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0521821282 - The Psychology of Good and Evil: Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others

Ervin Staub

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The Psychology of Good and Evil

Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others

This book gathers together the knowledge gained in a lifelong study of the causes of goodness and evil. Since the 1960s Ervin Staub has studied the roots of helpful, caring, generous, and altruistic behavior in adults and their development in children, as well as passivity in response to others' need. He has also studied bullying and victimization in schools, as well as youth violence and its prevention. He spent many years studying the origins (and prevention) of human destructiveness, genocide, and mass killing, and he has examined the Holocaust, the genocide of the Armenians, the disappearances in Argentina, the genocide in Rwanda, and other instances. He has applied his work in many real-world settings, in seminars, workshops, lectures, and in consultations with parents and teachers, police officers, and political leaders. He has appeared frequently in the media, since September 11 especially, to explain the causes and prevention of terrorism. Professor Staub has published, in addition to books, many articles and book chapters on these topics. A selection from these is gathered, with new writings added, in *The Psychology of Good and Evil*. The book presents a broad panorama of the roots of violence and caring and suggests how we can create societies and a world that are caring, peaceful, and harmonious. Two of the important themes of the book are how both evil and goodness evolve, step by step, and the great power of bystanders.

Ervin Staub is Professor of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He was born in Hungary, and received his B.A. and his Ph.D. (Stanford University, 1965) in the United States. He has taught at Harvard University, Stanford University, the University of Hawaii, and the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is a Fellow of four divisions of the American Psychological Association and was President of the Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, and Violence (as well as recipient of its Lifetime Contribution to Peace Psychology award), and of the International Society for Political Psychology. Professor Staub applies his work to the promotion of caring, helping, "active bystandership," and the prevention of violence through media appearances, work with organizations and schools, and working on healing and reconciliation in conflict settings such as Rwanda.

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Other books by Ervin Staub:

Positive Social Behavior and Morality: Vol. 1. Personal and Social Influences

Positive Social Behavior and Morality: Vol. 2. Socialization and Development

Personality: Basic Aspects and Current Research (editor)

The Development and Maintenance of Prosocial Behavior: International Perspectives on Positive Morality (coeditor)

The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence

Social and Moral Values: Individual and Societal Perspectives (coeditor)

Patriotism in the Lives of Individuals and Nations (coeditor)

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ERVIN STAUB

University of Massachusetts, Amherst



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To Macs and to all “active bystanders”

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Preface

I received my Ph.D. in psychology at Stanford in 1965, started my work life as a professor at Harvard, and almost immediately began to focus on the topics of this book: goodness and evil. For many years, I have conducted research on, extensively written about, and more and more applied to the real world the understanding that is presented in this book on a variety of interrelated questions: What leads children and adults to be generous and helpful, and what leads them to respond to someone's urgent need in an emergency rather than remain passive bystanders? Why do children and adolescents bully, harass, and intimidate each other, and what can we do about it? What influences lead people, especially young people, to become aggressive and violent, and what socialization and experience in the home and school lead children and youth to become caring and helpful? What leads groups of people to engage in violent actions, especially in extreme forms of violence such as genocide and mass killing? How can groups (and individuals) heal from the trauma created by past victimization? How can members of perpetrator and victim groups, or members of groups that have mutually harmed each other, reconcile? What is the role of passive bystanders in allowing violence to unfold, and how can we use the great potential power of "active bystanders" for preventing violence or generating helping? And how can violence and other harm-doing by individuals and groups be prevented and caring, helping, and peace be promoted, and how can cultures that generate these be created? Since September 11, 2001, I have also applied my prior work to the understanding of the roots of terrorism and its prevention.

As I engaged with these issues over the years, I increasingly entered the "real world." I lectured and conducted workshops for parents and teachers on practices in the home and school that would help them raise caring and nonviolent children. In this book I write about positive (as well as negative) socialization in the home and about the practices of "caring schools." It is possible to provide all children, I believe, with experiences

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that foster in them caring about other people, while also helping them maximize their own personal and human potentials, that is, helping them to become optimally functioning persons. It seems profoundly important to me, and I hope it will seem so to readers of this book, to bring this about.

In another entry into the real world, after the famous incident that someone captured on film – in which a few police officers severely beat Rodney King while a group of officers stood by watching – I developed a training program for the agency responsible for police training in the state of California, aimed at preventing the use of unnecessary force by the police. Later, together with Dr. Laurie Anne Pearlman, I developed, trained people in, and carefully evaluated the effects of their use in the community of an intervention to help promote healing and reconciliation in Rwanda, in the wake of the terrible genocide there in 1994. We have also worked with some of that country's leaders to help them understand the roots of violence and develop policies and practices they might use to prevent renewed violence and to break the cycle of violence.

As I am writing this, in December 2002, we are about to leave for Rwanda to try to help channel the feelings that arise from the *gacaca*, so that instead of retraumatization and renewed rage and hostility, the country can move toward reconciliation. The *gacaca* is a community justice system, newly created and initiated in 2001–2002. It was inspired by a traditional practice in Rwanda for resolving conflict and reconciling wrongdoers with the community. The large majority of 115,000 people who have been in prison since 1994, accused of perpetrating the genocide, will be tried in *gacaca* courts by 250,000 members of the community who were elected to serve as judges and trained over a period of several months.

As I have mentioned, I have done extensive writing in books, articles, book chapters, and at times in newspaper columns, about the topics I have just described: the roots and prevention of evil and the roots and creation of goodness. This book is a selection from my writings, covering primarily the period from the publication of my book on evil, *The Roots of Evil*, in 1989, to 2003; it also includes a number of earlier publications that I regard as especially important – particularly about influences that lead people to help others in need – and substantial new writings.

The Roots of Evil provides a thorough, detailed examination of the roots of genocide and mass killing at many levels, from culture and society to individual characteristics and human relationships, with detailed analyses of a number of important instances. The current book is much broader in its focus. It focuses on goodness as much as evil, on what leads individuals to help others, and on how caring and helping develop in children. Although I do not provide here the same deep exploration of the roots of genocide and mass killing, I summarize the material from *The Roots of Evil* in an award-winning publication that I have recently updated. I include publications that focus on new examples, especially Rwanda. I describe

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influences I have identified since *The Roots of Evil* – for example, the role of past victimization and woundedness in making violence by groups more likely. In *The Roots of Evil* I also discuss how violence by groups might be prevented. In the writings in this book I add to that exploration, addressing profoundly important matters such as healing, reconciliation, and even forgiveness, specific actions “bystander nations” can and ought to take to prevent violence by groups, and democratization as an avenue to culture change.

I wrote opening and concluding chapters for this book and included some other new or recent, not previously published pieces. The volume contains whole articles or book chapters, and parts of others. In a few selections, material that reports the results of research has been rewritten to make it easier to read and thus accessible to a wider audience. In putting together these selections, my aim has been to describe and interweave all the important elements in the understanding I have gained about goodness and evil in the course of my life’s work, to represent what I know at this time about goodness and evil.

My life experience, and my lifelong work on good and evil, altruism and aggression, and helping and harm-doing, have been deeply intertwined. As one of the selections describes, I am what is nowadays called a child survivor of the Holocaust. I was a 6-year-old boy in Budapest in the summer of 1944 when about 450,000 out of about 600,000 Hungarian Jews were transported to Auschwitz and killed. I and members of my nuclear family survived because of Raoul Wallenberg, a Swede who heroically saved many lives in Hungary, and Maria, a Hungarian woman who worked for my family and did all she could to help us. We called Maria “Macs,” an abbreviation of the Hungarian word for cat. I don’t know how that came about. But Macs was my second mother, and I feel that her courageous actions and loving nature taught me, in spite of my experiences during the Holocaust and afterward in Hungary under communism, to have faith in human beings and in the possibility of our caring about each other, about the “other,” and about all “others.”

I believe that my beginning to work on what leads people to help others and what stops them from helping those in need, including my focus on the passive and active “bystander,” and my lifelong concern with preventing violence, passivity, and promoting goodness, owe a great deal to Macs. On one of my visits to her in Hungary, when she was in her late eighties, I told Macs that the work I have been doing all my life was inspired by her. With her head with its beautiful fine silver hair shaking, as it did constantly in those days, she smiled and said, naturally and without pride, “I know.” This book is dedicated to her, and to all others who have not and will not remain passive bystanders in the face of others’ suffering and need, who act on behalf of others and thereby make this a more caring world.

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This book summarizes what I have learned about goodness and evil in the course of 35 years. During that time I have done research in academic settings and research in the world outside the university on caring, helping, altruism, and the reduction of aggression, and I have engaged in efforts to raise caring children, prevent violence by individuals and groups, and promote healing by victimized groups and reconciliation among groups. I want to express my gratitude to the many people who have directly contributed to this book, or have been influential in my thinking and work over the years, and/or provided support by their friendship, affection, or in other ways. I will mention a few of them by name.

Vachel Miller was an outstanding collaborator in helping to make selections for the book. A few of the selections include research findings, and he was also extremely helpful in summarizing these in accessible language. Phil Laughlin, my editor at Cambridge University Press, was helpful in every possible way, as were others at Cambridge, like Helen Wheeler, who supervised the production. I am deeply grateful to associates, colleagues, and former students who have allowed me to include or reproduce coauthored material: Laurie Anne Pearlman, Darren Spielman, and Robert Schatz, as well as Daniel Goleman, whose article about my work in the *New York Times* (written when he was the behavioral science writer for the *Times*) is the only article by another person included in this volume. Jen Borden was helpful in organizing materials for the book.

The late Perry London, the first person to study heroic rescuers, inspired my early work on altruism. Walter Mischel, my advisor and friend over the years, Eleanor Maccoby and Al Bandura, as well as Perry London, were all my teachers during my graduate school years at Stanford. The late Stanley Milgram and Robert Rosenthal were colleagues and friends during my years as a young professor at Harvard. Seymour Epstein, who I met when he was a visiting professor at Harvard and who has been my colleague for many years at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst,

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George Levinger, Icek Aizen, James Averill, Robert Feldman, Susan Fiske, Linda Isbell, Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, Paula Pietromonico, all colleagues at UMASS, have all been supportive of my work. Daniel Bar-Tal, Janusz Reykowski, and Nancy Eisenberg were coauthors on various projects and intellectual companions. Many other colleagues, many of them members of the Society for Peace, Conflict, and Violence, the Peace Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association, or the International Society for Political Psychology, Psychologists for Social Responsibility, or social or child psychology groups, have influenced or inspired me. I am grateful to close, supportive friends, especially Jack Rosenblum, Corinne Dugas, Michael and Nina Shandler, Alan Hurwitz, Ana Lisano, John Mack, Marc Skvirsky, Pál Réti, Agnes Gáti, and Lane and Sarah Conn.

I am grateful to my sons, Adrian and Daniel, and to their wives, Sheri Kurtz and Kristin Brennan, for their love and presence in my life, and I am deeply appreciative of the values by which they live their lives.

And the adage last but not least truly applies in my thanking Laurie Anne Pearlman, my life partner and also my work partner in Rwanda, who supports with love and generosity of spirit all I do in the world.