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Prof Milgram's Experiment

Just how far are we prepared to go when acting under the orders of someone else? It is a question that has been at the centre of a number of news stories, such as the alleged mass-suicide in Uganda of hundreds of members of a religious cult.

I have to admit that my usual reaction to such stories is to think that such things only happen to people with feet of clay—and brains to match. It is certainly a lot more comforting than the alternative, which is to think that we too might be equally vulnerable to the influence of authority. But for years I have heard dark references to an experiment done years ago by an American psychologist, which allegedly proved that even the nicest people can be turned into amoral automatons with terrifying ease.

Sitting in the office of a psychologist friend, I finally discovered the source of these stories. There on his shelves was a copy of *Obedience to Authority*, published in 1974 by Stanley Milgram, a professor of psychology at the City University of New York. Prof Milgram's book is a chillingly matter-of-fact account of the outcome of that experiment of which I had heard so many tantalising reports.

The book recounts how, while at Yale University between 1960 and 1963, Prof Milgram recruited members of the public to take part in what was advertised as a "study of memory".

After being told that the study would look at the effect of punishment on learning, the recruits were led to a room to witness the "pupil", a man in his forties being strapped to a chair and wired up to electrodes. A researcher explained that these would deliver shocks to the pupil, adding that while these could be extremely painful, they would cause no permanent tissue damage.

The recruits were then told to read out a list of word associations—and to give the pupil an electric shock if he made mistakes, using a console with switches going from 15 volts to 450, and marked "Slight Shock" all the way up to "Danger: Severe Shock".

The experiment then began. The scientist in charge would instruct the recruit to deliver a shock at the next level of voltage,

and to call out what voltage it was, each time the pupil blundered.

Although separated by a wall, the recruits could hear the pupil next door. And as the mistakes accumulated, so the protests from the room grew louder, turning to cries and then agonised screams. Recruits who started to demur were told that they had to continue, those who really kicked up a fuss were told they had no choice but to continue.

And despite all the screams from the room next door almost two-thirds of the recruits went all the way to the 450 volts—long after the pupil's screams had been replaced by an ominous silence.

What the recruits did not know was that the pupil was a stooge, his "screams" just tape-recordings. But the results were all too genuine, and stunned everyone, including Prof Milgram. It seemed that ordinary people—professional engineers, care workers, housewives—could be persuaded to deliver lethal shocks to a perfect stranger by someone assuming authority.

His experiment exploded many comforting myths; women, for example, proved no less likely than men to go the whole way. Indeed, about the only remotely comforting finding lay in the reaction of one recruit, who refused to go beyond 215 volts. She proved to be a German émigré raised in Nazi Germany. Asked if this might have explained her refusal to go on, she said: "Perhaps we have seen too much pain."

Would more people act like she did now, 40 years after Prof Milgram's experiment? If no more caring than people in the sixties, perhaps we are more likely to question authority. Certainly it would be comforting to think so, but the only way to know would be to carry out a similar kind of experiment.

However, it is an experiment unlikely to be repeated any time soon. For one can just imagine the law-suits that would come from all those nice, law-abiding recruits demanding compensation for the psychological trauma of being revealed for what they really are.

*Robert Matthews, Sunday Telegraph,
26 March, 2000*

1 What was the writer's original attitude to the issue raised in the opening paragraph?

- A He thinks most people can be made to do whatever they are ordered to
- B He doubts all kinds of people can be persuaded to obey orders without question
- C He refuses to believe reports of people following unethical orders
- D He warns about the abuse of power by people in authority giving orders

2 How is Prof Milgram's book characterized?

It is...

- A overly emotional in style
- B too full of painful details
- C factual but disturbing
- D scientifically questionable

3 What was the basic purpose of Prof Milgram's experiment?

- A To study how people react under severe psychological stress
- B To measure the brain's responses to electric stimulation
- C To test the psychological control of pain
- D To investigate the effect of pain on memory

4 What is said about the recruits' attitude towards the pupil?

- A They were certain the pupil did not suffer any pain
- B Most of them were aware the pupil had agreed to be punished
- C Some of them seemed to believe the pupil overreacted
- D The majority of them refused to show any mercy to the pupil

5 What is the writer's chief conclusion?

- A The results of Prof Milgram's experiment are not to be trusted
- B It will remain uncertain whether Prof Milgram's results are still valid
- C People have changed since the time of Prof Milgram's research
- D Prof Milgram's experiment should be condemned on ethical grounds

Please turn over

A Prima Donna's Progress

This is a review of Joan Sutherland's autobiography

As a small child, Joan Sutherland's mother took her to the local doctor to see about having her tonsils out. She had a tendency to catarrh and ear infections, and to remove children's tonsils was then, as she puts it, 'all the rage'. The doctor said that they must stay put—her vocal cords 'were so responsive that no doctor worth his salt would presume to operate in their vicinity.' Thus one of the great voices of the century was saved.

Dame Joan has evidently kept all her diaries and engagement books—no waffle for her. Each event has its date, time, and the correct names of everyone involved, from her first semi-professional engagements when she was twenty, through to more recent events, such as naming one of the Eurotunnel shuttle locomotives. Her autobiography has no 'kiss-and-tell' element, and although she is critical at times of people and artistic policies, there is a sense of reticence and diplomacy that befits her unassailable position as DBE and OM.

The catalogue of operas, concerts and recordings, the unending travel seems exhausting. By guiding us through her career, Sutherland explains what it's like backstage, nurturing such a voice, and keeping sane in the face of standing ovations, showers of flowers, and ecstatic reviews. She quotes quite a few of these, letting a bit of carping through. At the height of her fame, in the Sixties, most of the criticism was aimed at her husband, the conductor Richard Bonyngue. He was seen as a sort of Svengali, in some way bewitching his wife. She is generous in charting his career at the same time, and in private they have always referred to their career as one.

Sutherland never really tackles the issues of rivalry and jealousy which seem to lurk in the background. Always enthusiastic about her predecessor, Maria Callas, she cannot admit the sense of frustrated rage which Callas seemed to

feel—and gave voice to in interviews after she had retired—once she saw Sutherland not only following in her footsteps but going much further in the revival of the bel canto operas. The most dramatic moment was in May 1962. On successive nights, Callas gave what proved to be her last performance at La Scala, in *Medea*, sandwiched between the first and second nights of Sutherland's triumph in a production of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* partnered by Callas's old team of Giulietta Simionato and Franco Corelli.

Sutherland doesn't mince words about things she finds outside her field of interest. One of her earliest and most significant achievements was the role of Jennifer in Sir Michael Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage* at Covent Garden in 1955. At the time, and in subsequent interviews, she expressed her bewilderment at the form and the music. Despite the fact that it is a classic work that she had helped to create, she seems not to wish to reconsider it: 'One went through the motions and sang the music hoping the audience might comprehend what was going on.'

Sutherland's voice was one of the great experiences in opera in the second half of the twentieth century. Her autobiography is fascinating for anyone curious about the minutiae of a career, long on detail, with few revelations. One is left with the picture of an artist, for whom music and the pursuit of perfection were all.

Through it all, despite a fair share of illness and accidents, Sutherland seems to have enjoyed her career—as did the audience, and even the critics. My favourite line from her scrapbook of reviews comes from the *Toronto Star*: 'Operatic Turkey Made More Edible When it Tastes of Joan Sutherland.'

Patrick O'Connor, Literary Review, October 1997

6 How could Joan Sutherland’s autobiography best be characterized?

- A It is full of factual information
- B It contains a great deal of gossip
- C It is warm and open-hearted
- D It shows the author’s imaginative powers

7 What are we told about Joan Sutherland’s husband?

- A She seems to be rather critical of his role in her life
- B She gives a fair account of his professional life
- C He appears to have taken little interest in her career
- D He helped her to get over bad reviews

8 What is said about Maria Callas?

- A She was a model for Joan Sutherland
- B Joan Sutherland describes her as a rival
- C She could not bear Joan Sutherland’s success
- D Joan Sutherland was jealous of her last performance

9 What does Joan Sutherland think about Tippett’s *The Midsummer Marriage*?

- A It gave her an opportunity to mature as a singer
- B She was too young to do the opera justice
- C It is an opera that leaves her cold
- D She considers Jennifer one of her favourite roles

10 What makes the last sentence a particularly funny headline?

- A “Turkey” can mean more than one thing
- B Joan Sutherland was extremely “operatic”
- C The words “edible” and “tastes” point in different directions
- D Joan Sutherland was known as an opera gourmet

Please turn over

And here are some shorter texts:

Marine Life

Natural oil seeps may be a boon for oceanographers charting subtle eddies or for oil companies looking for new deposits to tap, but are they a bane for marine life? When the existence of oil seeps in the Gulf of Mexico began to be widely recognized during the 1980s, researchers speculated that the fauna living around seeps would provide a natural analogue for marine life exposed to oil pollution. To collect some of these presumably diseased specimens, they dragged a fishing net over active seeps. One of their first hauls contained more than 800 kilograms of an unusual species of clam, *Calymene ponderosa*. Strangely, this large and obviously thriving creature was recovered from depths where deep-sea life normally proves rather scarce.

11 What are we told here?

- A Oil companies have paid too little attention to the environmental aspects of their off-shore activities
- B Some species of marine life seem to have become immune to the oil pollution in the Gulf of Mexico
- C Oceanographic research suggests that healthy deep-sea life is rarely found close to oil seeps
- D Researchers had expected oil seeps and oil pollution to have the same effect on marine fauna

Happiness and Misery

Compared with misery, happiness is relatively unexplored terrain for social scientists. Between 1967 and 1994, 46,380 articles indexed in *Psychological Abstracts* mentioned depression, 36,851 anxiety, and 5,099 anger. Only 2,389 spoke of happiness, 2,340 life satisfaction, and 405 joy.

12 What is the writer's main point?

- A Misery is more common than happiness
- B Relatively little research has been done on happiness
- C Misery and happiness are two sides of the same coin
- D Happiness is difficult to describe in scientific terms

Gifted Kids

Pablo Picasso was a child prodigy. But so was William James Sidis, a math whizz who graduated from Harvard at age 15 and grew to despise math so much that he worked mindless clerical jobs until his death.

One reason tragic cases like Sidis's haven't gotten much attention is that researchers have ignored the study of exceptionally talented kids, contends Boston College psychologist Ellen Winner, Ph.D., author of *Gifted Children: Myths and Realities*. As a result, misconceptions about prodigies continue to thrive, even among educators.

13 What are we told about William James Sidis?

- A His early mathematical interest was hardly encouraged
- B His failure in school became the tragedy of his life
- C He refused to make use of his great talent as an adult
- D He was wrongly considered an extremely clever child

14 What is Ellen Winner's main point?

- A Almost all children are in fact gifted in some way
- B There are many false beliefs about very gifted children
- C Few gifted children become researchers later in life
- D Teachers tend to overestimate the abilities of gifted children

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood has always had much in common with those writers of the last century who were engaged less by the subtle minutiae of human interaction than by the chance to use fiction as a means of exploring and dramatizing ideas. So, after reading her novels, we may find it harder to recall her characters than to remember the larger issues their destinies reflect.

15 What do we learn about Margaret Atwood as an author?

- A She writes about a fantasy world and not about real life
- B Her language is similar to that of some 19th-century writers
- C She is more occupied with the big questions of life than with people
- D Her own experiences are reflected in the novels she has written

Please turn over

In the following text there are gaps which indicate that something has been left out. Study the four alternatives that correspond to each gap and decide which one best fits the gap. Then mark your choice on your answer sheet.

Who Gets the Money?

The goal of foreign aid—at least officially—is usually to help the poor. It may seem intuitively appealing that rich countries should give money to poorer ones to help them to grow faster and live better.**16**.... the economic logic behind this notion is surprisingly weak.

Many economists argue that poor countries stay poor because they suffer from a shortage of capital. Poor people cannot save much, so poor countries cannot finance the investment that is needed for them to grow. Foreign aid is supposed to fill the gap.

The argument is dubious. First, it is**17**.... that developing countries really do face a capital shortage. In recent years, many of the biggest recipients of aid have enjoyed large inflows of private capital. Second, low savings rates cannot be explained by absolute poverty alone. Even the poorest countries have rich people.**18**...., 50% of income in developing countries is held by the richest 20% of the population. These rich elites could save more. Low domestic savings rates imply that they choose not to save or, more likely, choose not to save at home.

....**19**.... economic theory cannot give a satisfactory rationale for aid, empirical evidence that aid actually works is hard to find. There are examples of specific projects that have done a lot of good—an immunisation programme that cuts the rate of disease, for example. But in aggregate, economists have a tough time**20**.... that aid has done much either to help the poor or to promote growth.

- 16** A Yet
B Consequently
C Likewise
D So

- 17** A obvious
B likely
C unclear
D irrelevant

- 18** A At best
B In conclusion
C By contrast
D On average

- 19** A Just as
B While
C Unless
D Even if

- 20** A denying
B proving
C discussing
D admitting

The Economist, December 10th, 1994

That is the end of the English test. If you have time left, go back and check your answers.