

Essay Assignment on Stanley Milgram's *Obedience to Authority*:

Submit a MS Word file (.doc or .docx) via email to stonekim@lawrence.edu by **Wednesday 18 January 2012 at 11:00 AM**. Be sure to keep a copy for your records.

The paper should conform to the following format and style expectations:

- 3 – 5 pages, double-spaced, 10-12 point font with approximately 1 inch margins
- Number and put your last name on each page.
- All citations should be in MLA style (see Diana Hacker's *A Pocket Style Manual* for details).
- Reaffirm the honor code at the end of the paper. This reaffirmation assures me that the paper is your own work and none of it was written by another person except for those parts that are properly cited as quotations from Milgram's book or other sources. Also acknowledge (in a note at the end of the paper) the assistance of the writing tutor(s) who helped you craft the paper.
- The paper should have a title, but does not need a separate title page.

You are required to work with a CTL writing tutor (preferably Melissa Zheng melissa.zheng@lawrence.edu or Joia Miller joia.m.miller@lawrence.edu, our section's writing tutors) at least once in the writing process as you shape your ideas, write the paper, and revise your drafts. You may not be able to schedule a meeting if you wait too long to contact a tutor.

In a recent critique of (the legacy of) Stanley Milgram's research on obedience, social psychologist John Darley of Princeton asserts the following¹:

Obviously I violently object to those who would equate the behavior of the subjects in the Milgram situation with the behavior of Nazi doctors, concentration camp executioners, or Serbian snipers who assassinate children...the actions of the subjects in the Milgram obedience studies are different in important ways from the actions of concentration camp executioners, or soldiers perpetrating massacres, but the psychological community's presentation of these results no longer recognizes these differences. Milgram's subjects are driven by the hovering authority to act as they do, and they show enormous signs of tension and discomfort as they do so—an almost hysterical dissociation of person from action. In contrast, the defining characteristic of those who commit atrocities is that they do so without supervision of authorities, without external pressure, and they use their intelligence to independently determine how they will do so. Milgram's subjects, many of whom are greatly agitated by their actions, many of whom seem to cling to the possibility that the other individual is not being permanently harmed are obviously and importantly different from people who voluntarily perpetrate atrocities. Still, I want to mark that Milgram's subjects are engaging in condemnable behavior; they inflict pain, in their perceptions a great deal of pain, on an individual who has withdrawn his consent to participate in what began as an experiment but now must seem an out-of-control nightmare.

¹ This paper assignment was devised by Professor Matt Ansfield and adapted by Professor Brenda Jenike.

(pp.133-34. Darley, John M. 1995. Constructive and destructive obedience: a taxonomy of principal-agent relationships. *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 51, No. 3: 125-154.)

A second general criticism of Milgram has focused on the ethical implications of an experiment which deceived and perhaps even damaged its own human subjects, paradoxically, by employing the authority of science so as to achieve its own scientific ends. In the book's appendix, for example, Milgram himself cites Dannie Abse's 1971 play, *The Dogs of Pavlov*, which:

...uses the obedience experiment as its central dramatic theme. At the play's climax, Kurt, a major character in the play, repudiates the experimenter for using him as a guinea pig. In the introduction to the play, Abse especially condemns the illusions employed in the experiment, terming the set-up 'bullshit,' 'fraudulent,' 'cheat.' (Milgram, 198)

Write an essay which explains 1) how Milgram might—or in the second case, did—respond to these charges and why; and 2) which of the two critiques you find more convincing and why. Be sure to support both parts of your essay with specific passages and examples from Milgram's work itself.