Q. HOW DID YOU MAKE THE TRANSITION FROM A WORKING IN A CHIMP LAB IN OHIO TO EXPLORING THE DARK SIDE OF HUMAN NATURE?

A. There is a common thread: wanting to understand why. The fundamental nature of psychology is to understand what we see. Primates and dolphins evolved separately, so why are their capabilities similar to each other, and to ours? With evil, it’s not sufficient to say, “They’re bad people.”

Q. YOU WARN STUDENTS IN THE SYLLABUS THAT SOME OF THE MATERIALS MAY BE GRAPHIC OR DISTURBING, SUCH AS PHOTOS OF MURDER SCENES OR A DISCUSSION OF WHAT MOTIVATES PEOPLE TO HARM OTHERS. DID PLANNING THE COURSE GIVE YOU PAUSE?

A. It’s so important for students to really understand what we’re talking about. I want to be sensitive. But to understand it in a scientific way, you have to have the emotional experience, too. I definitely don’t do it for shock value, but this is not something that you can learn about in abstract.

Q. YOU AND THE DIRECTOR OF THE DISTURBING THRILLER “COMPLIANCE” PARTICIPATED IN A Q&A AT AN EARLY SCREENING THIS SUMMER. THE FILM WAS BASED ON A TRUE STORY OF HOW AN AUTHORITY STRANGER PERSUADED SEVERAL PEOPLE TO ASSAULT A YOUNG WOMAN. WHAT DID THE ATTENDEES WANT TO KNOW?

A. They had a hard time understanding why people would do these things and are convinced they wouldn’t. When we are confused, stressed and afraid, we do not behave rationally. These were not crazy people in a normal situation; it is the other way around.

Q. ON THE FLIP SIDE OF THIS GLOOMY WORK ARE YOUR OTHER INTERESTS: PHOTOGRAPHY, GRAPHIC DESIGN AND DEVELOPING SOME ENTREPRENEURIAL ENDEAVORS. HOW DO THEY FIT IN?

A. The balance is all about being creative. I’m lucky because teaching gives me that as well. I’m creating a learning experience that challenges and engages students. I certainly wish that there were more time in the day for the creative projects and business ventures.

Q. YOU LIVE NEXT TO AND COMMUTE TO WORK WITH YOUR YOUNGER BROTHER, ANDREW (ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR THE COLLEGE). IS THAT A TOGETHERNESS OVERLOAD?

A. We have so much in common, the same sense of humor and the joint entrepreneurial interests. We both relish in the fact that we get to contribute to this overall thing [the university] we believe in. We have too much fun together for it to be an overload.

FACULTY Q & A

A TALK ON THE DARK SIDE

Students flock to hear Scott Roberts Ph.D. ’08 talk about deviant behaviors and why being bad sometimes feels good. His popular new course, “The Psychology of Evil,” delves into topics such as morality and religion and nurture vs. nature. It might sound like a change in direction for someone who’s done cognitive research on chimpanzees and trained dolphins. Roberts, lecturer and director of undergraduate studies in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, explains why it’s not... —MAB