



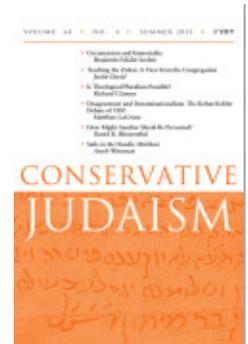
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How Might Another Shoah Be Prevented?

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Conservative Judaism, Volume 64, Number 4, Summer 2013, pp. 90-109
(Article)

Published by Rabbinical Assembly
DOI: 10.1353/coj.2013.0022



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How Might Another Shoah Be Prevented?¹

DAVID R. BLUMENTHAL



Introduction

One of the issues to come up very early in the existence of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council² was the tension between the historical and the moral missions of the Council and, then, of the Museum. On the one hand, we all wanted the story of the shoah³ to be told with as much detail as possible. The truth of what happened is awful but it must be told, and it must be told accurately and fully. The Museum has succeeded beyond our wildest dreams in fulfilling this mission. On the other hand, what good is history if it does not lead to change? What good is a museum for the shoah if it does not lead to some action to prevent further holocausts, genocides, and mass killings? Already at the beginning, there were some who wanted the last room on the museum tour to be a memorial room with appropriate décor and a place for meditation. Others felt that the last room should be a place for social action with brochures for various causes and an exhortation to choose a cause and do something. Eventually, the last room became The Hall of Remembrance; but we also set up the Committee on Conscience that was charged with selecting issues that were shoah-like and publishing calls for action. I am proud to note that much of the attention given to the genocide in Darfur emanated from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I am also pleased to note that in the spring of 2009, an exhibition entitled “From Memory to Action” opened at the Museum.

One of the reasons why the Museum has not been more morally active is the nature of the political culture of governmental institutions, especially in

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the nation's capital. The other reason is that, in order to prevent another shoah-like event, one must have an analysis of the cause, or causes, of the shoah. This is not so simple. If one believes that the chief cause of the shoah was anti-Semitism, then a program of education and political action follows from that. If one accepts that the main root was radical right-wing political conservatism, a different strategy of education and action follows. If one concludes that the principal source was authoritarian culture, or racism, or lack of civic and moral courage, yet other designs for education and action follow. If the shoah resulted from a combination of causes, still different agendas ensue. By contrast, if one accepts that the shoah resulted from specific historical circumstances that cannot, by the nature of things, ever be repeated, then no moral mission devolves from our efforts.

I believe that we must develop an analysis of the causes of the shoah and I believe that, from that analysis, we can propound general and specific programs of education and action that will help prevent another shoah-like event. I am writing now, therefore, to put forward an analysis of the shoah and, then, a program of action.⁴

Analysis: Insertion into a Hierarchy That Teaches Evil

In a series of experiments, Stanley Milgram⁵ and his team from Yale University required subjects to administer what they believed were painful and/or lethal electric shocks to innocent people in order to help them learn a set of associated words. When the subjects showed signs of nervousness as the pain and discomfort of the learners increased, they were instructed firmly by the experimenters to continue. When the subjects indicated that they refused responsibility for the consequences of their actions, the authority figures regularly replied that they, the experimenters, would assume that responsibility, thus enabling the subjects to continue administering dangerous and even lethal shocks to innocent persons. Quite contrary to expectations, 50–65% of the subjects followed instructions into the lethal range of shocks.⁶ The percentage reached 85% in Germany and among young people generally.⁷ No difference was registered for women.⁸ With unrelenting clarity, Milgram notes that these results were not a function of class, religious affiliation, gender, location, educational background, ideology, or general culture.⁹ Nor were they a result of character or psychopathology.¹⁰

Milgram concluded that hierarchy and authority are inherent in any society¹¹ and that this hierarchy and authority are internalized and serve as the basis for obedience to legitimate authority.¹² He further concluded that conscience, which regulates impulsive aggressive action, is diminished at the point of entering a hierarchical structure¹³ such that the person enters an “agentic state” in contrast to the usual “autonomous state.”¹⁴ In the agentic state, morality becomes obedience to authority; that is, that which is good is obedience to the authority.¹⁵ In somewhat more technical terms, in entering the agentic state, the superego is shifted from independent evaluation of the morality of action to the judgment of how well one has functioned in the hierarchical-authoritative setting.¹⁶ More simply, Milgram showed that people will do what they are told to do, even when they know it is wrong, if they are told to do it in a structured situation by a legitimate authority.

In a series of experiments dealing with American racism, Jane Elliot,¹⁷ an elementary school teacher in Riceville, Iowa, divided her class into brown-eyed and blue-eyed children. She then indicated that one group was “good” and the other “bad,” reinforcing this by according favored status to one group and discriminating against the other. In a very short time, the favored group began to discriminate viciously against the disfavored group. In a remarkable piece of instruction, Ms. Elliot, in the succeeding days, reversed herself, announcing that she had erred and that the disfavored group was really the favored one. Again, the now-favored group took its privileged status seriously and discriminated against the now-disfavored group.

The noteworthy element here is that the students accepted wholeheartedly the authority of the teacher, in her classroom, and followed her suggestion about superiority and the way one treats those who are inferior. They, too, inserted themselves into a hierarchy of authority, entered an agentic state, and performed acts they should have known were wrong. Astoundingly, they did this even when Ms. Elliot reversed herself a few days later by simply realigning her teaching from one group to the other. Later work by Ms. Elliot showed that this “experiment” works in prisons and elsewhere among adults, because they too accept and act upon the authority of someone legitimately placed in the social hierarchy.¹⁸

There are many more such experiments, loosely labeled “obedience

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experiments,”¹⁹ all of which clearly show that, in a situation in which there is a legitimate authority present, people will do what that authority figure asks even if they think it is not right.

The historical study of the shoah reveals much the same data and conclusions: with the invasion of Russia, the crack troops of the German army and the SS divisions moved out of Poland to form the fighting units and the *Einsatzgruppen*. However, there were still almost 3,000,000 Jews left in Poland who, according to the final solution, needed to be exterminated. Who was minding the store? Who would carry out this project? In a stunning book, Christopher Browning²⁰ follows the history of Police Battalion 101, a group of men who weren't fit for the fighting units and whose job it became to carry out their part in the final solution in Poland. Sometimes, this meant shooting everyone, person by person; at other times, it included shooting the sick, the weak, the elderly, and the infants while forcibly deporting the rest. The transformation of this remarkably undistinguished group of men, only 25–30% of whom were members of the nazi party,²¹ into mass murderers is one of the most horrifying stories of the shoah.

Browning, in his book *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), carefully reconstructs the actions of Police Battalion 101, taking into account all the appropriate problems of dealing with such historical sources, and concludes that 80–90% of the men continued to kill Jews while only 10–20% of the men refused, asked to be excused, or simply evaded the killing tasks.²² Of those who continued to kill, a small percentage became hardened killers who enjoyed their work and volunteered for killing missions; the greatest number “did everything that was asked of them and never risked confronting authority.”²³ Browning also points out that the work of this group of men who, by November 1942, had executed 6500 Jews and deported 42,000 more,²⁴ was not a single episode but an ongoing, relentless task that required sustained attention.²⁵ It was, thus, not a battle-frenzy as in My Lai but “atrocities by policy.”²⁶ Furthermore, this was not depersonalized action but hands-on killing with high salience to the victims.²⁷ These men were not specially selected, nor were they self-selected.²⁸ There was no special coercion and no “putative duress.”²⁹

In an attempt to wonder why and how this happened, Browning admits the effect of brutalization and numbing, of the context of racial war, of psy-

chological splitting, and of ideology. However, he maintains that these factors were contributory, subsidiary.³⁰ The main mechanism that enabled these ordinary men to become “grass roots” killers was insertion into the hierarchy of army command. Their officers only needed to invoke the authority of their hierarchy to obtain obedience, even though it was sometimes accompanied by anger and upset.³¹ Peer pressure—not to be “weak” but to be “tough”³²—reinforced authority; it did not create it.³³

In another study of ordinary Germans conducted in the 1950s, Milton Mayer went to a small village in Germany and, hiding his Jewish identity, interviewed the local people about life under nazism. The motif of insertion into a hierarchy which does, or tolerates, evil was very strong: “When ‘big men,’ Hindenbergs, Neuraths, Schachts, and even Hohenzollerns, accepted Nazism, little men had good and sufficient reason to accept it. ‘*Wenn die “Ja” sagen,*’ said Herr Simon, the bill-collector, ‘*dann sagen wir auch “Ja. . . .”*’ “What was good enough for *them* was certainly good enough for us.’ ‘. . . My friends were little men—like the Führer himself.’”³⁴

Many more such historical studies exist,³⁵ all of which show that German civilians as well as military personnel were inserted into a hierarchy in which the authorities taught them that evil was good. In the agentic state that such insertion evokes, doing good became synonymous with following instructions.

Analysis: Insertion into a Hierarchy That Teaches Good

One of the first conferences which the United States Holocaust Memorial Council held was the one in which we, at the behest of Elie Wiesel, brought together the rescuers. We—as members of the Council and the Board of Advisors, and also as Jews—bent over backwards to acknowledge the courage, indeed the heroism, of these people who had come to us in Washington. But they would have none of it. How often did we hear: “I was not a hero,” “I did nothing extraordinary”? How often did we hear: “I was just doing what was expected of me,” “I was just doing the normal human thing”? At first I thought these people were just being modest, but then I realized that they really meant it. They saw themselves neither as heroes nor as exceptional people; rather, they saw themselves as ordinary people who were just responding to what they knew was being demanded of them by

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their church, by their pastor, by their resistance leaders, by their parents, or by their conscience.³⁶ They were being normal, in much the same way as the perpetrators were being normal. They were doing what was expected of them, in much the same way as the perpetrators were doing what was expected of them. That thought astounded me and set me thinking.

Historical study of the shoah supports these observations: Fogelman³⁷ quotes one Christian as asking, “What would Jesus do?”³⁸ and another as saying, “I have to save these people, as many as I can. If am disobeying orders, I’d rather die with God and against men than with men and against God.”³⁹ She also observes: “Indeed, this conviction among religious rescuers—that they were accountable to a higher and more fearsome authority—was the most salient aspect of their rescuer self. It overcame anti-semitism, transcended fear, and impelled them to action.”⁴⁰ Kurek-Lesik cites the following:

“I come from nationalist circles, often charged with anti-Semitism. Why did I save Jewish children? Because they were children, because they were people. I would save any man [sic] in danger of death, and a child—every child—is particularly dear to me. This is what my Catholic religion *orders* me to do.” . . . A persecuted Jew somehow stopped being a Jew and became simply a man, woman, or child in need of help. The Polish nuns were motivated by a Christian *duty* towards others and by their fidelity to the ideal that they were pledged to do so in a special way by their vows. . . . This is why saving Jews and Jewish children should first of all be seen in the broader context of monastic service to humanity.⁴¹

Sometimes, the authority invoked was not religion but national resistance. Thus, Baron notes that 42% of the Dutch rescuers were also in the resistance and, hence, saving Jews was sanctioned by the political authority of the resistance even if one had no particular religious or social feeling for Jews.⁴²

Social psychology, too, brings its insights forward. In a dramatic series of experiments, Staub⁴³ took groups of various ages, assigned them an irrelevant task, and then gave them one of three sets of instructions: one subgroup was given permission to leave the task room if necessary; one subgroup was given no instructions on leaving the task room; and one

sub-group was prohibited from leaving the room. Then, from an adjacent area, cries of distress were simulated. The purpose of the experiment was to test resistance to authority in a situation that evoked helping behavior as a response to the distress stimulus. The experiment showed that, when permission was given, a “high frequency of helping behavior” resulted and, conversely, when prohibition was the instruction, it “substantially reduced active attempts to help.” In the case of no information, adults tended to help while children tended to refrain from helping.⁴⁴ Staub summarizes the results dramatically: “Almost all subjects in the *permission* condition actively helped.”⁴⁵

These experiments confirm the insights of the previous section on obedience: to wit, that insertion into a hierarchy of authority is very important in determining a person’s willingness to act. The inescapable result of this experiment is that authority can permit ethically correct behavior—that is, that authority can function, as authority, to justify and permit prosocial action.

In yet another well-known experiment, Darley and Batson⁴⁶ took a group of sixty-seven Princeton Theological Seminary students and administered to them a series of personality and religiosity psychometric tests. They then gave the students the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) to study, and assigned half of them to deliver a homily on the parable and half of them to prepare a brief talk on alternate ministry. The testing and studying were done in one building and the homily or talk was done in another. Each group was then divided into three sub-groups: one was “high-hurry,” having been told to hurry to the second location to complete the assignment; one was “intermediate-hurry,” having been told to go directly to the second location; and one was “low-hurry,” having been told they had ample time to get to the second location. A suffering victim, who was actually in place as part of the experiment, was placed on the way to the second location.

The purpose of the experiment was to see how many theology students, who had just studied the parable of the Good Samaritan and were preparing either to give a short homily on the subject or to talk about alternate ministry, would stop to aid this experimental victim (as the Good Samaritan had stopped to aid a victim by the wayside), and to determine what kind of help

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they would offer. In fact, 60%—that is, more than half—did not stop to offer help to the victim on the wayside. Of the 40% who did stop, 10% were in the “high-hurry” group, 45% in the “intermediate-hurry” group, and 63% in the “low-hurry” group. The conclusions were quite clear:

A person not in a hurry may stop and offer help to a person in distress. A person in a hurry is likely to keep going. Ironically, he is likely to keep going even if he is hurrying to speak on the parable of the Good Samaritan, thus inadvertently confirming the point of the parable. (Indeed, on several occasions, a seminary student going to give his talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the victim as he hurried on his way!) . . . It is hard to think of a context in which norms concerning helping those in distress are more salient than for a person thinking about the Good Samaritan, and yet it did not significantly increase helping behavior.⁴⁷

Darley and Batson then speculated on the cause of this phenomenon:

Why were the seminarians in a hurry? Because the experimenter, *whom the subject was helping*, was depending on him to get to a particular place quickly. In other words, he was in conflict between stopping to help the victim and continuing on his way to help the experimenter. . . . Conflict, rather than callousness, can explain their failure to stop.⁴⁸

A closer look at Milgram’s obedience experiments also reveals the power of authority and obedience to sanction prosocial behavior: one of the subjects was a professor of Old Testament. The subject discontinued the experiment after reaching 150 volts, saying, “If he [the learner/victim] doesn’t want to continue, I’m taking orders from him.” In the post-experiment discussion, the professor said, “If one had as one’s ultimate authority God, then it trivializes human authority.”⁴⁹ Authority and obedience to that authority—in this case, the victim and then God—sanctioned prosocial action. In yet another set of experiments, two experimenters were brought into the room, one who advocated continuing the experiment and one who advocated discontinuing it.⁵⁰ In this case of split authority, “[N]ot a single

subject ‘took advantage’ of the instructions to go on; in no instance did individual aggressive motives latch on to the authoritative sanction provided by the malevolent authority. Rather, action was stopped dead in its tracks.”⁵¹ Milgram maintained that this was because of a “contamination” of the hierarchical system, noting that some subjects tried to ascertain which experimenter was the higher authority.⁵² It seems to me, however, that the presence of two authorities, one sanctioning antisocial action and the other sanctioning prosocial action, allowed or permitted the subjects to follow the impulse to do good precisely because they had a choice of which authority to follow.

The conclusion, then, is quite consistent: people who perform prosocial actions also invoke a higher authority to sanction their actions; they, too, enter into an agentic state.

Analysis: Insertion into a Hierarchy—the Case of the Children

The evidence both from social psychology and from the historical study of the shoah is quite clear: people live within social hierarchies. In those hierarchies, there are legitimate authorities. People enter an agentic state with these legitimate authorities. People do what these authorities ask, or expect, them to do—whether the action is good or bad.

This is particularly clear in the case of children where the hierarchies and authorities—family, school, sport, church, and peer groups—are particularly visible to the observer. Again, both the evidence from the shoah and the evidence from social psychology show that being in a hierarchy in which the legitimate authority teaches and sanctions violence produces violent behavior; conversely, being in a hierarchy in which the legitimate authority teaches and sanctions caring behavior produces caring behavior.

Alice Miller,⁵³ in her profound study of German culture, looks into the personal-developmental history of Germans using the tools of both cultural history and therapeutic case studies. The case of Hitler’s screaming, as recorded in such films as *Triumph of the Will*, serves as a paradigm for Miller’s general theory of the origin of social evil: authoritarian culture permits a father to abuse his children—verbally, emotionally, and physically. Furthermore, this culture and these phenomena allow the adult abused

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child to do evil with one aspect of the self, to be “normal” with the other, and to sustain both selves in a tense but workable coexistence.

In a similarly famous study of prejudice, Adorno⁵⁴ also concluded that the authoritarian personality can be characterized as one which grew up in, and perpetuates, an atmosphere of harsh discipline: “Prejudiced subjects tend to report a relatively harsh and more threatening type of home discipline which was experienced as arbitrary by the child. Related to this is a tendency apparent in families of prejudiced subjects to base interrelationships on rather clearly defined roles of dominance and submission in contradistinction to equalitarian [sic] policies. In consequence, the images of parents seem to acquire for the child a forbidding or at least a distant quality. Family relationships are characterized by fearful subservience to the demands of the parents and by an early suppression of impulses not acceptable to them.”⁵⁵

The Oliners⁵⁶ have put it well:

. . . punishment implies the need to curb some intrinsic wildness or evil intent. Routine gratuitous punishment implies that powerful persons have the right to exert their will arbitrarily. . . . Having had little influence over their parents’ behavior, [such children] are more inclined to feel a sense of helplessness in influencing others generally. . . . Human relationships are construed in power terms, superordination and subordination viewed as the inherent social condition of humankind. The best one can do in the face of power is to succumb.

The more abusive the environment, then, the more the child is subject to the whim of the abusive parent. Punishment is erratic, unpredictable, and capricious as well as invasive and violent. This is both physically harmful as well as psychologically destabilizing.⁵⁷

In its extreme form, harsh discipline can turn very ugly. Miller notes that authoritarian, child-abusive culture generates great inner rage which is turned inward by repression and, then, outward by projection. Indeed, Germans felt a sense of relief upon reading *Mein Kampf* and learning that it was permissible to hate the Jews because this meant that all their anger at their own abused and despised selves—the product of abusive childhood

discipline—could be projected onto the Jews. This, in turn, led to the cruelty toward, and extermination of, the Jews:⁵⁸

[They] led a million children, whom they regarded as the bearers of the feared portions of their own psyche, into the gas chambers. One can even imagine that by shouting at them, beating them, or photographing them, they were finally able to release the hatred going back to early childhood. From the start, it had been the aim of their upbringing to stifle their childish, playful, and life-affirming side. The cruelty inflicted on them, the psychic murder of the child they once were, had to be passed on in the same way: each time they sent another Jewish child to the gas ovens, they were in essence murdering the child within themselves.⁵⁹

Or, as Fred Katz has commented:⁶⁰

Evil can be, and sometimes has been, *developed into a culture of cruelty*, a distinctive culture in its own right. As such it is systematically organized to reward individuals for their acts of cruelty: for being creative at inventing cruelties and for establishing a personal reputation for their particular version of cruelty. Here cruelty can be a macabre art-form . . . here, too, cruelty can be a distinctive “economy,” where one’s credit rating depends on one’s level of cruelty—the more cruel, the higher one’s standing. By contrast, acts of kindness can lead to publicly declared bankruptcy, and in some situations the punishment for this bankruptcy is a death sentence. . . . We must admit that, *under some circumstances, individuals will deliberately choose to do evil*. For example, a culture of cruelty can be highly attractive. It can offer an individual the opportunity to live creatively, and creative living touches on a profound human yearning. At times individuals may discover that acting cruelly is a way, perhaps the only way, they can be creative. They are then likely to embrace a culture of cruelty when some facilitating conditions exist in their immediate context.

One can conclude from these and other studies that early childhood discipline which is excessive and erratic—that is, abusive in its broad sense—helps to create the authoritarian personality, thereby facilitating the doing

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of evil. Excessive and erratic discipline does this by instilling an attitude of obedience, by bullying and frightening the child into submission. Excessive and erratic discipline also creates a deep anger in the abused self. This anger, indeed rage, must be suppressed because the child cannot retaliate against the parent; however, it is very likely to surface in later hostile acts which will be directed against the helpless, socially stigmatized other. Anti-social childrearing cultivates the xenophobic, rigid, submissive, and totalitarian personality, creating thereby the possibility for the doing of evil.

The evidence for children who have been raised prosocially is equally as probative. As the Oliners have shown, a commitment to caring for other human beings was deeply rooted in childhood attitudes of the rescuers toward authority and punishment. A disciplinary milieu characterized by reason and proportion is central:

. . . significantly fewer rescuers recalled any controls imposed on them by the most intimate persons in their early lives . . . parents of rescuers depended significantly less on physical punishment and significantly more on reasoning. . . . Thus, it is in their reliance on reasoning, explanations, suggestions of ways to remedy the harm done, persuasion, and advice that parents of rescuers differed most from non-rescuers.⁶¹

It [parental punishment] includes a heavy dose of reasoning—explanations of why behaviors are inappropriate, often with reference to their consequences for others. Physical punishment is rare: when used, it tends to be a singular event rather than routine. Gratuitous punishment—punishment that serves as a cathartic release of aggression for the parent or is unrelated to the child’s behavior—almost never occurs.⁶²

Fogelman, too, notes that studies of anti-nazi German men show their homes to have been “more accepting and less rigid” while studies of rescuers show that they experienced “a loving and trusting relationship with an affectionate mother [and] had a communicative and non-authoritarian father.” These studies supported her own findings of parents of rescuers “who explained rules and used inductive reasoning.”⁶³

The Oliners account for the connection between prosocial behavior and prosocial childhood discipline as follows:

Reasoning communicates a message of respect for and trust in children that allows them to feel a sense of personal efficacy and warmth toward others. It is based on a presumption of error rather than a presumption of evil intent. It implies that had children but known better or understood more, they would not have acted in an inappropriate way. It is a mark of esteem for the listener; an indication of faith in his or her ability to comprehend, develop, and improve.⁶⁴

Parents have power over children; they are not only physically stronger but also have access to material resources they can bestow or withhold. Societal norms generally support their superior position. . . . When adults voluntarily abdicate the use of power in favor of explanation, they are modeling appropriate behavior toward the weak on the part of the powerful. Faced with powerless others, children so raised in turn have at their disposal an internal “script”—a store of recollections, dialogues, and activities ready to be activated. They need not depend on innovation or improvisation but rather simply retrieve what is already imprinted on their memories.⁶⁵

The conclusion to be drawn about hierarchy and children is clear: patterns of antisocial childhood discipline, ranging from unnecessarily strict to outright abusive behaviors, create an authoritarian personality which will conform to the demands of authority and may even be drawn into a culture of cruelty. Patterns of prosocial childhood discipline, in which authority acts with measured and reasoned behavior and allows itself to be challenged, creates an altruistic personality which will question the demands of authority and is likely to be drawn into a culture of care.⁶⁶

Implications for This Analysis: Five Commandments for Cultivating Prosocial Action

The implication of this analysis is quite simple to articulate, now that we have an analysis: if we wish to prevent another shoah-like event, we must recognize that, willy nilly, we live in social hierarchies; that, whether we like it or not, we are authorities within social hierarchies; and that, as such, it is our obligation to exercise our authority in a prosocial way. This is easier said than done but it does need to be said and to be explicated.

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How, then, would one cultivate authority that is prosocial? That is the question.

I have not been able to present the full case here but the evidence from the scientific experiments, as well as from the historical data for the shoah, Vietnam, and other cases, shows clearly that formal instruction in religious schools or in secular philosophy simply does not, in and of itself, help. Moral education and ethics discussions do not, in and of themselves, make people more prosocial.⁶⁷ It is, rather, the ability to navigate the authority of social hierarchies that counts. To accomplish this, permit me to propose five commandments for cultivating prosocial action.

(1) Teach the nature of social processes. Secular and religious educators, at all age levels, must provide formal instruction about the social processes within which we live and make moral decisions. Discuss ideas such as: authority, obedience, disobedience, resistance, protest, heteronomy and autonomy, norms, rules, values, normocentric agentic shift, salience, permission, in-group/out-group, conflict management, conflict resolution, win-win, socialization, identification, modeling, peer support, and incremental learning. Discuss the nature of hierarchies and the effect of excessive vs. caring discipline. Ask questions such as: “What is the social hierarchy in this particular situation?” “To whom are you subordinate? To whom are you superior?” “Is there more than one authority at work here?” “Is there more than one set of subordinates?” “Upon what is the legitimacy of the authority in this situation based?” “What would you have to do to break the rule, the norm?” “What would you have to do to challenge the authority?” “Are you, as an authority, acting in a responsible way, within the limits of your legitimacy? And, if not, how do you as an authority challenge your own authority and reshape it?” Teach the works of Milgram, Kelman and Hamilton, the Oliners, Browning, and others. Show the films and discuss them. An understanding, no matter how tentative, of these processes is the important first step.

(2) Establish a means by which authority can be challenged. The evidence clearly shows that, under normal circumstances, the overwhelming majority of people will not defy legitimate social authority, even if asked to do something they know is wrong. Therefore, responsible leadership requires that authority itself set up a means by which its own judgment can be challenged. In a school, business, hospital, government, synagogue,

church, or volunteer organization, even in a family: set up an ombuds-person or an ombuds-committee who will hear appeals of disciplinary action taken by the central hierarchy. Set up a whistle-blowing mechanism that will enable criticism of the hierarchy. Set up a “care team” that will evaluate not the efficiency with which the task of the organization is being carried out, but the caring quality of the relationships among members of the organization, particularly those relationships that are hierarchical.

(3) **Identify and teach prosocial skills.** There are specific prosocial skills that, if learned and practiced, facilitate the doing of prosocial acts. Teach, first, the identifying and coding of one’s own feelings. Our feelings are basic to who we are; they are the ground for much of our being and the agency for much of our action. We, therefore, need to know our own feelings. Ask questions such as: “What did you feel when you saw such and such a person being beaten up or being verbally abused?” “Can you yourself recall feeling ashamed, guilty, joyous, powerful, hurt, nurturing, modest, immodest, content?” “What is the difference between anger and rage? Have you ever felt either? What was it like?” “How do you feel when someone threatens you, challenges you publicly, or praises you in front of others?” Then, teach perspective taking and empathy. Ask: “What do you think he or she feels?” “What does she or he feel, even if she or he cannot express it?” “How angry, happy, ashamed, proud . . . is he or she?” “What would you feel in that person’s place?” “What is empathy? What is sympathy?” Everyone is capable of perspective-taking and everyone will need to be the object of perspective-taking by others in the course of life. Being able to identify one’s feelings and to empathize with the other are important prosocial skills.

(4) **Use the language of justice and caring.** The way we phrase what we want to say forms who we are and who we become. Discuss the words: pity, compassion, concern, affection, love, care, cherish, nourish, protect, understanding, empathy, kindness, mercy, sympathy, attachment, devotion, heart, feeling, respect, awareness, recognition, intimacy, attention, warmth, and consideration. And their complements: pain, sorrow, grief, worry, anxiety, distress, suffering, trouble, oversensitivity, intimidate, persecute, threaten, and terror. Discuss the terms: inclusiveness, extensivity, globalism, goodness, kindness, justice, fairness, law, integrity, virtue, uprightness, rectitude, equity, impartiality, righteousness, ethics, caring, morality, protest,

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resistance, bonding, humaneness, and humanity. And their complements: exclusiveness, isolationism, ethnic superiority, injustice, oppression, prejudice, unfairness, uncritical compliance, inhumaneness, and inhumanity. Only by discussing and using the language of caring and justice can we change who we are.

(5) **Do something.** In cultivating a prosocial society, all the teaching and all the discussing is useless unless it leads to action. Pick a cause, join an action group, and protest, or organize, or lobby. Seek out models and imitate them. Do whatever you legitimately need to do to bring your cause to the attention of the authorities. At first, it may seem awkward but, through the well-studied process of incremental learning, it will get easier.⁶⁸

Conclusion

The shoah, in all its horror, did not come into existence in a vacuum. It arose from specific historical circumstances. But it also arose as the result of specific social-psychological conditions that are inherent to all human society. To prevent another shoah-like event, we must study closely these social-psychological conditions in the laboratory and in history, and then draw conclusions about these conditions. Then, we must—at least, so it seems to me—draw inferences about how to structure society and its institutions so that these conditions can be guided, indeed used, to create an environment in which illegitimate authority will be confronted and challenged, individually and as a group, and in which legitimate authority will encourage and sustain prosocial initiatives from those who follow authority. It is by analyzing and then by acting on the analysis to shape authority into a prosocial entity that we will have the best chance of preventing another shoah.

NOTES

1. An abbreviated version of this talk was delivered at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in October 2008 as the Joseph and Rebecca Meyerhoff Annual Lecture. I am indebted to the USHMM for permission to print this essay. Another version of it was delivered at the Kristallnacht commemoration in Toronto, Canada, on November 9, 2009.

2. I have been associated with this great enterprise since 1982, when Elie Wiesel asked me to be one of the Special Advisors to the Chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

3. For many years I used the word “Holocaust” to designate the destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War. I have since been persuaded that “Holocaust” should not be used for two reasons: (1) It bears the additional meaning of “a whole burnt offering,” which is certainly not the theological overtone to be sounded in this context; and (2) the destruction of European Jewry happened to Jews and, hence, it is they who should have the sad honor of naming this event with a Hebrew term. The word “shoah” has been used for a long time in Hebrew to denote the catastrophe to Jewry during World War II and has even been adopted by many non-Jews as the proper designation. I now adopt this usage and acknowledge my debt to Professor Jean Halpérin of Geneva and Fribourg for this insight. In addition, I do not capitalize the word “shoah” as a matter of theological and moral principle, just as I also do not capitalize words and expressions like “führer,” “final solution,” “nazi,” etc.

4. For a fuller analysis of the issues presented here, see my *The Banality of Good and Evil: Moral Lessons from the Shoah and Jewish Tradition* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press: 1999). This is now available also in French: *La Banalité du Bien et du Mal* (Paris: Le Cerf, 2009). See also the series of articles I have written on this subject, which are available on my website: <http://www.js.emory.edu/BLUMENTHAL> under “Articles.”

5. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York, Harper and Row: 1974); also available as a film.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 35, 60–61.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 171 and 173.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 62–63, 170.

10. *Ibid.*, p.187.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

12. *Ibid.*, p.141.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 132–134.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 145–146.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

17. Film, “In the Eye of the Storm,” and later in a film, “A Class Divided”; the latter appeared as a book by William Peters, *A Class Divided Then and Now* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1987).

18. This is clear from “A Class Divided.” My students tell me that Ms. Elliot appeared on the Oprah Winfrey show with great success.

19. One of the most astounding is the Stanford Prison experiment. See Philip G. Zimbardo et al., “The Psychology of Imprisonment: Privation, Power, and Pathology,” in *Doing Unto Others*, ed. Z. Rubin (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall,

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1974), available in slide presentation and, later, in a film, “Quiet Rage”; see also *New York Times Magazine*, April 8, 1973.

20. Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). See also, idem., “Ordinary Germans or Ordinary Men,” *Address and Response at the Inauguration of the Dorot Chair of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies*, ed. D. Blumenthal (Atlanta, GA: Emory University, 1994), pp. 7–14.

21. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, p. 48.

22. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 74 and 160.

23. Browning, “Ordinary Germans or Ordinary Men,” p. 11; see also p. 9 where he calls these men “grass roots” killers.

24. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, p. 121.

25. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, p. 132.

26. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 160–161.

27. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, p. 162.

28. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 164–169.

29. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 170–171. It is now well-known that there is not one single case of a person put to death for refusing to kill Jews. See Browning, *Ordinary Men*, p. 170; “*The Good Old Days: The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*,” ed. Ernst Klee et al. and trans. Deborah Burnstone (1988; rpt. New York: Free Press, 1991), pp. 75–86, esp. pp. 80 and 82 for Himmler’s verbal and written orders on the subject; and David H. Kitterman, “Those Who Said, ‘No!’: Germans Who Refused to Execute Civilians during World War II,” *German Studies Review* 9:2 (May 1988), pp. 241–254. See Browning, p. 103, that those who resisted were yelled at but not disciplined.

30. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 161, 163, 182, and 184.

31. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 69, 74, 151, and 171–175.

32. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. 150 and 183.

33. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, p. 175.

34. Milton Mayer, *They Thought They Were Free: The Germans 1933–1945* (1955; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), pp. 44–45.

35. See, for example, the study of German jurists: Ingo Müller, *Hitler’s Justice: The Courts of the Third Reich*, trans. Deborah L. Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); this volume was reviewed by me in *Modern Judaism* 13 (1993), pp. 95–106.

36. In 2005, I spoke on this subject at a conference and the chaplain to the firemen who served in the 9/11 inferno came to me and said that this was exactly what his firemen were saying: that they had not been heroes; that they were only doing their job and doing what was expected of them.

37. See Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994); as well as my review of this book in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 23 (1995), pp. 62–63.

38. Fogelman, p. 177.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 176–177.
41. Ewa Kurek-Lesik, “The Role of Polish Nuns in the Rescue of Jews, 1939–1945,” in *Embracing the Other: Philosophical, Psychological, and Historical Perspectives*, eds. Pearl Oliner, Samuel Oliner, Lawrence Baron, Lawrence Blum, Dennis Krebs, and M. Zusanna Smolenska (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 330, emphasis added; see also my review in *Pastoral Psychology* 46:2 (1997), pp. 131–134.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 306–327, esp. pp. 312–313. See also the very fine study of Samuel and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (New York, Free Press: 1988).
43. Erwin Staub, “Helping a Distressed Person,” in Leonard Berkowitz, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), vol. 7, pp. 293–341.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 323–324.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 313 (emphasis original).
46. John M. Darley and C. Daniel Batson, “From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27:1 (1973), pp. 100–108.
47. Darley and Batson, p. 107 (parentheses in original).
48. Darley and Batson, p. 108 (emphasis in original).
49. Milgram, pp. 47–49.
50. Milgram, pp. 105–107.
51. Milgram, p. 107.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good*, trans. Hildegard and Hunter Hannum (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983).
54. Theodor W. Adorno, et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, abridged edition (1950; rpt. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1982).
55. Adorno, pp. 256–257.
56. Oliner and Oliner, pp. 182–183.
57. All first-year psychology students are familiar with the experiments in which rats who are subjected to erratic and excessive electric shocks are driven “insane.”
58. Miller, pp. 166 and 187–188.
59. Miller, pp. 86–87. In the psychobiographical section on Hitler (pp. 142–197), Miller gives evidence that Hitler’s father was abusive and also that Hitler had a personality that was split and seriously repressed, that he idealized and identified with his father, and that he projected his idealized father into the image of the führer while he projected the part of his childhood that needed to be repressed and extinguished onto the Jews; see pp. 156ff. and 176–180.

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60. Fred E. Katz, *Ordinary People and Extraordinary Evil* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), pp. 31 and 127, emphasis original.

61. Oliner and Oliner, pp. 179–181.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

63. Fogelman, pp. 255–257.

64. Oliner and Oliner, p. 182.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 183.

66. There are, of course, many other factors that facilitate the doing of evil and of good such as: real or perceived threats, role modeling, peer pressure, incremental praxis, formal and informal socialization to values, xenophobia, the use of the language of caring or exclusiveness, identification, concepts of role, duty, and discipline, etc. See my *Banality*, part one, and my website, under “Articles.”

67. See the argument in *Banality*, pp. 128–132.

68. There are, of course, other prescriptions for creating a prosocial society such as: identifying and teach prosocial value concepts, teaching critical thinking, teaching conflict management skills and networking, learning the many forms of formal and informal protest, developing salience, and developing formal syllabi and curricula with active internship possibilities. See *Banality*, part two and the appendices, as well as my website. In this regard, I would also like to mention the resources available at the Facing History and Ourselves website located at www.facinghistory.org.

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