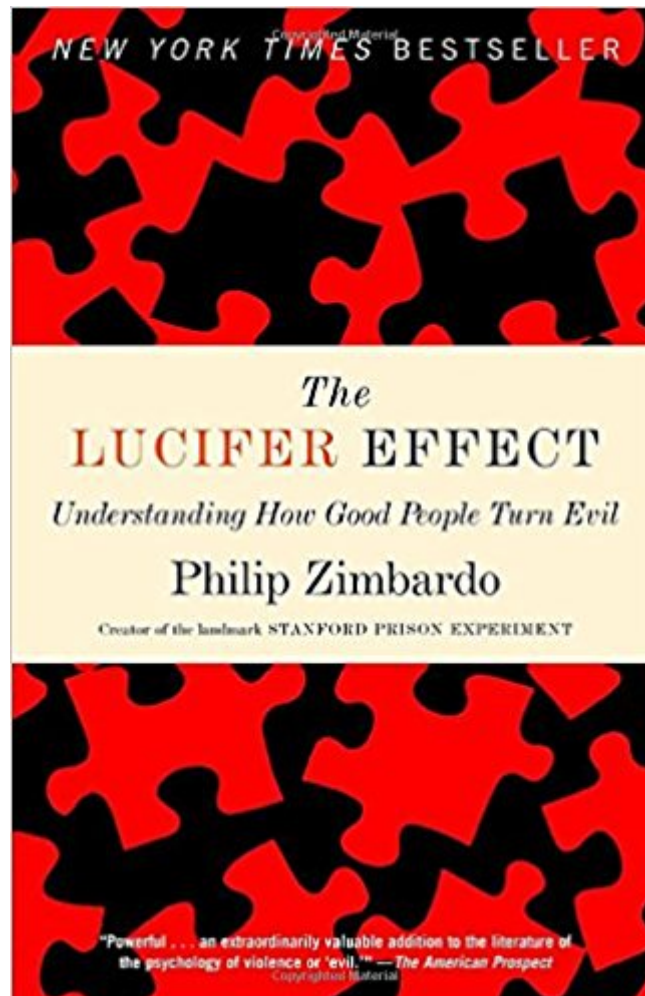




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The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil



Synopsis

The definitive firsthand account of the groundbreaking research of Philip Zimbardo – the basis for the award-winning film *The Stanford Prison Experiment* – Renowned social psychologist and creator of the Stanford Prison Experiment Philip Zimbardo explores the mechanisms that make good people do bad things, how moral people can be seduced into acting immorally, and what this says about the line separating good from evil. *The Lucifer Effect* explains how – and the myriad reasons why – we are all susceptible to the lure of “the dark side.” Drawing on examples from history as well as his own trailblazing research, Zimbardo details how situational forces and group dynamics can work in concert to make monsters out of decent men and women. Here, for the first time and in detail, Zimbardo tells the full story of the Stanford Prison Experiment, the landmark study in which a group of college-student volunteers was randomly divided into “guards” and “inmates” and then placed in a mock prison environment. Within a week the study was abandoned, as ordinary college students were transformed into either brutal, sadistic guards or emotionally broken prisoners. By illuminating the psychological causes behind such disturbing metamorphoses, Zimbardo enables us to better understand a variety of harrowing phenomena, from corporate malfeasance to organized genocide to how once upstanding American soldiers came to abuse and torture Iraqi detainees in Abu Ghraib. He replaces the long-held notion of the “bad apple” with that of the “bad barrel” – the idea that the social setting and the system contaminate the individual, rather than the other way around. This is a book that dares to hold a mirror up to mankind, showing us that we might not be who we think we are. While forcing us to reexamine what we are capable of doing when caught up in the crucible of behavioral dynamics, though, Zimbardo also offers hope. We are capable of resisting evil, he argues, and can even teach ourselves to act heroically. Like Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and Steven Pinker’s *The Blank Slate*, *The Lucifer Effect* is a shocking, engrossing study that will change the way we view human behavior. Praise for *The Lucifer Effect* “The *Lucifer Effect* will change forever the way you think about why we behave the way we do – and, in particular, about the human potential for evil. This is a disturbing book, but one that has never been more necessary.” – Malcolm Gladwell “An important book . . . All politicians and social commentators . . . should read this.” – *The Times* (London) “Powerful . . . an extraordinarily valuable addition to the literature of the psychology of violence or evil.” – *The American Prospect* “Penetrating . . . Combining a dense but readable and often engrossing exposition of social psychology

research with an impassioned moral seriousness, Zimbardo challenges readers to look beyond glib denunciations of evil-doers and ponder our collective responsibility for the world's ills. • Publishers Weekly "A sprawling discussion . . . Zimbardo couples a thorough narrative of the Stanford Prison Experiment with an analysis of the social dynamics of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. • Booklist "Zimbardo bottled evil in a laboratory. The lessons he learned show us our dark nature but also fill us with hope if we heed their counsel. The Lucifer Effect reads like a novel. • Anthony Pratkanis, Ph.D., professor emeritus of psychology, University of California

From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Psychologist Zimbardo masterminded the famous Stanford Prison Experiment, in which college students randomly assigned to be guards or inmates found themselves enacting sadistic abuse or abject submissiveness. In this penetrating investigation, he revisits at great length and with much hand-wringing the SPE study and applies it to historical examples of injustice and atrocity, especially the Abu Ghraib outrages by the U.S. military. His troubling finding is that almost anyone, given the right "situational" influences, can be made to abandon moral scruples and cooperate in violence and oppression. (He tacks on a feel-good chapter about "the banality of heroism," with tips on how to resist malign situational pressures.) The author, who was an expert defense witness at the court-martial of an Abu Ghraib guard, argues against focusing on the dispositions of perpetrators of abuse; he insists that we blame the situation and the "system" that

constructed it, and mounts an extended indictment of the architects of the Abu Ghraib system, including President Bush. Combining a dense but readable and often engrossing exposition of social psychology research with an impassioned moral seriousness, Zimbardo challenges readers to look beyond glib denunciations of evil-doers and ponder our collective responsibility for the world's ills. 23 photos. (Apr. 3) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Social psychologist Zimbardo is best known as the father of the 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment, which used a simulated prison populated with student volunteers to illustrate the extent to which identity is situated within a social setting; student volunteers randomly chosen to play guards became cruel and authoritarian, while those playing inmates became rebellious and depressed. With this book, Zimbardo couples a thorough narrative of the Stanford Prison Experiment with an analysis of the social dynamics of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, arguing that the "experimental dehumanization" of the former is instructive in understanding the abusive conduct of guards at the latter. This comparison, which is the book's core insight, is embedded in a sprawling discussion about situational influences that cobbles together a discussion of the psychology of evil, a strong criticism of the Bush administration, and a chapter celebrating heroism and calling for greater social bravery. This account's Abu Ghraib focus will generate demand. Brendan Driscoll Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A lot of this book goes on to talk about the SPE (Stanford Prison Experiment), which is fine, but it does tend to get a little bit tedious. Zimbardo could have made do with half of the information about the experiment that he did. Everything does tie in nicely together at the end though. The book does a great job of masterfully bringing in everything together, experiments related to the SPE, the SPE itself, and what it all means to a great conclusion. It is a harrowing one; that everyone has the capacity for evil, but the last chapter in this book explains the flip side of that, which is that we all have the capacity for good as well.

Here's how to attempt to avoid going along for the ride. Far reaching, motivating and well worth more than one read. I'm taking this one slowly because while the writing is great the subject matter is challenging and thought provoking. I'll be going back to this one again and again. Thanks Dr. Zimbardo for your lifetime of work and thought on this theme.

Rehashing the Stanford prison experience was tedious only because I was familiar with it. The book will anger you and educate you. Keep an open mind. Powerful expose.

A fascinating read that should be compulsory for all humans with a capacity for doing both good and evil ... statistically 100% of us. Due to the very wide ripple effects of the Stanford Prison Experiment, Zimbardo goes into very great and for me, excessive, detail about for instance, the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison. Nevertheless, an absorbing and compelling read.

This book is an excellent exploration of the role situational factors impact behavior. It is a frightening read, one that left me evaluating myself, and my ability to detect and defend against situational influences. It is well written, well paced, easy to read, flows well, and keeps your attention effectively. But there are two caveats. Just so you are warned, this Book contains very graphic material. Graphic depictions of Violence, Horrific sexual abuse, and strong language. If you are easily offended, this book may be too much for you. A second warning regarding the author himself. He does a very good job of calling attention to situational influence. He shows just how much people can be 'corrupted' by situational factors. He details the results of numerous experiments, and demonstrates the similarities between the experiments and real world events quite effectively.... to a point. Specifically, in Chapter fifteen, as he analyzes Abu Ghraib, and demonstrates how situational forces trumped dispositional qualities in the individuals involved, right up until he gets to the top of the Chain of command. Unfortunately, at this point, his personal political views prevent him from completing the situational analysis. This is really too bad, as he does such an excellent job of it up to this point. It would have been so much better if he could have completed the circle. Fortunately, his personal prejudices are relatively easy to spot, and with that knowledge, the attentive reader can work it out on their own. It is certainly not something that detracts from the book, just something to be mindful of so as not to miss the bigger picture.

There is no question that Zimbardo is a great scholar and that he had spent years, decades, studying this subject. Yet, good scholarship doesn't always translate to good writing. This is a thick (literary and otherwise) book. The overall argument presented by Zimbardo is clear, but it feels that it is bogged down by so many details. There are pages after pages of transcripts from the original study. And here is the point. It all depends what you expect. If you want very detailed account of the 1971 study, that's what you get. Clear, detailed, well-supported and well-explained. If you look

mainly for straightforward answers to the question how good people turn evil, this book could be a difficult read.

It is difficult to exaggerate how clear and professional this book really is. How I wish I could write a book this good. To my great dismay, I had passed this book up many times thinking it might be lightweight stuff probably more about religious/spiritual experiences with angels, etc. However I could not have been more wrong, for the substance presented here sits right at the center of my own favorite professional hobbyhorse: that we underestimate the role that social psychology plays in our lives, and in particular the role systemic variables play in shaping and mediating our behavior, especially our bad behavior. This author, perhaps the strongest professional one could deploy in this field, goes right to the heart of the matter. His theoretical framework is impeccable: It builds the perfect explanatory chain up from the individual to the situation, and then to the system in a theoretical model that sets up an existential battle royal between the best in human nature and the increasingly more powerful systemic pressures which seem prompted to lower inhibitions sufficiently to allow the individual permission to commit all kinds of evil. It presents a new kind of moral promiscuity that we have not seen since the days of the Nazi's Third Reich. The chain connecting these levels of analysis could not be more cleanly presented or more obvious: Individual inhibitions are inculcated and shaped by society at a very young age. Once shaped, situational and/or systemic pressures take over and can overwhelm, relax or "give open permission" to reduce those inhibitions low enough to allow evil to seep in. The more scientists review recent findings the more they are concluding that it is present trends within our own government and society -- the systemic pressures -- rather than organically generated individual evil, that are now becoming the dominant trend in producing evil within our culture. In fact it would not be too much of an exaggeration of the author's point of view to suggest that the valve regulating the flow of systemic pressures is now in the "full on mode." Societal inhibitions have been lowered to a level that is unprecedented in our times. In this regard, the author's own metaphor which flips the bad apple in the barrel syndrome, is perhaps the most apt of all. He reverses the metaphor and says that it is now the "bad barrel" that is producing the "bad apples" and not the other way around. The author reviews and examines both examples and experiments that repeatedly are being shown to be more the rule than the proverbial exceptions. Among them are the result of his own Stanford Prison Experiment, the Kitty Genovese case, Abu Ghraib, inner city ghetto gang related crime and violence, and increases in both bullying and American style racism, and most important of all, a growing indifference to all of these. He outlines a set of dynamic psychological processes that serve as precursors to societally produced

evil. Not unsurprising, they parallel those described by Albert Speer, Hitler's second in command at the end of the Nazi regime. The first step according to Speer is de-individualization and then dehumanization. Dehumanization it turns out is a two-way street, a dual reflexive and reciprocal process: both the perpetrator and the victims are diminished and dehumanized. Next, along a downwardly sliding scale, are what only can be loosely categorized as "weak character variables in the individual." And here we mean: blind obedience to authority, passivity in the face of threats, self-justifications and rationalizations, and a general unwillingness to take responsibility for one's own actions -- that is, the tendency to immediately search for scapegoats and any exonerating excuses or rationalizations in the face of one's own evil, whether it be individual or collective evil. The evidence presented here proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the old canard "the devil made me do it," is outmoded and seriously needs to be updated and replaced with a newer model that says: "the state gave me permission to do it." Only this updated model takes fully into account the psychological dynamics that occur up and down Professor Zimbardo's causal chain. Here the good Professor has given us the outlines of that model and some very useful ideas about how to take control of it before it overwhelms us. Ten stars.

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