



Psychology of Evil

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### **Are We Naturally Good or Evil?**

Human beings possess the virtues that enable them to make rational decisions and judgments. According to the presentation by Philip Zimbardo titled *The Psychology of Evil*, people are neither good nor bad (Zimbardo, 2008). Nonetheless, the prevailing circumstances, for example, social or economic, can affect a person's behavior. Individuals try to cope with various struggles, for example, abuse or social alienation, which might result in misconduct. Moreover, a potentially harmful occasion will trigger a similar response; for example, when a person feels threatened, he or she is likely to act defensively. On the other hand, justice, social inclusion, and equitable access to resources and opportunities motivate people to adhere to the norms and rules. Therefore, the concept of good and evil is also dependent on the issues at hand (Miller, 2016). Furthermore, substance abuse and mental impairments can also be the risk factors for misbehavior. However, before judging someone, it is imperative to conduct a background analysis of the possible issues that could trigger a mischievousness. Generally, no person can be categorized as naturally good or bad.

### **Psychology's Concept of Evil**

Zimbardo acknowledges that the concept of evil sparks heated debates among philosophers and theologians. Nevertheless, in psychology, immorality is dualistic, being the aggressive opposite or the absence of good (Gray, 2010). Despite the broad applications, it is commonly used to narrowly explain profound wickedness or the likelihood of a person to engage in socially unacceptable behaviors. Zimbardo demotes that evil manifests through vices and is common in situations where the outcomes of the actions are outweighed by the degree of damage or injury caused (Zimbardo, 2008). Regardless of the occurrence, every person takes full responsibility for any action that violates the moral norms.

The concepts of good and evil are the opposing ones yet closely interlinked. Zimbardo explained that there is a fine line between virtuous and vicious, and anybody can cross it (Miller, 2016). Therefore, any person irrespective of the gender, age, or ethnic background has the ability to do both good and evil deeds. An in-depth examination of the results of electric shock experiment indicated that when faced by a harsh condition, the prisoners reacted with an equal force. Similarly, people can portray good or evil behavior being in different situations.

### **Abu Ghraib Prison**

Situational effects have a direct impact on people's perception of good and evil. Based on the events at the Abu Ghraib prison in which the inmates underwent some forms of social abuse and punishment, it is apparent that dehumanization, as well as deindividualization, enhances moral disengagement. Zimbardo denoted that when people are not able to handle tough situations, they tend to seek an ideology that justifies their actions (Zimbardo, 2008). Moreover, a person would change his or her conduct to adapt to a particular environment. In addition, people in a group are likely to emulate others. Therefore, if the number of people indulged in vices prevails, there is a high probability that other members will adopt the same evil behavior.

Furthermore, individuals embrace evil acts by labeling and dehumanizing other people. Moreover, the systematic justification of immoral acts can cause a severe decline in moral behavior. The violent attitude of authority towards the inmates can trigger them to adopt merciless or brutal practices. When people feel disindividualized, for example, if forced to wear a uniform like in prison, they are more likely to adopt aggressive behavior. Besides, being a part of a group minimizes social responsibility since it is possible to argue that no individual is liable for misconduct. Therefore, government actions can also affect people's perception of evil.

### **How the Need to Conform Affects the Actions**

People often strive to conform to society by adopting the 'perceived' accepted conducts. Mostly, if the group observes a set of religious norms and cultural values, it would be prudent to emulate the ideas so as not to experience social alienation. In addition, assemblages are types of anonymity-conferring environment that can influence the behavior of a person either positively or negatively. For example, being surrounded by hostile and destructive people, a person will show a preference for similar conducts (Gray, 2010). The reason is that the group notion can significantly control the opinion and emotions of an individual.

I believe that the behavioral patterns accepted in a community have a direct impact on the way other people think and act. When I was in primary school, my sister was a member of the cheerleading team. As we were close, I used to accompany her to the training and games. I enjoyed being among the cheerleaders because I loved the way they danced during the games and motivated the school team to triumph over rivals. Over time, I got used to being part of the group and asked my mum to get me a similar attire. Even though I was not in the cheerleading team, I felt comfortable in the outfit. Therefore, due to the group influence, I developed a passion for sports and especially cheerleading. I also realized that now I can sing and dance in the company of other people with ease.