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The Editor  
New York Times Book Review  
New York Times  
Times Square  
New York, New York

Dear Sir:

The exchange between Brown, Rosenzweig, and Marcus on the Milgram book stimulated a number of thoughts in me. I speak as a friend and colleague of both Brown and Milgram, but one who disagrees on the moral dilemmas involved in the study and their interpretation of its results. Brown misses the basically valid point in Marcus' polemical review and in Rosenzweig's comments on the contradiction between Milgram in his personal intentions and Milgram in his ingenious role-playing as experimenter and scientist.

From the personal point of view, Milgram's experiment was motivated partly by a sustained moral concern, the concern to understand and publicize the capacity of the "average man" to commit evil under certain social circumstances. The moral conclusions of the experiment, as Brown points out, are to engender a deeper understanding and sympathy with the banal perpetrators of evil at the same time that they arouse the moral impulse to eliminate the authoritarian situations in which this can occur. Endowed with this moral impulse, Milgram himself was unwittingly the victim of the "authority of science" as Rosenzweig points out. Brown dismisses the psychological pain which many subjects endured in the experiment, painfully conflicted and feeling that they were doing wrong but unable to desist. I witnessed this pain as a scientific observer through the mentality of the one-way vision mirror. That Milgram's conclusions apply to myself I would be the last to deny. I could more dispassionately observe the suffering of the subjects through a one-way vision mirror, just as the subjects could continue to shock their assumed victims when separated by a screen from them. In this sense, Milgram's belief in social-science "objectivity" operated as a false screen from the moral and personal understanding of the realities of the situation he created and allowed him to engage in a morally dubious experiment. He was himself a victim, in a sense, another banal perpetrator of evil. Serving the authority science under the banner of "objectivity," he himself inflicted pain on others for

the greater social welfare. In this, however, he was no more determined, enslaved, or irrational than his subjects and he thought, as many of them did, that inflicting pain in this situation was morally justified on the utilitarian grounds that the minor sufferings of his few subjects served the greater welfare of society through documenting certain truths.... Milgram, a utilitarian, failed to ask the question: "Is what I am doing just or fair to the individuals involved even if it is for the greater good?" Brown's defense of the ethics of Milgram, utilitarian in its nature, seems to miss the point. Milgram failed to treat his subjects as persons, the basic meaning of the moral attitude. Brown is correct in saying that one can make the utilitarian argument that the experiment's effects on the subjects could be justified on utilitarian grounds as a learning experience since some said, "It strengthened my belief that man should avoid giving pain to his fellow man at the risk of violating authority." While Milgram conducted the experiment as a learning experience, other subjects had quite different learnings from the study. Another subject said that "he acted just like Eichman and I was surprised to find he enjoyed it." Another Yale undergraduate subject told me that he "learned a lot from participating in the experiment that he could use in business." What he learned was the susceptibility of man to authority and deception, a belief in the lack of responsibility and wisdom of man which Milgram tries to prove and the notion that it is legitimate or scientific to play upon it.

While Milgram had utilitarian moral motives in conducting the experiment to teach society, he had no moral intention to actually produce this teaching effect in his subjects. His concern for his subjects was utilitarian, not to hurt them, only to "cool them off" from feeling bad, not to engage them in an experience of moral learning. Those who "learned," whom he quotes, were mainly those who resisted. The harm of the experiment to the subjects was not so much the pain they suffered in inflicting imaginary pain but in its effect on their moral attitudes. As is well known by Milgram, there is a tendency for people to "reduce cognitive dissonance" to justify unethical behavior into which they are coerced. I believe Milgram could have engaged in the experiment in an ethical fashion but he did not. If the experiment had been used as a vehicle of moral dialogue and education for each individual subject it might possibly have been justified.

This raises another very major point ignored in Milgram's book and omitted from Brown's letter. After Milgram had completed his experiment, I and a student interviewed thirty student subjects in the experiment. The interview was used to define the level or stage of moral reasoning of the subjects. Subjects were divided into those who showed awareness of universal moral principles and rights ("Stage 6 or Stage 5 B), those who believed in a social contract based on utility (like Milgram, called Stage 5 A), and those who were conventional in moral reasoning, i.e., those who believed that right was defined by legitimate authority and the social system. We found that 75% of the principled (Stage 6 and 5 B) subjects refused to shock the victim as compared to 13% of the remaining lower stage

subjects. Far from being the passive victims of a coercive social authority, most of the subjects who obeyed authority were actually moral beings following the behests of the conventional or Stage 4 "law and order morality" used also by Nixon and Agnew as a justification for violating human rights. Like Nixon and Agnew, but with prior intentions, Milgram also used a utilitarian logic of the greater good of society to deceive and manipulate others with an authoritarian rhetoric.

From my perspective, then, the experiment could have been justified as a learning experience, a conflict which would stimulate movement of thought toward principled moral reasoning.

As someone with pretensions as a moral educator, let me suggest what Milgram, Brown, and Marcus could learn from this interchange. All are quite aware that they, too, could have inflicted harm on the victims; indeed, Milgram actually did so as experimenter. The usual social scientific wisdom is that awareness of human frailties is the only salvation from them. Milgram's book does not suggest that Milgram has seen or understood his own frailties in retrospect or the failure of himself as well as his subjects to adopt a morally principled action. This has nothing to do with social science or mechanistic theories per se. Spinoza was a mechanist. Marcus turns to humanistic literary-historical authority as salvation. If only Brown's and Milgram's grammar and sense of history were better, their moral reasoning would be. This is a worship of humanistic "technology" or method similar to Milgram's worship of social-scientific technology and method. Not the idols of the academy but development of moral philosophic tendencies inherent in man are the solutions to the problem. Having preached to others, let me confess myself. Andrew Greeley, in a rather surprising confusion of fact, publicly charged me with doing what Milgram did, deceiving subjects into inflicting supposed harm on others. I did not do this, I was only an "innocent" bystander watching this harm, but turning it to my own intellectual advantage by researching it. I, too, used a utilitarian logic to justify my action, blinded by the idols of scientific psychology. At that time I did not have what I now have, a conviction that I could have intervened, not by force but by moral reason to aid my friend Milgram in clarifying and developing his own moral reasoning about what he was doing. I believe that my own conflicts and limits, as well as those of Brown and Milgram, point the way to a future social science which is "humanistic" in the non-shibboleth sense which recognizes first that we are all fundamentally human persons but recognizes second that we can "objectively" look at ourselves as persons through disciplined social science in such a way as to enhance our moral personhood.

Sincerely,

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and Social Psychology