

THEOLOGY

THE LUCIFER EFFECT

27.09.2007

I am currently reading "[The Lucifer effect](#)" by Philipp Zimbardo. Having seen many terrible things like a woman killed by more than 30 stabs with knife I know that theodicy is the main problem in theology - when the bad "situational power triumphs over individual power". Zimbardo examines the process of transformation when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things "turning away from grace". Evil is defined as

the intentionally behaving in way that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize or destroy innocent others

Although we think of ourselves as a consistent person across time and space (we need to do so for not being schizophrenic) this is probably not true

we are not the same person working alone as you are in a group; in a romantic setting versus and educational one

We are even less willing to accept this view in particular when it comes to doing evil things. Me also?

Evil things may be encountered everywhere (also in the science business) although Zimbardos focus is more with crimes against humanity, genocide, and terror; from Hitler, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Idi Amin, Sadam Hussein to mass slaughter in Rwanda and Darfur. One of his messages is the evil may not so much be essentialized in tyrants but seen in incremental terms where people may at any time possess a particular attribute to a greater or lesser degree. Hard to accept but (page 7)

In short, we can learn to become good or evel regardless of our genetic inheritance, personality, or familiy legacy.

Here is where Zimbardo meets to some extent the [science misconduct](#) debate as this is an

incremental process as well.

... 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 ... They begin their quest for understanding with the “Who questions”: Who is responsible? Who caused it? ... Social psychologist (such as myself) tend to avoid this rush to dispositional judgment when trying to understand the causes of unusual behaviors. They prefer to begin their search by asking the “What questions”: What conditions could be contributing to certain reactions? What circumstances might be involved in generating behavior? ...

This might be seen in analogy to the current model of medical science contrasting a public health model, something that attracts me as an epidemiologist.

It might also help me to understand science more as a group enterprise, what are the forces keep it driving (and where it may deteriorate).

Ultimately, it will help me to believe in God’s justice that will take into account all circumstances of a short life in an eternal space. [Bonhoeffer has deeply impressed me](#) by his letters for not giving up to belief in a righteous God. In one of his last writings to Maria von Wedemayer (the famous letter of Dec 12, 1944 that includes “Von guten Mächten...”) he also writes about the old child prayer

Abends wenn ich schlafen geh, vierzehn Englein um mich stehn, zwei zu meinen Füßen, zwei zu meinen Häupten, zwei zu meiner Rechten, zwei zu meiner Linken, zweie die mich wecken, zweie die mich decken, zweie die mich weisen zu Himmels Paradeisen.

When at night I go to sleep, fourteen angels watch do keep: Two my head are guarding, two my feet are guiding, two are on my right hand, two are on my left hand, two who warmly cover, two who oâ€™er me hover, two to whom â€™tis given to guide my steps to heaven.

- [no need](#) to fear Lucifer.

