Shrink Rap Radio #87, April 27, 2007. Understanding How Good People Turn Evil
Dr. David Van Nuys, aka "Dr. Dave" interviews Dr. Philip Zimbardo

(transcribed from www.ShrinkRapRadio.com by Jo Kelly)

Excerpt: *"We have to understand the causal mechanisms that make ordinary good people do bad things. We have to develop a public health model, not the old medical model. The public health model says: when we look at individuals who are afflicted with a disease, we look for the vector of disease. We look for where the epidemic is coming from because then we can inoculate people against it. If all we do is treat the individuals with medicine, or with prison, we never change the course of evil."*

Introduction: **Philip Zimbardo** is internationally recognized as a leading "voice and face of contemporary psychology" through his widely seen PBS-TV series, *Discovering Psychology*, his media appearances, best-selling trade books on shyness, and his classic research, *The Stanford Prison Experiment*. He has been a Stanford University professor since 1968 (now he's an Emeritus Professor – much like myself), having taught previously at Yale, NYU, and Columbia University. He continues teaching graduate students at the Pacific Graduate School of Psychology, and at the Naval Post Graduate School (Monterey). He has been given numerous awards and honors as an educator, researcher, writer, and for service to the profession. Recently, he was awarded the Havel Foundation Prize for his lifetime of research on the human condition. Among his more than 300 professional publications and 50 books is the oldest current textbook in psychology, *Psychology and Life*, now in its 18th Edition, and *Core Concepts in Psychology* in its 5th Edition. His current research interests continue in the domain of social psychology, with a broad emphasis on everything interesting to study from shyness to time perspective, madness, cults, vandalism, political psychology, torture, terrorism, and evil.

Noted for his personal and professional efforts to actually 'give psychology away to the public', Zimbardo has also been a social-political activist, challenging the Government's wars in Vietnam and Iraq, as well as the American Correctional System. Zimbardo has served as elected President of the Western Psychological Association (twice), President of the American Psychological Association, the Chair of the Council of Scientific Society Presidents (CSSP) representing 63 scientific, math and technical associations (with 1.5 million members), and now is Chair of the Western Psychological Foundation. He heads a philanthropic foundation in his name to promote education in his ancestral Sicilian towns. Zimbardo adds to his

retirement list activities: serving as the new executive director of a center on terrorism, the Center for Interdisciplinary Policy, Education, and Research on Terrorism (CIPERT). He is most excited by the publication of his most important contribution: *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (**Random House**, 2007). To find out more about this very important book, go to www.lucifereffect.com.

Dr. Dave: Dr. Philip Zimbardo, welcome to Shrink Rap Radio.

Zimbardo: I'm happy to be here David.

Dr. Dave: I'm sure happy to have you here. You've long worked at giving psychology away, and that's what I'm trying to do here with this show as well. So I really appreciate your taking time to speak with me here.

Zimbardo: Yes I guess my whole career in psychology has been an effort to give back the gifts that I got. I mean nobody in my family had ever gone to high school let alone college. And so education for me was the key for getting out of the ghetto and surviving. And so my sense has always been that I have to pay back to society and especially to psychology which has been so good to me. Whatever it is that we learn that is valuable, tell the people.

Dr. Dave: Well you've certainly done that in spades, I must say. Now you've got a new book out, called *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. What is it that led you to write that book?

Zimbardo: Well in one sense David it's been incubating since I was a little kid. I grew up in the South Bronx New York, and that was, is, maybe always will be a ghetto. It went through various periods where it was a kind of peaceful ghetto, and then a violent ghetto when drugs came in. But it meant that I was surrounded by good kids who did bad things: many of them ended up in prison, many of them ended up broken. And so as I kid I just wondered, what was that transformation? One day they're good, the next day they're doing terrible things.

When I got to be a psychologist then I was able to reframe the question as: to what extent are ordinary people changed, transformed by different situations that they live in, they exist in? What psychologists call behavioural contexts. And so The Lucifer Effect really is a kind of summary of my observations, insights, my Stanford Prison Experiment, and lots of other psychological science done by colleagues. All of which points to the fact that situations are much more powerful in influencing how we

think, how we perceive the world, and what would we do, than we give them credit for. We tend to over represent the individual dignity, individual willpower, individual rationality in guiding our actions. We put too much stuff in the person and not enough stuff in the situation. The Lucifer Effect is an attempt to correct that.

Dr. Dave: Yes, and your work certainly has been pioneering in that realm. You are a social psychologist by background I believe, and it seems to me that social psychologists seem to come up with the most ingenious experiments. (laughter) I think of Stanley Milgram's work, of your work, of - is it Richie Davidson who did Six Degrees of Separation? Is that the right person?

Zimbardo: No that was originally Stanley Milgram also.

Dr. Dave: Oh really? Oh I didn't realise that.

Zimbardo: Yes that was also him, with essentially what he called the Lost Letter Technique. He had letters with the names on them and essentially it was to find out how many contacts would it take before somebody who saw this letter would get it to the right person. But social psychologists in general tend to believe that situations are important. Social psychologists in general have tended to be more from minority backgrounds, Jewish backgrounds, not mainstream. So I think as a group we tend to focus on how we in our families, in our clan have been changed by the situations we are in. And so because we are sensitive to situations, then our research is all about how we manipulate situations to influence people. Again the famous research by Leon Festiger, by Elliot Aronson, all had a kind of creative flair, a creative twist to it.

Dr. Dave: Yes that's really true. Now we are going to be talking in some detail about the experiment that you are best known for, the Stanford Prison Experiment. Did that build at all on the work of Stanley Milgram? Is that what sort of gave you the idea in the first place?

Zimbardo: Only in a very general sense. I should tell your listeners a remarkable curiosity that little Stanley Milgram and I were in the same high school class at James Monroe High School in The Bronx, in senior year. In fact I have a wonderful website, luciferreffect.com and I went back and I found that high school yearbook picture. So about Phil Zimbardo and then there's a photo gallery and there's the pictures in the high school class.

Stanley back in 1963 was the first one to do this truly impressive study where he created a situation in which he put ordinary people – a thousand people from Newhaven Connecticut, from Bridgeport Connecticut - not college students, not high school students but ordinary everyday people. And what he showed was that in less than an hour he could get the majority, two thirds or more of these good people shocking an innocent person "nearly to death". That is the full range of 450 volts where this guy is screaming, he may become unconscious, and they go all the way to the very end. And so that study was the first that pushed the limits of situational power. He called it blind obedience to authority.

And it's really one of the most generalizable studies in all of psychology for two reasons. It had a huge sample of a thousand, they were ordinary citizens, and actually he didn't run one study with a thousand, he ran 16 different variations and each one he varied one element of the situation. So one study was with women, and also got two thirds conformity. If you want to eliminate blind obedience to authority: if you first see somebody like you resist, you resist. If you see somebody like you go all the way, then you go all the way. He shows that you quantify evil: you can get down to zero, so if other people rebel, you rebel; if other people go all the way then ninety percent go all the way.

Dr. Dave: Boy, I just learned a lot in what you said. I thought I knew something about that study, but I didn't realise that he had so many subject ultimately.

Zimbardo: What I did David, is when I was writing The Lucifer Effect, I decided to do it, to go back as if it was my graduate student thesis. I went back and I literally reread all the original Stanley Milgram work, all the work that people had written about him, and all the follow up. And all of that is in a whole chapter in The Lucifer Effect. And I just discovered lots of things that we had all gotten wrong. So for example the famous white lab coat that the experimenter wore as a symbol of authority was grey. (laughter) And Milgram says in a footnote: I didn't want to make it white because white lab coats are associated with medical, and I didn't want to have the medical authority.

So the other nice thing about The Lucifer Effect is it has lots of little gems. I have fifty pages of notes, every statement I make I document.

Dr. Dave: Oh I know! I've been reading in it and it's quite a tome, so I wasn't able to read the whole thing before the interview, I've been grazing in it.

I need to hasten to clarify: you mentioned the 450 volts, and just in case there is a listener who has not heard of this very famous study: the person being shocked was a confederate, and in fact was not being shocked but was acting like they were. But the subject who was administering the shocks was under the impression that in fact they were electrocuting someone.

Zimbardo: Yes, the vast majority fully believed that when they pressed that button - there was a shock generator with 30 switches starting very low at 15 volts, ending at 450 – the vast majority of participants, ordinary citizens believed that in fact when they delivered a shock the guy in the other room was receiving it. It was all pre-programmed, he was yelling and screaming, but obviously in order to keep the experiments consistent over all those participants it was all tape recorded. So you pressed the button, you heard the guy scream but it was tape recorded and constant from person to person.

Dr. Dave: OK so back to my question: to what extent was your Stanford Prison Experiment influenced by Milgram's work on obedience to authority?

Zimbardo: It was to the extent that Milgram demonstrates it in an interesting context: that ordinary people could be seduced to behave in evil ways, or bad ways. But the way I built on that, although it is very important it is rare that you have an authority figure directly putting pressure on you to do something bad. More often we are in institutions, in families, in schools, in prisons, in hospitals, in old aged homes; where nobody is telling you to do something bad, but they are giving you permission to do certain things, or they are looking the other way, or they are hinting at something they would like to have happen.

And so the Stanford Prison Study is about institutions: it's about the power of institutions, about institutional rules. And what we call social norms: often unwritten rules, guidelines for behaviour. How they can initiate good people into first doing things which are bad, illegal, immoral.

Dr. Dave: OK so let's get down to the nitty gritty here, of this Stanford Prison Experiment study that you did in 1971. Take us through it with as much loving detail as you care to give it.

Zimbardo: Sure. The Stanford Prison study was done way back in 1971. And what is important for your listeners who are younger - the old timers will remember that 1971 was a volatile era in America. It was civil rights

going on, anti war activism against the Vietnam War, Women's Liberation coming in, black pride and Black Panthers out here in the West Coast. There are college students who formed the Weather Underground who are blowing up buildings around the country. So it was a time of great civil unrest, great energy, it was a time when young people said never trust anybody over 30, never trust the military-industrial complex. Everybody had hair, remember the famous musical Hair.

So these were the students that responded to the ad I put in the city newspaper "Wanted: students for study of prison life for two weeks; $15 per day". So when they come in, we interview them, we give them a battery of five different psychological tests, because we want to pick kids who are normal and healthy; no history of crime, drug addiction, no psychological or emotional problems. So of 75 who answered the ad, we start with two dozen normal and healthy in every way. But these are kids who say: "I don't want to be a guard, I didn't go to college to become a guard, I'm not a redneck".

That's really important, so the bias is against becoming a guard. But then we randomly assign them by the flip of a coin, half are guards, half are prisoners. The guards we have come down the day before; we have them select their own military uniforms, we give them symbols of power – Billy Clubs, whistles, handcuffs. We have them all wear silver reflecting sunglasses - an idea I got from a prison movie Cool Hand Luke - to create a sense of anonymity.

The prisoners, we simply said wait in the dormitories, wait at home, the study will begin on Sunday. Unbeknown to them I had arranged with the Palo Alto city police to do realistic arrests. With the squad car, with the sirens wailing, picking up the kids, charging them with violation of penal code 459PC armed robbery, breaking and entering; handcuffed them, put them against the squad car, read them their rights, neighbours are looking on. Then bring them down to the real city hall police department, do fingerprinting, photograph, booking them, put a blindfold on, put them in a for real prison cell.

And then my assistants - Craig Haney, Curt Banks - would pick them up, bring them to our jail (they are still blindfolded, they don't know where they are), and then strip them naked, delouse them – presumably they are bringing lice in. Pretty much they go through a degradation ritual. Then they are standing there in front of a mirror naked, everybody laughing at them, and then the study begins.

Dr. Dave: Are these all men, all male?

Zimbardo: Yes all male. It is all men, all guards and prisoners. We actually had done a pre-test with mixed genders and there were problems that I wanted to avoid, for example one of the female prisoners told a guard, "if you let me out I will let you do anything you want" and I could have lost my job on this, had he done anything he wanted.

Dr. Dave: Right.

Zimbardo: So we just wanted to simplify it and let's just deal with all men.

Then the study began, with two groups of kids playing a game: cops and robbers; in what they knew was an experiment. And on the first day nothing happened. I was going to literally end the study on the second day because the kids playing the role of guards were really awkward, they didn't want to be a guard. It was awkward, they were saying "come on, line up, stop laughing, do push ups!"

Then the next morning the prisoners rebelled. Even though the guards were hassling them only minimally, it was too much: again it was a time everybody wants personal freedom. So they rebelled: they all had numbers on their uniform and took the numbers off; started cursing the guards; barricaded themselves in the prison cells. And what happened was, the guards came to me and said "what are we going to do?" I said, it's your prison, it's your decision. So they called in all the other guards. There was three guards on each of three shifts and then with backup guards; and there were three prisoners in each of three cells, with backup prisoners. And they came in and broke the rebellion; they broke down the doors, they dragged the prisoners out, they stripped them naked, they chained them, they threw them in solitary confinement.

At that point they said "these are dangerous prisoners". So that transformed their thinking. The next thing they said, "everything except breathing air is a privilege: food is a privilege, bedding is a privilege, reading is a privilege, etc, etc". That changed the whole dynamic. Then it became, as one of the prisoners said, "It was a prison run by psychologists and not by the state".

Dr. Dave: But then things began to go very wrong at some point, as I recall.

Zimbardo: Yes, what happens is, guards are working 8 hour shifts, so what that means is it gets boring. And the only thing you have is prisoners as playthings. So boredom is a major motivation for evil; a major motivation for doing things that are arousing to break through the boredom.

Dr. Dave: Interesting.

Zimbardo: So we would see over time what I would call creative evil. The guards would think of interesting things to do with the prisoners. So they spent a lot of time having the prisoners line up to memorise the rules; and then they would have to say the rules backwards; and then they would memorise their numbers, then sing their numbers, then they had to do push ups while somebody was reciting the numbers.

Essentially what they did is they created a totally arbitrary environment where the prisoners could not figure out what they would do that would lead to reward or punishment. So a guard would tell a joke, prisoners would laugh, they got punished. A guard would tell a joke, they wouldn't laugh, prisoners got punished. And so it was creating this arbitrary environment which really forced what Martin Seligman has called Learned Helplessness.

Dr. Dave: Yes.

Zimbardo: And that's why in 36 hours we saw the first prisoner have an emotional breakdown: screaming, out of control, crying; and we had to release him to student health. And each day after that, that became the model of how you exit, how you escape from this increasingly hostile environment.

Dr. Dave: Were they just acting like they were upset? Or were they truly beginning to break down?

Zimbardo: Well the evidence we have is that the first kid started out acting. That is the first kid started out saying: this is the way I'm going to get out. Then, because we interviewed him at great length afterwards, he got so into it and he was so upset, and then there was a little of the paranoid element: he had to now act this way in front of his cellmates, they were three to a cell. In a funny sense, the madness took over him. When he is screaming, when he is out of control – and you listen to those tapes, they're just chilling – he became, I guess the most mild phrase is, severely emotionally disturbed or distressed. I mean, so much so that we had to release him, I mean it's an experiment. In a real prison you would just send him to sick bay or something of this kind.

An interesting side light is, this young man, it had such a big impact on him - so that's how we know he wasn't just play acting - it changed his whole life. He went on to get a PhD in clinical psychology at Berkley. He did his dissertation on "the shame of prisoners and the guilt of guards". He did his internship in San Quentin and has been working in the San Francisco County Jail for the past 20 years.

Dr. Dave: Amazing.

Zimbardo: So if it's play acting, it's play acting that he very deeply internalised. (laughter)

Dr. Dave: I'll say. Now what about the guards: was there a psychological impact on them?

Zimbardo: Well I should say I had to end the study after six days, for several reasons. One of them was, what you got was increasing levels of homophobia: stripping prisoners naked, laughing at their genitals, playing games that at first started having a sexual component. Like, one prisoner is Frankenstein, one is Mrs Frankenstein: pushing them together saying "love them". Then it escalates more and more, saying "f" that hole in the ground. Then finally: you are female camels, then no you are male camels get behind them and now start humping them; and the guards are laughing because "humping" is a play on words, a double entendre.

But the prisoners are simulating sodomy: in a psychological study of cops and robbers where it's all fake, it is not a real prison; there is nobody with guns forcing you to do that. And they are now mindlessly obeying every order of the guards. At this point the study is out of control. All you can say is we proved the point: situations can overwhelm disposition; situations can overwhelm personal character. Not of everybody, but of most people.

Dr. Dave: OK, how did you not lose your job over that? (laughs)

Zimbardo: Well it was 1971; because people said "oh you must have been sued". No, in 1971 we did not have a litigious society. There was not a lawsuit, there was not anything negative at all. In fact the study was approved by the Stanford Human Subjects Committee.

What you have to realise is it's a different evaluation after the fact than before. After I tell you all this you say: wow, that study never should have been done; what was the Human Subjects Committee thinking? The Human

Subjects Committee was thinking, "here's kids playing cops and robbers in an experiment. If the kids have any issue then they walk away, they quit; it's not a prison it's an experiment".

In fact that's what we all thought, but the prisoners transformed it. It was a prisoner who told the others, "they won't let you leave; you can't quit". We never said that, of course. But once they said that, then it became a realistic prison.

We had the prison chaplain come down, interview the prisoners, and he's there knowing it's an experiment. In fact he wanted some references, I said I'll trade you: I'll give you references for your term paper if you come down, interview the prisoners, give me a sense of how realistic it is. He begins, he drops into his prison role, and he says "what are you doing to get out son", to each kid. They said, what? He said, "You are in jail, you need a lawyer to get out". And they are looking at him dumbfounded: "What do you mean? I thought this was an experiment?" And so he made them think it was really a jail, not an experiment. One of the kids said, "Well my cousin is a public defender." He said, "well do you want me to contact him?" The lawyer then contacts this kid's mother, says "your son is in jail, bring down your cousin the public defender to help get him out."

Dr. Dave: Oh my goodness!

Zimbardo: Well that's either written by Pirandello or Kafka, I'm not sure which. (laughter) But it's all these little things which were unique that transform this, what started out as a little demonstration of the power of the situation, into something totally unexpected and huge.

Dr. Dave: Yes, something that you didn't expect when you set this whole thing in motion. Nobody could have anticipated it; and that's why this is such a landmark study because it really revealed the dynamic - the power of the situation that I don't think was understood prior to this.

Zimbardo: In a funny way as you say this, I never thought about it: it's really like you are going to put together a drama, a dramatic presentation and but it ends up not having a final act. The actors keep acting, the audience leaves, and the actors keep doing their role and you say, "wait a minute, you are supposed to end now" and they say "End what?" That is they take what started out as being acting on a stage, with props and costumes and scenery, and then it becomes something totally different. It's as if the actors are doing methods acting and the method becomes the madness.

Dr. Dave: I'm still wondering about the psychological impact on the guards. You described a kind of homophobic activities they got involved in. Was there any sense of shame or remorse afterwards?

Zimbardo: It varied enormously. I should say there is no question it was unethical, in the sense that people suffered.

In the Milgram study, when it's all over the victim comes out and says "hey you didn't shock me, we were just pretending". Many of the people still felt guilt, because you knew you thought you had shocked him. Here people really suffered. They suffered not for 50 minutes as in those studies, but day in and day out. And I am responsible for that. In *The Lucifer Effect* I have a long section, half a chapter on the ethics of this research, and my continued apology for having created it and not ending it sooner.

What we did at the end of the study is, we first had extensive debriefing with all the guards, then separately all the prisoners, then we brought the guards and prisoners together. During that time what I was able to say is look, we all did bad things: me as a superintendent, you as guards, you as prisoners. But it is diagnostic of the power of this strange situation that we've all been in; it's not diagnostic of our personalities; it's not diagnostic of any pathology in us. Because I chose you because you were the best and the brightest; and in my own case I have a whole history of being a caring, loving teacher, father etc, etc.

But in this time and this place I was transformed into becoming a cold hearted superintendent, and you were transformed into becoming creatively evil guards, and you were transformed into becoming pathological prisoners. The ones who didn't break down became zombies, doing anything the guards would say "spit in this guy's face, call him a bastard"; and they said "yes sir" and they did it. And so I said all of us did things that we are ashamed of, but it tells us the message that situations can be much more powerful than we ever thought.

I had them all come back two weeks later when we then showed them the videotapes we made; and then two months later NBC made a video of the Stanford Prison Study and many of them came back. I have been in contact with some of them for 35 years, but again they vary; some of them still justify what they did in various ways.

Dr. Dave: Interesting.

Zimbardo: But it did not have as negative an impact on the prisoners or guards as you might assume just from hearing that they really suffered; because they had a normal healthy foundation to bounce back to.

And also because the bizarre, evil behaviour was so specific to wearing the uniform, in that dungeon, at that time and that place; and you take off the uniform and get them out of the place - and it's exactly what happened with Eichmann in Auschwitz. Normal before you put him in: you give him this job to execute 2 million Jews in 3 months; he's a monster. You take him out, you put him on trial, and Hannah Arendt says "he is terrifyingly normal".

Dr. Dave: Yes. Now given the changes in the American Psychological Association Ethical Guidelines could you conduct a study like this today?

Zimbardo: Oh you can't even ask questions that would be imagined to be distressing to participants. It is not possible to do any kind of behavioural research which involves deception, which involves stress to the individuals. The human studies committees are exceedingly cautious if you will, exceedingly conservative to prevent any kind of unnecessary arousal or distress; and some people like me would say the pendulum has swung too far the other way.

Dr. Dave: I was wondering if you would feel that way.

Zimbardo: Yes. Of course human participants or animal participants have to be protected from excesses of experiment to power; there is no question about that. On the other hand, in the extreme you do no research. If all the research is only about Pablem you are never going to find out what is the effect of poison is on the system.

Suppose you want to do a study of resilience. Suppose you want to do a study to find out who is going to be the hero in a certain kind of situation. Well you can't create the situation from which people can show their resilience, or show their leadership to overcome or change; so it puts psychology and social science in a bind. To say if indeed you have to be in some situations to understand how powerful they can be, but now we can't ever allow you to create those situations; we are only going to ask people to imagine how they would behave if they were guards in the following prison - then you have a distorted psychology, or a distorted sense of what people are and what they can do.

Dr. Dave: I certainly agree with you. The world would be much poorer without the research that you and Stanley Milgram did. It opened up a whole new way of understanding what goes on.

In fact let's leap forward then to what I suspect was one of the driving motivations for writing this book, which was Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo.

Zimbardo: Oh yes. Obviously it has been many, many years; I have written a number of different articles about Stanford Prison study, many of them with Craig Haney who was my graduate student then, and who is now Professor of Law and Psychology at Santa Cruz. We have written lots of articles and chapters about the book, but essentially we laid it to rest. Until literally almost 3 years ago, April 28 2004 when we were all shocked by those horrendous pictures coming out of a strange place called Abu Ghraib Prison of American soldiers dehumanising, degrading, crushing the prisoners they were supposed to be protecting in this prison.

And I was shocked, but I wasn't surprised because I had seen those images: guards stripping prisoners naked, guards putting bags over their heads, guards sexually degrading prisoners. That was my guards, 35 years ago, down in the basement at Stanford. And so the military comes on immediately and says "don't blame the military: it's a few bad apples, it's a few rogue soldiers." Our good President Bush comes on and says, "we're going to get to the bottom of this." Which parenthetically means, we're never going to get to the top of it, right?

Dr. Dave: (laughing) Yes.

Zimbardo: I make the argument that maybe these are not bad apples; maybe it was the barrel that was bad. Maybe these are good American soldiers, as most American soldiers are when they start out. And we put them in a bad barrel - prison - and we put that bad barrel in the bad barrel of war. So it's a doubly corrupting barrel.

Well the good thing for me was that the lawyer for one of these guards heard me on NPR and invited me to be on his defence team. And on the defence team for Sergeant Chip Frederick – he was the sergeant supposedly in charge of that night shift - I got access to all the information about him, so I could determine was he a good apple or a bad apple to start with. And then all the information about what was that situation like, that behavioural context that all these soldiers did these bad things. Then I was able to ask the big question: who created that situation that put these young men and women in harm's way? And then the answer is: it's the system.

And I have a whole chapter in *The Lucifer Effect* where I track down, like an investigative reporter, who were the colonels, who were the generals that put this system in charge. And then what was Rumsfeld's role in propagating a set of eight specific interrogation tactics which migrated from Guantanamo Bay, down to this dungeon in Abu Ghraib. And so I put all these people on trial.

Dr. Dave: Were you able to - in terms of the real trial that was going on - were you able to prevail at all?

Zimbardo: Not at all. I mean military justice is a strange thing; some people would say it's an oxy moron. It was all set, I mean these are show trials. What they do is, they give some outlandish sentence like, the guy I defended was going to get 15 years; and then you plea bargain that you are going to rat on the other soldiers, and they take a few years off. You are going to agree to this charge in place of a more profound charge. And so I think he was going to get 9 years, and maybe my situationist argument reduced it by a year at most. And he got dishonourable discharge, 8 years in prison, they sent him to solitary confinement, they took away 9 medals.

This guy is a super patriot; he should have been the poster boy for the military: he loves the American flag; he's from a small town in Virginia. He was the guard in a small minimum security prison; now he is in charge of 1000 prisoners, 60 Iraqi policemen who are smuggling weapons in, and he is overwhelmed. He is an army reservist: he is a week-end soldier with no training for this. And then they took away 22 years of his retirement pay: he had been a National Guard - so he is broken. And he said "I'm guilty: I'm willing to serve, I'm willing to die for my country". The sentence is way out of proportion to anything that he did specifically.

But it was the trophy photos, it was those images of American soldiers degrading, dehumanising prisoners which we had never seen before. So it was the humiliation of the military, the humiliation of the Bush administration that he had to pay for.

Dr. Dave: So that's got to have been heart breaking for you, I'm sure it continues to be, knowing what you know about this young man and your close involvement with him. And it seems like in some ways we haven't learned the lesson of this research.

Zimbardo: Oh not at all, it's very sad. I must say the single thing that was most enlightening to me: and I lay this out, I guess in Chapter 15 of *The*

Lucifer Effect, is that there have been 11 investigations into these abuses, 10 of the 11 are by generals. They are called "independent investigations" but it doesn't make sense, they are all by generals. Where was the Senate Armed Services Committee? Why didn't they do one? Well they didn't do one because they were pushed to the side.

But one of these is by former Secretary of Defence James Schlesinger. And in it he says exclusively what you just hinted at: that the landmark Stanford study should have been a cautionary tale to the military about the potential for abuse of detainees in a prison setting. And then he goes on to say: and the Stanford setting was benign compared to the stress of wartime. He said: it should have been a cautionary tale to require greater planning, greater attention to training. Which, of course never was done. So he outlines then he said: the principles of social psychology could have predicted what happened in this place at that time.

So in a way it's kind of a backhanded compliment for the Stanford Prison study and for social psychology, but it's after the fact.

Dr. Dave: Yes. You know I think that your book needs a film - kind of like Al Gore's film, to get the word out there. Because your book is long, it's wonderfully written, it's both scholarly and informal.

Zimbardo: Thank you.

Dr. Dave: Somehow you have managed to marry those two elements together. But I would love to see it get a much wider readership, or to have the basic message disseminated much more widely.

Zimbardo: Maybe I'm in the baby Al Gore stage. Obviously I give lectures: I have given 10 lectures in the last month, and I have a whole lecture on *The Lucifer Effect* with slides and video clips and things. I don't know how to make it into a movie, but I think you're right, the message has to go to the next level. Because relatively few people in our society read books; certainly not big, fat books.

Dr. Dave: Right (laughing). You know something that you said touches on another issue relating to the American Psychological Association's Ethics Guidelines, which is very controversial. Currently as they are written they allow psychologists to work as consultants in places such as Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo. And some psychologists are upset; feeling that we shouldn't get near such places, and should have the stricter guidelines that the American Psychiatric Association put out. Where are you on that issue?

Zimbardo: Yes it's very contentious. Actually at the American Psychological meeting here at San Francisco in August, there is going to be about 10 or 12 hours devoted to just that issue: what is the role of psychologists in these interrogations. And there is a wide range of opinion. The American Psychological Association has come down on the soft side, that is saying: yes it's ok for psychologists to be involved in various ways. The government says: we don't torture; so psychologists say: we are not involved in torture.

I wrote an extended commentary about it, to say that: number 1 the committee that was put together to review these issues was biased from the start. Of 10 people on the committee, 6 had Department of Defence connections; several were in the military. Well before you begin you know you are in trouble, because they have to approve the restricted Bush's interpretation and not the international standard that says we will do nothing that violates the human dignity; we will do nothing that involves cruelty or personal indignity. We will not uphold the Geneva standards; we are going to uphold the Bush standard.

Well that alone cast the whole conclusion in a very negative light. In fact there is likely to be a major expose in Vanity Fair coming out in the next month or two, which goes to the bottom of: how did that happen? How did you have a committee dealing with ethics when it was set up so badly; in such a biased way? And I think it's going to be very explosive for psychology.

Dr. Dave: Yes, a storm is brewing.

Zimbardo: It will be sad. What's sad is that it may have a negative backlash about psychology and not just the particular people, who did this wrong doing; who set up this commission improperly, in order to give support for Bush's interpretation of unlawful enemy non-combatants; or why we have to suspend the Geneva Convention.

Dr. Dave: Yes. Well the committee aside, and how it was formed; one side is saying you need to have psychologists somewhere in the process, because they can help temper it, they can help keep it humane; they can maybe be aware of – what I'll refer to as, I was going to call it the Zimbardo effect but I'll call it the Lucifer Effect. So they maybe could temper things. On the opposite side, you have people who say psychologists shouldn't be anywhere near this sort of situation. They are concerned about what you might call "behavioural drift"; that they will be influenced by environment,

by the military context in which they find themselves and they will become victims in fact of the Lucifer Effect. So where do you come down on that? I don't know where I do, actually I'm sort of split.

Zimbardo: It would be nice if the first part of your statement were true; that is if psychologists were there as neutral observers giving advice to the military about what we know in general about persuasion, about compliance. But as representatives of humanity, that we would say that is going too far, or that is not acceptable.

The problem is most of the psychologists have worked for the military, that is they have a job to do. They are sucked in; it's more than behavioural drift. It's that if you are a captain, military psychologist and the colonel is doing something wrong, you cannot say: you are doing something wrong sir, without having your career jeopardised. So it's really a phoney dichotomy. When you are in that situation psychologists have very little power. Certainly if they are in the military and if they are outranked, somebody says: shut up and do your job, or go away and we will get someone else to do it.

So I think it's too idealistic to say that psychologists can be good because we can moderate against excesses. When you are embedded in the situation you become part of the excess. Or you begin to change your values so that you don't see it as excess; you see it as necessary in the war on terrorism.

Dr. Dave: OK. I appreciate your being so clear about that. We have just recently had this experience of mass killings at Virginia Tech; and I know your career has involved a lot of focus on the study of violence. Do you think our society is becoming more violent than in the past, and if so, why?

Zimbardo: Yes, I was in London when this happened last week, which was probably fortunate, otherwise I would have had to give commentary on endless TV programs. But even in London it was on BBC, CNN all the time. And there were these horrific programs on – getting into the mind of the mad killer. But what was upsetting to me is here is this rush to the dispositional; and immediately say: we need to know everything there is to know about this crazy kid, this lunatic; how could anybody have done such a horrific thing, and on and on.

So it's what the Lucifer Effect is opposing, it's to say: yes people do behaviour; yes people are the actors who carry out behaviour; yes psychology is the scientific study of the behaviour and mental process of

individuals. But people always are in a behavioural context. If you don't ask about the behavioural context you rarely understand the causes.

So if this Virginia Tech thing was the first one then yes let's find out about the person. It's the eleventh school shooting in a decade. So then I say, is there a pattern? Is this kid simply one of many? What he did is noteworthy only because it's the biggest; it's 32 and that's more than we had before. If it was only 11 it wouldn't have made such a big deal. But he's what? He's shy, he's a loner, he was bullied, he was teased, he never had a friend. He sent out messages over and over again: I need help. And he got none.

And what he did get was a gun. He got a gun; he got a semi-automatic gun which would have been illegal had the law not been retroactively changed. So that after Columbine, there was some minimal restriction: you can't have an automatic rifle with a cartridge with fewer than 11 bullets or something. Well the National Rifle Association puts pressure on Congress and they take that law away. So this kid had a gun that had a cartridge with 15 bullets and he could shoot that many people pulling one trigger.

So here's what I'm saying, is that: it's shyness, being lonely, being alienated, being teased, being bullied – these are the situational circumstances that could have prevented this. These are the same things that happened in Columbine; in almost all the shootings that I actually have done research on. When I used to work on shyness to say that when I looked at young men that had recently committed homicides, for the first time in their life they broke the law, they killed somebody: 80% of them were shy. And I looked at other men who had recently also killed somebody, had a whole history of crime: almost none of them were shy.

If you are shy it means you have not learned to verbally negotiate conflicts and you just become sullen, you get depressed, you turn it inward and you commit suicide. But now if you have a gun: you get angry, and you turn it outward and you kill. And you know how many shy, lonely, alienated kids are out there? Especially kids from minority immigrant backgrounds. And it's not just in America it's everywhere. So my concern is save your tissues, saying your crying towel because this is going to happen again, and again, and again. Because we are not dealing with symptoms we are dealing with the person – if this kid had not killed himself he could have been lynched. Certainly if he was black or Muslim he would have been lynched; or in prison, tormented, etc.

But the whole point of my book *The Lucifer Effect* is we have to understand the causal mechanisms that make ordinary good people do bad things. We

have to develop a public health model, not the old medical model. The public health model says: when we look at individuals who are afflicted with a disease we look for the vector of disease; we look for where the epidemic is coming from because then we can inoculate people against it. If all we do is treat the individuals with medicine, or with prison, you never change the cause of evil.

Dr. Dave: And that I think is a good place for us to wrap it up.

So Dr. Philip Zimbardo I want to thank you so much for being our guest today on Shrink Rap Radio.

Zimbardo: Thank you David, I really appreciate it. And do have your listeners go to lucifereffect.com. I think they are going to see something rather remarkable there, it's all free and it's all downloadable.

Dr. Dave: Great. I will put a link to that in my show notes.

Zimbardo: Thank you so much.