



Source: *The Lucifer Effect* by Philip Zimbardo

Definition of Evil

This book is my attempt to understand the processes of transformation at work when good or ordinary people do bad or evil things. We will look at real people engaged in life's daily tasks, enmeshed in doing their jobs. We will seek to understand the nature of their character transformations when they are faced with powerful situational forces.

Let's begin with a definition of evil. Mine is a simple, psychologically based one: Evil consists in intentionally behaving in ways that harm, abuse, demean, dehumanize, or destroy innocent others--or using one's authority and systemic power to encourage or permit others to do so on your behalf.

Most of us hide behind egocentric biases that generate the illusion that we are special. These self-serving protective shields allow us to believe that each of us is above average on any test of self-integrity.

Throughout our journey I would like you to continually ask the "Me also?" question as we encounter various forms of evil. We will examine genocide in Rwanda, the mass suicide and murder of Peoples Temple followers in the jungles of Guyana. the My Lai massacre in Vietnam, the horrors of Nazi concentration camps, the torture by military and civilian police around the world. and the sexual abuse of parishioners by priests, and search for lines of continuity between the scandalous, fraudulent behavior of executives at corporations. Finally, we will see how some common threads in all these evils run through the recently uncovered abuses of civilian prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq.