

A Social and Criminological Approach to Understanding Evil - Terry J Goldsworthy

Title: A SOCIAL AND CRIMINOLOGICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING EVIL

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploration of the concept of evil. It attempts to define what we mean by this elusive concept and its relevance to human behaviour. The thesis then develops an operational definition of evil that is distilled from the writings of various social scientists. The thesis argues, however, that in addition to merely defining evil, there are three emotive elements that also go towards our preparedness to label an act as evil.

The thesis then examines the causes of evil acts. The thesis argues that the interactive causation, of situation and disposition, is the most robust explanation of evil acts. The thesis rejects the notion of the evil person, instead arguing that it is ordinary people who commit evil acts.

The thesis then examines the causes of genocide, the most evil of acts, and links this back to the previous discussion of causal factors of evil acts. Germany's war against the Soviet Union in World War II, in particular the role of the Waffen-SS is then discussed. The death and destruction during this conflict would result not just from military operations, but also from the systematic killing and abuse that the Waffen-SS directed against Jews, Communists and ordinary citizens. This thesis provides a clear, concise history of the Waffen-SS campaign of conquest and genocide in Russia. By drawing on the best of military and Holocaust

scholarship, this thesis dispels the myths that have distorted the role of the Waffen-SS, in both the military operations themselves and the unthinkable crimes that were part of them.

The thesis then utilises the case study of the Waffen-SS to highlight the application of the interactive causation explanation in regards to evil acts. The conventional wisdom that the Waffen-SS in WWII fought a relatively clean fight, unsullied by the atrocities committed by the Nazis, is challenged – and largely demolished. Focusing on the Eastern Front, the thesis contends that the Nazi vision of a racial-ideological death struggle against Slavic hordes and their Jewish-Bolshevik commissars resonated with soldiers of the Waffen-SS, steeped in traditional anti-Semitic and racist dogmas. In doing so the thesis clearly shows that the Waffen-SS was an organisation that committed widespread atrocities. The thesis then applies the operational definition of evil to the case study and determines that the acts committed by the Waffen-SS were in fact evil. It also contends that the concept of evil is useful in explaining human atrocity. In conducting this examination the thesis provides some insight into the challenges facing society from preventing future broad-scale acts of evil.