



Overcoming Evil

Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism

New York: Oxford University Press. 2011

Ervin Staub.

Overcoming evil is Winner of the 2012 Alexander George Book Award of The International Society of Political Psychology for the Best Book Published in 2011 in the Field of Political Psychology, and Winner of the 2013 Ursula Gielen Global Psychology Book Award of the International Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association for significant and fundamental contributions to psychology as a global discipline.

Description

Overcoming Evil describes the origins or influences leading to genocide, violent conflict and terrorism. It identifies principles and practices of prevention, and of reconciliation between groups after violence, or before violence thereby to prevent violence. It uses both past cases such as the Holocaust, and contemporary ones such as Rwanda, the Congo, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, contemporary terrorism, and the relations between the Dutch and Muslim minorities, which also has relevance to other European countries, as examples. The book draws on the author's previous work on all these issues, as well as on research in genocide studies, the study of conflict and of terrorism, and psychological research on group relations. It also describes the work of the author and his associates in real world settings, such as promoting reconciliation in Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo. The book considers what needs to be done to prevent impending or stop ongoing violence. It emphasizes early prevention, when violence generating conditions are present and a psychological and social evolution toward violence has begun, but not yet immediate danger of intense violence. The book considers the role of difficult social or life conditions, repression, culture, the institutions or structure of society, the psychology of individuals and groups, and the behavior of witnesses or bystanders within and outside societies. It emphasizes psychological processes, such as differentiation between us and them and devaluation of the "other," past victimization and psychological woundedness, the power of ideas and people's commitment to destructive ideologies. It considers humanizing the other, healing from past victimization, the creation of constructive ideologies and groups and how these help people develop cultures and institutions that make violence less likely. The book asks what needs to be accomplished to prevent violence, how it can be done, and who can do it. It aims to promote knowledge, understanding, and "active bystandership" by leaders and government officials, members of the media and citizens to prevent violence and create harmonious societies. It discusses the development of inclusive caring and moral courage in children and adults, and altruism born of suffering, which are important to facilitate active bystandership to resist influences that generate violence and promote positive culture change

Features.

The book describes central principles of the origins of violence between groups, and of prevention and reconciliation, and both the generality and specificity of these principles across types of violence and situations. The book connects knowledge about the origins of the kinds of mass violence it describes, which has been the primary focus of attention in past work, with principles and practices of prevention. In addressing violence between groups, the emphasis is often on systems, institutions and structures, and on leaders. This book addresses the role of these, and the changes needed in them for prevention, but focuses on the psychology of groups and their individuals members as well as leaders: how they feel, what they think, their woundedness as a result of past experiences, their orientation to others, the ideas (and ideals-ideologies) they adopt or create, the changes required in these for prevention, and how to bring these changes about.

Comments on the book

Overcoming Evil is a brilliant and original work on the sources of violence, prevention of genocide, and reconciliation after genocide. Ervin Staub's work on reconciliation in Rwanda is unprecedented. - Roger W. Smith, Former President, International Association of Genocide Scholars, and Professor Emeritus of Government, College of William and Mary

Ervin Staub's magnum opus offers a penetrating, comprehensive analysis of one of mankind's most bedeviling problems, inter-group hostility and violence. Staub brilliantly explains the roots of this social evil, while offering a map out of this perennial predicament. Overcoming Evil is a deeply hopeful book that should be read by anyone who is concerned about humanity's future and how to prevent, react effectively to, and help people heal from this pernicious form of violence. - Daniel Goleman, Author of Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ

Ervin Staub's work on genocide is remarkable in its combination of thoughtful interpretation and hands-on observations of lasting effects and efforts at recovery. - Robert Jay Lifton, Lecturer in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School; Winner of the National Book Award; and Author of The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide

Ervin Staub the world's leading researcher of the human capacity for selfless good and mass evil is the perfect person to help us transform closed fists into open arms. This culmination of his life's work, informed by his on-the-ground prevention and reconciliation work, is timely, personal, engaging, and profoundly significant. - David G. Myers, Professor of Psychology, Hope College, and Author of Social Psychology, 10th Edition

Professor Staub has long been one of the leading scholars on the origins of hatred and violence. This book is singularly important because it not only deepens his prior insights, but reflects practical efforts in prevention and reconciliation. He formulates central principles leading to intense violence between groups and clarifies alternative paths. He devotes serious attention to practices of violence prevention, including early prevention, and also practices of reconciliation after a violent disaster such as the Rwandan genocide. He applies a broad range of principles to specific situations in order to improve opportunities for nonviolent progress. This is an exceedingly valuable book. -David A. Hamburg, President Emeritus, Carnegie Corporation of New York; DeWitt Wallace Distinguished Scholar, Weill Cornell Medical College; and Author of Preventing Genocide

Staub has written a superb book that has excellent scholarship and well-conceived practical suggestions for preventing massive intergroup violence and for developing reconciliation if it occurs. It is an extraordinary book of heart, as well as fine scholarship. I recommend it highly for all leaders and citizens who seek a more peaceful world, as well as for social scientists who wish to be informed of the best thinking in this area. - Morton Deutsch, Professor Emeritus of Psychology and Education, Teachers College, Columbia University

Overcoming Evil offers readers a front row seat to witness Ervin Staub's wisdom and expertise gained from three decades of research and thoughtful engagement with the problem of evil. He wrote The Roots of Evil with refreshing clarity; with this book he has raised the bar and spells out a set of principles and values necessary for transcending evil and building peaceful societies. From training those in positions of power to become "constructive leaders," and to developing communities of "active bystanders," Staub shares with readers cutting edge research that shows how to create what he terms structures of prevention and reconciliation. Staub leaves the reader with no doubt that it is possible to prevent the cycles of violence that so often repeat themselves historically. If you care about building and sustaining peace in the aftermath of mass violence and genocide, read this book from cover to cover. You will want to stand up and applaud the ethical clarity and profound insights in this extraordinary work of scholarship. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Former Member, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and author of A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness.

In a fitting capstone to Ervin Staub's remarkable career, Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict, and Terrorism addresses the psychology of man's inhumanity to man. Leavened by his own personal experience and field work in countries ravaged by genocidal struggle, Staub's book covers the range of political violence, from terrorism to ethnic cleansing, exploring and illuminating the dark corners of man's psychology that permit ordinary people to commit such extraordinary evil. Not merely an academic exercise, the book provides pragmatic guidance for resolving the seemingly intractable conflicts that beset contemporary society. Jerrold M. Post, M.D., Director, Political Psychology Program, George Washington University, and Author of The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al-Qaeda

Overcoming Evil is a remarkable book. Many works on conflict focus on the destructive element of the forces at hand, a task at which this book succeeds admirably. Both authoritative and personal, the volume gives us a profound understanding of the nature, sources, and dynamics of violence, building on over thirty years of the author's research and analysis on the topic. However, Ervin Staub has given us a volume that takes us beyond understanding the costs of destruction, slaughter, and war. It also shows us the way out. Overcoming Evil gives the reader in-depth instruction on how to stop the violence. Focusing particularly on prevention, it makes the case for the power of the individual (the active bystander), as well as the power of groups, nations, and international leaders, to intervene in order to reverse escalating hostility or to halt conflict that has already broken out. This is a book of hope and action, and will be a valuable addition to the libraries of scholars and practitioners alike. Pamela Aall, Vice President for Domestic Programs, Education and Training Center, U.S. Institute of Peace

The leading author on genocide has turned his analysis to address the question of how to prevent it. The work is deeply personal, analytically penetrating, and tactically broad. It deserves a wide readership, from those who make policy to those who are bystanders to unfolding events. I William Zartman, Jacob Blaustein Professor Emeritus, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

Staub has done it. In a single volume, he has given us illuminating, multidisciplinary analysis of the causes of mass violence and terrorism, their impacts, and most important, the steps we can take collectively toward prevention. The extraordinary scope and depth of this book makes it essential reading for everyone who cares about peace and building a humane world. Michael Wessells, Professor, Program on Forced Migration and Health, Columbia University

