemical processes beyond their control?²⁸ Finally, how should we conceive of the genesis of religions? As a social phenomenon? What makes a person believe? Which is the function performed by religious convictions and world views?

These and other questions represent the focus of this book. Beginning with the “perpetrator-victim complex,” the first chapter examines the evidence amassed within the scope of a number of empirical investigations together with its contemporary interpretations. Thus informed, the chapter then proceeds to examine a number of forms of human behavior displayed as a reaction to specific borderline situations. The question most often posed in such a context is that regarding man’s capacity for brutality. This question constitutes the focus of the second to the fourth chapters. The questions raised in the first chapter are addressed by an appraisal of human dispositions through an examination of three separate themes: stereotypes and prejudice; experience, learning and remembering; emotions and psycho-physiological processes. A fifth and final chapter considers the need for and presence of mechanisms of compensation, which people can employ to address their manifold short-comings and inadequacies. This focuses on the construction of transcendental worlds establishing a more satisfying reality. Merely one amongst a number of such areas of make-believe, religions hinder the necessary inter-subjective discourse and prevent consensus.²⁹ Indeed, our whole lives are staged in a series of highly subjective and disparate constructed and controversial realities. Never entirely accepted by their constructors, these worlds rarely satisfy powerful human yearnings which, in turn, become ever-more shrill and mutable. As such, we live in the “supposedly actual.”

In writing this book, I have incurred a number of debts which it is a pleasure to acknowledge. I should like to thank Ronald Lambrecht, Melanie List, Henrik Nitsche, Danny Schäfer and Katarzyna Stokłosa for their stimulating comments, copy-editing, the provision of literature and compilation of the bibliography. Kasia, my companion of many years deserves my thanks for her understanding, patience, constant encouragement and love. I should especially like to thank Grätel

²⁸ See Martin Heinze, Thomas Fuchs, and Friedel M. Reischies, *Willensfreiheit—Eine Illusion?* (Berlin: Parodos-Verl., 2006); Michael Pauen, *Illusion Freiheit?* (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer, 2004); Henrik Walter, *Neurophilosophy of Free Will: From Libertarian Illusions to a Concept of Natural Autonomy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

²⁹ See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966). John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

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Gerhard Besier

CHAPTER ONE

PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS, BYSTANDERS AND OPPONENTS: HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN SPECIFIC CONTEXTS

“Given the right or wrong circumstances, every act committed by any person, however atrocious it may have been, represents a possibility for us all [...]. Any attempt to understand such extraordinary actions [...] requires us to begin with a situative analysis.”

Philip G. Zimbardo (2008)¹

The transition from individual and collective pathologization to the acceptance of perpetrator profiling

Shocked by the sheer inhumanity of the atrocities committed during the Second World War, contemporary observers equated the evil nature of the crimes with the personality of their perpetrators and began a search for psychopathological abnormalities of the individuals concerned.² Granted unrestricted access to the accused at the Nuremberg trials, the psychologist Gustave M. Gilbert was unable to reach a coherent conclusion; although able to diagnose significant indications of mental illness in Rudolf Heß³ his verdict on Hermann Göring was that of a convinced perpetrator and

¹ Philip G. Zimbardo, *Lucifer-Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007), 211–12.

² For this and the following, see Jeannette Schmid, “Freiwilligkeit der Gewalt? Von der Psychologie der Täter zur Psychologie der Tat,” *Analyse und Kritik* 20 (1998): 27–45; Angelika Benz, “Exzesstäter, Schreibtischtäter oder Durchschnittsbürger?” *Informationen: Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift des Studienkreises Deutscher Widerstand 1933–1945* 35 (2010) 3–6; Daniel Pick, *The Pursuit of the Nazi Mind: Hitler, Hess, and the Analysts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³ Regarding Rudolf Heß see also Kurt Pätzold and Manfred Weißbecker, *Rudolf Heß: Der Mann an Hitlers Seite* (Leipzig: Militzke-Verl., 2003); Rainer F. Schmidt, *Rudolf Heß: “Botengang eines Toren?” Der Flug nach Großbritannien vom 10. Mai 1941* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1997).

confirmed his hypothesis of a psychopathological personality.⁴ Later psychoanalytic evaluations of Rorschach tests carried out on the accused did not exhibit any abnormalities in contrast to the control group of “normal” test subjects.⁵ Despite the inability to find any evidence for the widely postulated typus of “sadistic perpetrators gleaming satisfaction from their deeds,” this assumption is still present in popular understanding of the Third Reich. Even the Harvard academic Daniel Jonah Goldhagen is convinced that far from being “ordinary men,” only convinced National Socialists and sadists could have been capable of responsibility for the crimes of National Socialism.⁶

It is highly unlikely that the selective ideological premises underpinning Goldhagen’s work will be supported by other empirical studies. Moreover, the findings of evolutionary biology would seem to indicate that man’s capability to murder numbers amongst one of those feats of adaptation of the human brain “which has proven itself so well during the history of his development” to the extent that modern man “is unable simply to abandon or change this fundamental condition of his existence.”⁷ It is not just the case—as the evolutionary psychologist David Buss has demonstrated—that the old motives for murder retain their effect in the modern world. Man’s psychic disposition to killing is a familiar concept. Who has never held murderous thoughts towards a person only to apply the old strategy of avoidance so as not to tread this path?⁸

The contrasting explanation of a naive and immature society, “led astray” by Hitler and his demonic clique,⁹ also enjoyed currency in the

⁴ See Gustave M. Gilbert, *Nuremberg Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1947); idem., “Hermann Goering: Amiable Psychopath,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 43 (1947): 211–29.

⁵ See Barry A. Ritzler, “The Nuremberg Mind Revisited: A Quantitative Approach to Nazi Rorschachs,” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 42 (1978): 344–53.

⁶ See Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitlers Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996). See also Michael Mann, “Were Perpetrators of Genocide ‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Real Nazis?’ Results From Fifteen Hundred Biographies,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 14 (2000): 331–36. See also Mary Fulbrook, *A Small Town Near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷ David M. Buss, *The Murderer Next Door: Why the Mind is Designed to Kill* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 237.

⁸ In this sense, Jehuda Bauer was able to say that “the behavior of the Nazis [...] was only too human” Jehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 21.

⁹ Amongst them Joseph Goebbels, in whom the majority of commentators diagnose a narcissistic personality structure—see Peter Gathmann and Marina Paul, *Narziss*

immediate post-war period as an explanation for the history of the Third Reich.¹⁰ The majority of post-war Germans claimed not to have been aware of the crimes perpetrated in their name by the Nazi regime and were thus able to turn away from their erstwhile idols with surprising rapidity.¹¹ Seeking an explanation for how otherwise responsible citizens exhibited such passive obedience, Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford¹² made recourse to a number of analytical models, including their own F[ascism]-Scale to identify the syndrome of the “authoritarian personality,” which developed through an inflexible attachment to the conventional bourgeois middle-class values.¹³ With a tendency to subject themselves to idealized authority figures, such people also actively sought out those not conforming to their idealized canon of civic behavior in order to punish them. Writing later, he postulated “those needing authority identify with naked power over all content. Basically, they have a very weak ego and as a result, need to identify with a collective in order to find fulfilment.”¹⁴ Having attracted

Goebbels: Eine psychohistorische Biografie (Vienna: Böhlau, 2009); Peter Longerich, *Joseph Goebbels: Biographie* (Munich: Siedler, 2010). Not only a member of the Nazi leadership surrounding Hitler, Goebbels also belonged to the circle of leadership around Hitler. Subject to a number of early setbacks due to his physical handicap, he used self-stylisation to acquire the favour of his “Führer” and developed a complex dependence on him. Gathmann and Paul diagnosed “chronic depression, fears, strong feelings of inadequacy, and a whole range of psychosomatic complaints” (Ibid., 10).

¹⁰ In contrast, see Karl-Günter Zelle, *Hitlers zweifelnde Elite: Goebbels—Göring—Himmler—Speer* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010).

¹¹ See Peter Longerich, *“Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!”: Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933–1945* (Munich: Siedler, 2006). See also Hannes Heer, *Vom Verschwinden der Täter: Der Vernichtungskrieg fand statt, aber keiner war dabei* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2004). Regarding the high level of popular approval for the National Socialist system, see Karl-Heinz Reuband, “Das NS-Regime zwischen Akzeptanz und Ablehnung: Eine retrospektive Analyse von Bevölkerungseinstellungen im Dritten Reich auf der Basis von Umfragedaten,” *GuG* 32 (2006): 315–43.

¹² See Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel Levinson, and Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950); Theodor W. Adorno, *Der autoritäre Charakter: Studien über Autorität und Vorurteil: Mit einem Vorwort von Max Horkheimer*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam: De Munter, 1968/69).

¹³ See Lars-Eric Petersen and Bernd Six, eds., *Stereotype, Vorurteile und soziale Diskriminierung: Theorien, Befunde und Interventionen* (Weinheim-Basel: Beltz, 2008), 163–71.

¹⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), 17.

massive criticism of its methodology,¹⁵ the primarily psychoanalytical concept of an authoritarian personality has been subject to a number of subsequent attempts to save it as an analytical tool.¹⁶ Since the 1980s, the scale most often used for ascertaining an authoritarian disposition is Bob Altemeyer's Right-Wing-Authoritarianism-Scale based on learning-theoretical concepts.¹⁷ Whatever our subsequent estimation of the findings of Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanders, it is clear that they stimulated research and discussion.

Writing in the 1960s, Alexander Mitscherlich and others located the source of such behavior in the authoritarian form of upbringing and education prevalent in the Kaiserreich and Weimar republic.¹⁸ Moreover, the Frankfurt psychoanalyst diagnosed "pre-democratic mindsets" in many Germans and a collective tendency towards "unconscious denial, an insistent suppression of memory and most importantly, the exclusion of all feelings pertaining to crucial events of the past now denied [...]."¹⁹ Mitscherlich identified two alternatives: "a prescription without mourning. The perpetrators die out. Or: working out the details of those events which although themselves not inhuman, created the atmosphere in which the Final Solution became a possibility."²⁰

Addressing a Berlin conference in January 1983, the Zurich-based German philosopher Hermann Lübbe scandalized the West-German intelligentsia with a contrary thesis: the successful integration of the majority of both high and low-ranking Nazis was due not to an overly scrupulous scrutiny of their behavior, but the "communicative concealment" of their past in the immediate post-war years. Thus according to Lübbe, silence about their role between 1933 and 1945 served

¹⁵ See the comprehensive criticism provided by Detlef Oesterreich, *Flucht in die Sicherheit: Zur Theorie des Autoritarismus und der Autoritären Reaktion* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1996).

¹⁶ See e.g., Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1960).

¹⁷ See Bob Altemeyer, *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1981); see also idem., *Enemies of Freedom: Understanding Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1988); idem., *The Authoritarian Specter* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁸ See Alexander Mitscherlich, *Society Without a Father: A Contribution to Social Psychology* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1969).

¹⁹ Alexander Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* (New York: Grove Press, 1975), XXIV–XXV.

²⁰ Mitscherlich, *Inability*, XXVI.

an important integrative function.²¹ In view of the wide historical “*travail de mémoire*” and the current insecurities in dealing with the past, extending into the ritual forms of political auto-promotion of our society,” the “suppression thesis” was plain wrong.²² Whatever the merits of this assertion, the “phase of silence” can only have been oppressive for those emigrants returning from their Nazi-induced exile,²³ involving a degree of pressure released only by the move to “confront the past,” which closely followed the Adenauer era. Nevertheless, the question remains as to how it was possible to alter the dominant canon of civilized Western values to the extent that it was superseded by a Nazi morality which sanctioned the ensuing atrocities. If post-1945 claims to a wide-scale ignorance of the Nazi crimes did not merely represent an attempt to adapt to new political realities, then this unwillingness to believe the rumors of barbarity circulating after 1945 could also be interpreted as an attempt to return to the moral values of the pre-Nazi era.

The specific system of morality inculcated and disseminated by the Nazi system involved what Raphael Gross identified as a fluid “transition in the demarcation of [...] perpetrators and their victims.”²⁴ Those responsible for implementing the criminal instructions of Hitler’s regime were able to claim—with some justification—to have “committed their crimes in the name of all others. The ‘others’ to whom they referred and who they saw as prepared to support their conception of morality were the ‘Germans.’”²⁵ The validity of such a conclusion is indicted by the widespread level of social acceptance in German society immediately after the war of the strategies of justification employed by the former Nazi perpetrators, and the ability of the young West German society to integrate a range of far-right prejudices.²⁶ Indeed, neither the employers nor the immediate circle of friends of such individuals found anything objectionable in their dealings with people with such a past. The judges hearing the cases of the former members of *Einsatzgruppen*, concentration camp personnel and other groups found it very difficult to view the

²¹ See Hermann Lübke, *Vom Parteigenossen zum Bundesbürger: Über beschwiegene und historisierte Vergangenheiten* (Munich: Fink, 2007), 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 23, 26.

²³ See Olivier Guez, *Heimkehr der Unerwünschten: Eine Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland nach 1945* (Munich: Piper, 2011), esp. 129–48.

²⁴ Raphael Gross, *Anständig geblieben: Nationalsozialistische Moral* (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer, 2010), 210.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁶ See Christina Ullrich, “*Ich fühl’ mich nicht als Mörder!*” *Die Integration von NS-Tätern in die Nachkriegsgesellschaft* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2011).

arraigned as perpetrators in the usual sense; a situation compounded by the level of solidarity which they enjoyed. Such a climate facilitated the cognitive reconstruction of earlier actions in such a fashion as to prevent the development of a sense of injustice both amongst the perpetrators and German society at large.

Those arraigned at the Nuremburg tribunal and its successor proceedings often made recourse to the formula of “obeying orders from a superior” which, according to military traditions, demanded a normative obedience preceding all demands of the conscience. In such a world, orders are not to be questioned for their moral value; this is the task of a higher authority.²⁷ The results of Stanley Milgram’s series of experiments started in 1963 to investigate man’s tendency to “destructive obedience” occasioned contemporary surprise and no little consternation. Not only did the subjects demonstrate an unexpected readiness to inflict supposedly life-threatening injuries on unfamiliar test subjects;²⁸ the “perpetrators” involved had not exhibited any prior inclination to cruelty. Despite attracting considerable and continued criticism for his methodology,²⁹ Milgram’s findings have been confirmed by other similar tests performed simultaneously, for example those conducted by Arnold H. Buss.³⁰ Milgram also succeeded in demonstrating that responsibility for the act of cruelty was not delegated to the superior giving the orders, but to the victim, who was ascribed negative characteristics in order to justify the

²⁷ See Jochen von Lang, ed., *Eichmann Interrogated: Transcripts from the Archives of the Israeli Police* (London: Bodley Head, 1983); Harry Mulisch, *Strafsache 40/61: Eine Reportage über den Eichmann-Prozess* (Berlin: Tiamat, 1987).

²⁸ Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). See also Peter Huemer and Grete Schurz, eds., *Unterwerfung: Über den destruktiven Gehorsam* (Vienna: P. Zsolnay, 1990); Hans B. Lütke, *Gehorsam und Gewissen: Die moralische Handlungskompetenz des Menschen aus Sicht des Milgram-Experimentes* (Frankfurt/M.: Lang, 2003).

²⁹ See e.g. Nestar John Charles Russell, “Milgram’s Obedience to Authority Experiments: Origins and Early Evolution,” *British Journal of Social Psychology* (2010): 140–62. Ian Nicholson explains the great interest in the Milgram experiment with reference to the political (Cold War) and cultural crises (of the American conception of Male identity). See Ian Nicholson, “‘Shocking’ Masculinity: Stanley Milgram, ‘Obedience to Authority’ and the ‘Crisis of Manhood’ in Cold War America,” *Isis* 102 (2011): 238–68.

³⁰ See Arnold H. Buss, *The Psychology of Aggression* (New York: Wiley, 1961); idem., “The Effect of Harm on Subsequent Aggression,” *Journal of Experimental Research in Personality* 1 (1966): 249–55; Timothy C. Brock and Arnold H. Buss, “Dissonance, Aggression, and the Evaluation of Pain,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 65 (1962): 197–202.

torture. These findings were later confirmed in subsequent tests conducted in 12 different countries. Three interesting replication studies have been conducted in recent times.

Indeed, independent projects conducted by the psychologists Jerry M. Burger³¹ and Dominic J. Packer 45 years after Milgram's famous test from 1963³² served only to confirm Milgram's findings, despite a number of subsequent social and cultural changes such as the student revolts of 1968,³³ female emancipation and the American civil rights movement.³⁴ Even the new anti-authoritarian upbringing enjoyed by the participants of the test did not seem to have made much difference to their behavior in the tests. As in 1963, two thirds of the testpersons in the 2006 study were prepared to follow inhuman instructions and punish others with putative electric shocks. Burger was unable to identify any differences based on age, gender, race, religion or world view. Nevertheless, the ethics commission at the Santa Clara University in California would not permit him to replicate Milgram's use of shocks of up to 450 Volts—the ceiling was set at 150 Volts. Contrary to Burger's expectations, those obeying the order to administer the shock did not alter their behavior even after being confronted with the phenomenon of a participant who resisted these orders. As Dominic J. Packer from Ohio State University succeeded in demonstrating, those disobeying further orders stopped at the critical 150 Volts mark. Nevertheless, there was no correlation between disobedience and the increasing incidence of the cries of pain from those being punished. Speaking of those disobeying orders, Packer identified that “disobedient participants appeared to respond to a perceived right that stopped them from continuing without the learner's consent. Non-compliance was reliably triggered among a subset of participants at the

³¹ See Jerry M. Burger, “Replicating Milgram: Would People Still Obey Today?” *American Psychologist* 64 (2009): 1–11.

³² See Thomas Blass, *The Man Who Shocked the World. The Life and Legacy of Stanley Milgram* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), esp. 75ff. From the perspective of one of the test subjects see Gina Perry, *Behind the Shock Machine – The untold Story of the Notorious Milgram Psychology* (New York: New Press, 2013).

³³ See Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of '68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁴ See Gerhard Besier, et al., *Im Namen der Freiheit: Die amerikanische Mission* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 192ff., 204ff. Regarding the American Civil Rights movement in the USA, see Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011); Graeme Abernethy, *The Iconography of Malcolm X* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013).

first invocation of this right, but was not systematically related to increase in the severity with which the learner's well-being was violated."³⁵

2009 saw a highly accessible repetition of the Milgram experiment made all the more shocking for its transmission as a reality television show. Supervised by the French psychologists Jean-Léon Beauvois, Laurent Bégue, Didier Courbet and Dominique Oberlé, the event addressed the question of whether a medium alone could bring people to inflict violence and suffering on others.³⁶ They also addressed the question as to which personality characteristics would bring people to resist the arrangement. The testpersons were to subject fellow players—in reality actors—to a memory test. Incorrect answers were repaid with electric shocks. Those participants seeking to abandon the game in reaction to the cries of their victims were told “not to be perturbed, we need to continue” or “the logic of the game requires that you continue.” Three of the four variants of the game saw the testpersons inflict a shock of up to the maximum of 460 Volts, which, in reality, would have been sufficient to kill its recipient. The actors “subject” to such treatment screamed, requested the suspension of the test and then finally lapsed into silence.

Seeking to establish the type of personality which caused a third of the testpersons to resist and two thirds to obey the command to inflict pain, the psychologists subjected their volunteers to the personality test developed by Paul Costa and Robert McCrea involving a five factor model, measuring personal characteristics on five dimensions—extroversion, neuroticism, openness to new experience, agreeability and conscientiousness. According to the investigations, the characteristics of good-naturedness and conscientiousness were often associated with pronounced levels of obedience. Accordingly, the higher the degree to which the candidates assessed their conscientiousness and agreeability, the greater was their potential readiness to administer torture. Such individuals were described as especially sociable personalities who did not wish to risk conflict with authority figures. The less good-natured the personality, the more easy they found it to say no. These results constituted a surprise to the leaders of the investigation, who usually associated conscientiousness and good nature with a lower level of aggression.

³⁵ Dominic J. Packer, “Identifying Systematic Disobedience in Milgram's Obedience Experiments: A Meta-analytic Review,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3 (2008): 301–4.

³⁶ See Jean-Léon Beauvois et. al., “Une transposition du paradigme d'obéissance de Milgram à la télévision: enjeux, résultats et perspectives”, *Connexions*, no. 95, (2011): 71-88, doi: 10.3917/cnx.095.0071.; see also idem., “Rebellen am Schalthebel.” *Gehirn & Geist* 9 (2010): 54–59.

Moreover, such people take fewer drugs, are less likely to become criminals, display a higher ability to bring up children and a higher degree of education.

The psychologists also determined a higher degree of correlation between compliance and the subjective well-being of a person, and a connection between rebellious behavior and subjective dissatisfaction. Those satisfied with themselves and the world were more ready to torture their fellow humans than those dissatisfied with their general situation, who were ready to flout the “rules of the game.” Furthermore, the study was unable to establish an association between empathy and civil courage. In a further finding, which agreed with Alan Elms and others, those conducting the study led by Bégue discovered that people who according to their own estimation belong to the right of the political spectrum were more likely to accept authority than self-confessed left-wingers.³⁷

1996 saw the publication of a treatment by Detlef Oesterreich of control-theoretical approaches to the subject.³⁸ Focusing on the reactions of an authoritarian personality, he defined these as a situation-specific retreat to the security of authorities as a consequence of fear and uncertainty. Such behavior—seeking to protect oneself from both danger and seeking the experience of emotional attachments—belongs to the mechanisms of the child’s process of socialization. Whereas mature adults develop solutions to problems on the basis of their own experience, those submissive to authority have failed to transcend the primary mechanism of the child’s response and develop positive emotional ties to any instance offering protection. Accepting the values, standards and ideology of the authority to which they cling, such individuals usually reproduce the conservative orientation, which such figures usually exhibit. Any move by outsiders to question these values and standards is interpreted as an attack on the self-conception of the person holding them and provokes a rigid defense of the values in a desperate attempt to prevent their loss.

Although making cautious recourse to Milgram’s observations and findings, Christopher Browning’s 1992 study of Police Reserve Battalion 101 emphasized the effect of peer- pressure over the need to obey. Nevertheless, in view of the “mutually reinforcing effect of authority and conformity,”³⁹ Browning viewed his study as providing confirmation of

³⁷ See Albert C. Elms, “Obedience Lite,” *American Psychologist* 64 (2009): 32–36.

³⁸ See Oesterreich, *Flucht in die Sicherheit*; Bennet, Dennett, Hacker, and Searle, *Neuroscience and Philosophy*.

³⁹ See Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battallion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 171ff.; idem., *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Milgram's results. Conformist behavior and the glorification of the values of "hard manliness" also belong in this context; those unable to kill were viewed as being "weak."⁴⁰ In contrast, Browning estimated the effect of National Socialist ideology on the group of middle-aged men socialized before 1933 as being very low. Moreover, the party indoctrination programs made "absolutely no express attempt" to move the men of Police Battalion 101 to "make a personal contribution to the creation of a Europe 'free of Jews.'"⁴¹ In interpreting exactly the same archive material, Goldhagen subjected Browning's findings to severe criticism and expressed the view that extreme hate against the Jews was both a matter of socialization and a necessary precondition for the Holocaust.⁴² However, consideration of the domestic lives of the men involved serves to undermine the socialization hypothesis. At home, the murderers showed themselves to be loving husbands and fathers, whilst at the front (and the distance between the two events was not great) they were capable of the worst of crimes. After a day's work in the execution pits, they continued to visit the theatre and concerts and continued their participation in the German cultural life, experiencing a number of "cheerful hours in Auschwitz."⁴³

Following on from Milgram and Browning, the social psychologist Harald Welzer presented a study of Police Reserve Battalion 45 recruited in Aussig (contemporary Ústí nad Labem). Responsible for mass murder, rape and other crimes in Poland and the Ukraine, Welzer also speaks of the battalion members as "ordinary men" and explains their action through something he calls "role distance:" the discrepancy between deeds and being.⁴⁴ Historians continue to present "perpetrator profiles."⁴⁵ Using

2000). See also Alexander Kochinka and Jürgen Straub, "'Dämonologie' oder psychologisches Denken? Wie erklärt man, warum ganz gewöhnliche Angehörige der nationalsozialistischen Gesellschaft das Leben anderer auslöschten?" *Analyse und Kritik* 1 (1998): 95–122.

⁴⁰ See Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 185–86.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁴² See Goldhagen, *Executioners*.

⁴³ See Ernst Klee, "Heitere Stunden in Auschwitz: Wie deutsche Künstler ihre mordenden Landsleute im besetzten Polen bei Laune hielten," *Die Zeit*, no. 5, January 25, 2007, 90; see *idem.*, *Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich: Wer war wer nach 1945* (Frankfurt/M: S. Fischer, 2007).

⁴⁴ Harald Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer, 2005). The genocide in Rwanda was also committed by "normal" people. Following a broad analysis of perpetrator reports, Scott Straus reached the conclusion that "Rwanda's perpetrators were not especially mad, sadistic, hateful, poor, uneducated, ideologically committed, or young. [...] There