

Situational Determinants of Behavior

BY HENRI ZUKIER

Glendower: I can call spirits from the
vasty deep.

Hotspur: Why, so can I, or so can any
man; but will they come when
you call for them?

Henry IV

Two decades ago, a study of Nazi war criminals aroused widespread outrage and controversy. The author argued that the atrocities of World War II were oftentimes committed by very ordinary people, and that, contrary to popular belief, many Nazis were not at all abnormal, nor some kind of perverted or sadistic monsters. Rather "... they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal."¹ For instance, one convicted criminal was a very "average, normal ... ambitious young man" who joined the Nazi movement because he had become weary of his job as a traveling salesman and thought the movement afforded better opportunities for promotion and for a career. Clearly, the defendant had not acted out of base motives, evil instincts, or some deep-seated animosity. The psychiatric report noted that the defendant had "a psychological outlook ... an attitude toward [family] ... and friends that was ... most desirable."² And the court that convicted him acknowledged that "... under more favorable circumstances it is highly unlikely that [the defendant] would

¹ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Viking, 1963), p. 276.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.