HSSP Summer, 2012 Philosophy of Mind

**Class # 6: Interactionism and Situationalism: Moral Judgment and Decision**

**Question: Why do good men turn evil?**

**Quick review**: Any questions or comments from last week?

Today I hope to continue our discussion on priming, classical conditioning, social conditioning, and instrumental conditioning and we’ll put these in context of morality.

Picking up from last week:

**Critical Thinking Questions:**

**1)**: Do you think stereotyping is a confirmation bias? Why or why not? When is stereotyping good, and when is it not? Are there biases that we take for granted?

2 ) Do you think conditioning can effect learning and build memory? If so, how? What about social conditioning?

**Critical Thinking Questions this week:**

1) To what extent does priming set our mood, and our response and decisions?

2) Can ordinary men be made evil?

When we watch these videos, think about the uniform; in what ways is that priming, in what ways does that become situational? Do we already have a confirmation bias before we even watch the movie, and if so, about what and why? Milgram ran a study concerning obedience, because during the Nuremburg Trials after WWII their defense

was often based on "[obedience](http://www.simplypsychology.org/obedience.html)" - that they were just following orders of their superiors. Do you think “obedience” is a valid ethical and moral defense, and why?

**Vocabulary:**

**Interactionism:**

Definition:Interactionism holds that two-way interaction occurs between mind and body. This includes social communication, verbal and non-verbal; specifically:

* Humans act toward things based the meanings they give to them
* Meaning arises from social interaction with others and society
* The meanings are a process of interpretation that changes with events and encounters

**Situationalism (psychology)**

Definition: Situationism holds that people are more influenced by external factors and circumstances than by personal [traits](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trait) or [motivations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Motivation)

**Behaviorism**:

Definition: How behavior changes in response to different configurations of stimuli, including rewards and punishments

**Classical Conditioning**

Definition: Behavioral process whereby a response becomes more frequent or more predictable in a given environment as a result of reinforcement, with reinforcement typically being a stimulus or reward for a desired response.

**Operant or Instrumental Conditioning**

Definition: Involves creating a relationship between a response and a stimulus. It’s proven to be a more effective way of teaching, and learning than classical conditioning

**Priming**

Definition: A process through which one input or cue prepares a person for an upcoming input or cue

**Confirmation Bias**

Definition: People are more perceptive to something that confirms their belief than they are to evidence that challenges their belief

**New vocabulary:**

**Social psychology** is about understanding individual behavior in a social context.

**Internalization** is the long-term process of consolidating and embedding one’s own beliefs, attitudes, and values, when it comes to moral behavior; Publicly changing behavior to fit in with the group and also agreeing with them privately

**Internalization-** a deeply rooted response to social influence. The desire to be right is the motive. Once accepted the behavior or the opinion becomes a part of our belief system separate from the source. Credibility of the influencer is important (expert and trustworthy).

**Compliance** Publicly changing behavior to fit in with the group while privately

disagreeing.  Motivated by rewards and the avoidance of punishment. Lasts as long as the

rewards last or as long as the threat lasts. Going along with the group behaviorally without

being persuaded that the group is correct. Power is the major component.

(Brainwashing) People are more likely to comply when they are in a good mood (prosocial

or helping actions); ingratiation behaviors or “buttering up” someone relies on this;

reciprocity norm - I’ll do this, if you will do this for me.

**Disorientation:** An inability to identify oneself and/or the current time, place, or situation. A feeling of being detached, or distant from oneself

**De-personalization**  in psychology, a state in which an individual feels that either he himself or the outside world is unreal. In addition to a sense of unreality, depersonalization may involve the feeling that one’s mind is dissociated from one’s body; that the body extremities have changed in relative size; that one sees oneself from a distance; or that one has become a machine.

**De-individualization:** Loss of self-awareness; loss of a sense of individuality and responsibility within a crowd. The theory seeks to explain the violent and impulsive behavior of the individual in large crowds and mobs

**Cognitive Dissonance Theory**  
Cognitive dissonance is the feeling of uncomfortable tension which comes from holding two conflicting thoughts in the mind at the same time.

**Obedience** is a form of social influence where an individual acts in response to a direct order from another individual, who is usually an authority figure. It is assumed that without such an order the person would not have acted in this way

**Conformity:**

The term conformity is often used to indicate an agreement to the majority position, brought about either by a desire to ‘fit in’ or be liked (normative) or because of a desire to be correct (informational), or simply to conform to a social role (identification).

**Theory of Conformism:** A person who doesn’t have the ability or expertise to make decisions in a situation, will leave the decision making to the group/hierarchy.

**Autonomous state**: In this state individuals make decisions based on their own ideas, beliefs and experiences.

**Agentic State:** In this state individuals give up their own responsibility, deferring to those of higher status. Milgram says: "the essence of obedience consists in the fact that a person comes to view themselves as the instrument for carrying out another person's wishes, and they therefore no longer see themselves as responsible for their actions. Once this critical shift of viewpoint has occurred in the person, all of the essential features of obedience follow"

**AGENCY THEORY:**

According to Milgram, at any particular time a person is in one of two psychological states: Autonomous state: In this state individuals make decisions based on their own ideas, beliefs and experiences.

Agentic State In this state individuals give up their own responsibility, deferring to those of higher status.

Agency theory also explains why some people do not obey – they have remained in the autonomous state where they are able to make informed decisions about how to behave  
  
A weakness of agency theory, however, is that there is little evidence that an 'agentic shift' actually takes place and it is not clear how this could be measured. Also, the theory does not make it clear what processes are involved in the 'agentic shift'.

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**The Milgram Experiment: Study on Behavioral Obedience Yale University, 1961**

**His Question:**

Could it be that Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust were just following orders? Could we call them all accomplices?"

**Aim**: Milgram was interested in researching how far people would go in obeying an instruction if it involved harming another person.  Stanley Milgram was interested in how easily ordinary people could be influenced into committing atrocities for example, Germans in WWII.

**Procedure**: Volunteers were recruited for a lab experiment investigating “learning” (re: ethics: deception).  Participants were 40 males, aged between 20 and 50, whose jobs ranged from unskilled to professional.  At the beginning of the experiment they were introduced to another participant, who was actually a confederate of the experimenter (Milgram).  They drew straws to determine their roles – leaner or teacher – although this was fixed and the confederate always ended to the learner. There was also an “experimenter” dressed in a white lab coat, played by an actor (not Milgram).

The “learner” (Mr. Wallace) was strapped to a chair in another room with electrodes. After he has learned a list of word pairs given him to learn, the "teacher" tests him by naming a word and asking the learner to recall its partner/pair from a list of four possible choices.

The teacher is told to administer an electric shock every time the learner makes a mistake, increasing the level of shock each time. There were 30 switches on the shock generator marked from 15 volts (slight shock) to 450 (danger – severe shock).

The learner gave mainly wrong answers (on purpose) and for each of these the teacher gave him an electric shock. When the teacher refused to administer a shock and turned to the experimenter for guidance, he was given the standard instruction /order (4 prods):

**Prod 1**: please continue.

**Prod 2:** the experiment requires you to continue.

**Prod 3**: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

**Prod 4**: you have no other choice but to continue.

**Results**: 65% (two-thirds) of teachers continued to the highest level of 450 volts. All the participants continued to 300 volts.