

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Do you believe that people are basically good? Why or why not? What evidence supports your answer?
- Mr. Prager explains that, “Your answer to the second question [of whether people are basically good or not] will shape just about all of your moral, social, and political views – even more than whether you believe in God.” Do you agree with this assertion? Why or why not?
- Mr. Prager asks, “...if people are basically good, why does every civilization have so many laws to control human behavior?” and “...if we are born good, why do you have to teach goodness?” How would you answer Mr. Prager’s questions? If we are not born good, how can people become good? How can one teach goodness?
- Later in the video, Mr. Prager answers, “Why do people commit evil? Because it’s easy to. Because it’s tempting to. And, yes, because it often accords with human nature,” that, “...those who believe that people are basically good have simply made a decision to believe that and ignore all the evidence.” Do you believe that the evidence supports Mr. Prager’s claim? Why or why not? How does the manner in which a person is born relate to that person’s potential?
- Mr. Prager makes the point that, “...parents and society have to undertake major efforts to make children into good adults., “ ...indeed that, “...figuring out how to make good people is the single most important project in all of human life.” Why is this the case? How can this be done? Considering the historical record, why is it imperative that society work towards this end?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: Josef Mengele

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “The Life and Crimes of a Nazi Doctor,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What did Josef Mengele do to earn the name ‘Angel of Death?’ Which survivor said about Mengele, “...he is not a monster. He is a human being who was taught to hate.” Do you agree with this assertion? Why or why not?
- Do you consider Mengele to have been an evil person? What was his potential? Do you think that in another time and place he still would have been so evil? Why or why not?
- Who failed to help Mengele become a good person? Does this article inspire you to be a good person and try to help others, especially young people, become good persons? Why or why not?



QUIZ

ARE PEOPLE BORN GOOD?

1. True or False: People are born naturally good.

- a. True
- b. False

2. If you believe people are basically good, you are likely to believe _____ causes people to commit violent crime.

- a. Bad judgement
- b. Outside forces like poverty and bigotry
- c. Lack of morals
- d. Poor parenting

3. In a society where it is believed that people are basically good:

- a. Society teaches other life skills.
- b. Society emphasizes education.
- c. Society doesn't devote great efforts towards making good people.
- d. People grow up to be good.

4. Why does every civilization have so many laws to control human behavior?

- a. The government wants to impose its values.
- b. Because people aren't born good.
- c. They want to control their citizens.
- d. All of the above.

5. What is the single most important project in life?

- a. Having a good job.
- b. Loving everyone.
- c. Staying fit and healthy.
- d. Making good people.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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The Life and Crimes of a Nazi Doctor

By Stefan Kanfer, Peter Carlson

Josef Mengele Was the Chief Physician of Auschwitz Who Conducted Unholy Medical Experiments and Earned the Name 'Angel of Death'

There are evils so deep you can drop names in them and never hear them hit bottom. Josef Mengele is one of those names. His title was doctor, but his victims used another label: the Angel of Death.

He spread his wings in the most notorious killing ground of the Holocaust: Auschwitz. The death camp has become synonymous with genocide, with the turning of human beings into black smoke, saturating the Polish sky. But in a genocidal century some words have lost their power to shock. Say Auschwitz too many times, see too many skirmishes about Bitburg, watch enough barbed-wire films like *Sophie's Choice* and the Holocaust is only a long word for fire. Besides, other mass murders have occurred since World War II; other catastrophes now fill the evening screen. What about Ethiopia? The body count in Afghanistan? Lebanon? South Africa?

And then comes the news: After a 40-year pursuit, a body has been unearthed in Brazil. It bears the marks of the century's most diabolical fugitive. The spades of the gravediggers have dug up more than they knew: Josef Mengele may or may not be as dead as his victims. But his crimes are newly alive.

They began in the spring of 1943 when he was named chief physician of Auschwitz. The place was a kingdom of lies. The words over the prison gates read *Arbeit Macht Frei* (Work Makes You Free). But the work was lifting piles of stones from one place to another and back again. And the freedom was not the prisoners', but the captors'. They had the freedom to kill, to torture, to maim. It was in this abandoned atmosphere that Mengele thrived. Impeccably dressed in a crisp black SS uniform, smiling tightly, the small rigid figure would greet every incoming train to Auschwitz-Birkenau to make his "selections." His stick indicated the way: to the left, extermination; to the right, life.

And life itself was a lie. Under Mengele it became a prolonged round of medical experiments. He was obsessed with racial purity. Twins fascinated him: If German women could give multiple births, he reasoned, the growing losses of the war could be reversed. So he collected twins, opening them up with his scalpel to see what secrets could be discerned within. The results were usually fatal. Germany was not producing enough children with Aryan characteristics. Mengele decided to create them by transplanting portions of the body—one reason why Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal called him "the man who collected blue eyes."

An eyewitness watched Mengele shoot a boy in one knee, then in the other. As the child cried, the doctor administered the coup de grace with a bullet in the brain. "You have to respect the laws of the place," he concluded. He offered candy to twin girls, then shot them in the neck. He castrated or sterilized hundreds of male prisoners. He tossed babies into ovens alive. He promised rare milk porridge to starving expectant mothers who volunteered for medical experiments. They were all fatally gassed. So were the inmates of barracks that included some of his former professors. After a woman gave birth Mengele strapped her breasts with tape and waited to see how long it took her unfed infant to die. The mother survived. "I murdered my own child," she says.

Who was Mengele? A demon risen from the cracks of hell? An ordinary face in the human mass, yet another victim of conflict and chance? Most of the countless thousands he tormented are silent. Let history speak. It is eloquent enough.

A SCIENTIST SERVING DEATH

In the last four decades Josef Mengele has become a legend, a symbol of evil. It is hard to imagine that early on, he was considered one of the elite, the highest flowering of the New Germany. Back then he was Dr. Josef Mengele, M.D., Ph.D., an elegant, handsome man from a prominent family, a scholar, a scientist, a lover of poetry and classical music.

Born in 1911 in Gunzburg, Germany, he was the third son of a wealthy farm machinery manufacturer, a bright boy with a bent for science and an interest in genetics. He earned not one but two doctorates: one in medicine, the other in anthropology. He published at least one respectable research paper—on the genetics of cleft palates—before taking up the Nazi pseudoscience of Aryan superiority. In 1943 he volunteered for duty at Auschwitz, knowing he would find an unlimited supply of human guinea pigs for his "research."

At Auschwitz Mengele was a parody of a scientist. He worked meticulously, vaccinating his victims against disease before killing them with carefully sterilized surgical instruments. He performed his sadistic experiments under research grants from the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, and he efficiently informed his sponsors of his progress with detailed reports and shipments of such "specimens" as skeletons, blood and eyeballs. He would have been a classic Hollywood mad scientist except for one crucial difference—his madness was encouraged by a society equally insane, eager for scientific "proof" of its superhuman superiority.

Sometime around Christmas of 1944, as that society collapsed, crushed by advancing Allied troops, Mengele fled from Auschwitz. Captured by U.S. counterintelligence agents, he somehow slipped out of their grasp. Then, astonishingly, he returned to his hometown to live under his own name. Although he was mentioned during the 1945-46 Nuremberg trials, nobody tried to arrest him. Finally, in 1949, the West German authorities went after him, only to find that he had slipped away. He turned up in Argentina, where he lived—again under his own name—in Buenos Aires, serving as a local representative of the family business, Karl Mengele & Sons. In 1954, under the alias of Dr. Helmut Gregor, he became an Argentine citizen. In 1959 the West German government requested Mengele's extradition, but an Argentine court delayed for more than a year before ordering his arrest. By then the doctor was in Paraguay, where the Supreme Court of Justice awarded him citizenship under his own name.

During the next quarter century Mengele, who finally carried a \$3.4 million bounty on his head, was reportedly seen in Paraguay, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, West Germany, Austria, Portugal, Miami and Westchester County, N.Y. He was, the reports stated, a rancher or an auto mechanic or an international drug trafficker. This much-hated, much-hunted fugitive seemed to move at will, always eluding capture, as if some evil guardian angel were protecting him—a perception that added luster to his-legend.

And then, on May 31 of this year, West German police, acting on a tip, raided the home of Hans Sedlmeier, a former employee of Karl Mengele & Sons. They discovered a cache of letters, some possibly written by Mengele himself, that led to Sao Paulo, Brazil. There, a Hungarian-born couple, Geza and Gitta Stammer, claimed that Mengele had worked for them as an unpaid farm manager for 13 years, beginning in 1961. They never turned him in, Gitta explained, because he threatened reprisals against their children. Another couple, Austrian-born Lieselotte and Wolfram Bossert, said that they, too, sheltered Mengele in Sao Paulo and were with him when he drowned in 1979. While experts examined the remains of the man buried under the pseudonym Wolfgang Gerhard, Mengele's son Rolf claimed that the body was his father's.

Dead or alive, Mengele lives on as a nightmare in literature. He is the genocidal doctor who taunts God in Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy*, the drill-wielding dentist in William Goldman's *Marathon Man*, the mad scientist cloning dozens of Adolf Hitlers in Ira Levin's *The Boys From Brazil*. Even more than Hitler himself, Dr. Josef Mengele, the healer turned exterminator, has taken his place in our collective

unconscious as evil incarnate.

WITNESSES TO A NIGHTMARE

Irene Hizme and René Slotkin

Both are married with children and live in the New York City area. The twins were born in Czechoslovakia in December 1937 and were only 5 years old when they fell into Dr. Mengele's hands:

Irene: I don't remember his face. I remember the first time I saw him he was wearing green, dark green. And I remember his boots; that was probably the level my eyes were. Black, shiny boots. He was asking for Zwillinge, Zwillinge [twins, twins]. He sounded angry. I don't know if I understood that it applied to me. We knew whatever we had to do, we'd better do it fast, and right.

René: I don't remember actually seeing when we were separated from our mother. I remember feeling it, though, and hearing it. I remember a cry. I suspect it was my mother, but I'm just guessing.

Irene: The first time we went to the infirmary, he took blood. It was very painful. I think you started to cry then, and I think that got me nervous. At Auschwitz you didn't dare cry, no matter what went on. From then on I remember thinking about you, "I wonder if he's in the laboratory...and I hope he doesn't cry."

René: I didn't go to the laboratory as much as you. We found out later that he appeared to be more interested in the female twin. But if one twin died he would often let the other be killed.

Irene: They gave me injections in the arm and the back, and X rays. I'd be extremely sick for a while. Somewhere in my head, I had a good impression...you know, a doctor is a doctor, and so he's not going to hurt me. But of course he did.

René: I remember seeing you. I saw this kid looking across the barbed wire, and I knew that this was my sister. I just knew it.

Irene: Mengele, I think, was possibly a nut for cleanliness. We always had to take a shower when we were going to the infirmary. We'd get all undressed and march to this bathhouse. That was scary. I was already bright enough to pick up on the fact that they weren't always shower houses. You sometimes went in there and didn't ever come out again.

René: At one point toward the end of the war I was scheduled to go to the chambers. I knew I was going to lose my life. We were being loaded onto trucks when this car comes up. A convertible. That's when I saw the figure of Mengele. We were taken off the truck. He stopped the whole procession because they were going to kill his twins. And he didn't want his twins to die.

Marc Berkowitz

Perhaps none of Mengele's surviving victims had closer contact with the Angel of Death than Berkowitz, now 53 and a retired New York furniture salesman. Arriving at Auschwitz from Czechoslovakia in March 1944 with their mother, 12-year-old Marc and his twin sister, Francesca, were singled out by Mengele for experimentation:

He was a great one for telling lies. Before the experiments began, he came and tattooed my number personally. In a gentle voice he said, "You're a little boy, and we have to do it so it grows with you. Whenever you look at the number you'll always think of me. This is to show the people that it doesn't hurt and you don't have to be frightened. It's for a safety reason, in case you people get lost."

Mengele had a certain love for the Jewish people, but it was an evil love. He said, "I don't want to fool people who are simple. I want to fool the bright ones, the ones who study the Talmud, the ones who think they can change the world." He was very knowledgeable about Judaism and even spoke some Yiddish.

When he punished he liked to smile. He said, "The more we do to you, the less you seem to believe we are doing it."

When the experiments began, he told us the pain is only temporary and it will help us survive this environment. If a child would protest, he'd get very upset and yell, "We can't afford to lose time!" He'd kick the floor, grab his head with both hands, throw a tantrum, uttering something that was not intelligible. They put us in freezing baths, smeared chemicals on our skin, but it was the needles we were most afraid of. After the first 150 injections I stopped counting.

I was brought up to love God. For me hate would have been the greatest crime. That fascinated Mengele. And he thought I had Aryan features. So he made me his messenger boy. I ran errands. I cranked his Victrola. I tended to him personally, to his meals, his special kitchen. I picked his Brussels sprouts whenever he felt like having them. I complied because I had the ability to deal with it and because it was an avenue to survival.

One morning in July 1944 I spotted my mother among a long line of women moving toward the gas chamber. I had not seen her in six weeks. Mengele called me in and gave me an errand to the crematorium. He knew I would see my mother go to her death. A couple of days later he asked me if I still believed in God. As I answered he unfastened the two snaps on his revolver holster one by one. "Everything has been taken from me now," I said. "But God you will never take because He instilled the feeling in me, and only He can take it away." When I had finished, he refastened his holster.

In September he said to me, "I have never seen you cry." I said, "The well has run dry, but someday it will be full again." It didn't happen until 1969, the first time I went to Israel. As soon as I got off the plane the tears started like an ocean. I went to the Wailing Wall and I wept for the stones, because I realized if not for those stones, I would have no roots, no heritage, no identity.

After the war I wanted to remain illiterate. I had thought that education was meant to elevate man. But the SS were highly educated, and the atom bomb was the fruit of education. I thought, who wants this education? To this day I cannot read or write. I'm not proud of it, but I'm not ashamed.

Mengele had a look in his eye that said, "I am the power." No human should have that look. But he is not a monster. He is a human being who was taught to hate. And humanity allowed him to do those things. Everyone has the responsibility. If we claim we didn't know then, surely we do now.

Of course he is alive. And he's laughing. He never had such a good time in his life. Drowned? He had a phobia of water; he considered it dirty. He wouldn't go near a lake. He had a pool at Auschwitz, but he wouldn't go in it. He's making a mockery of the civilized world. Why isn't the civilized world making a mockery of him?

If he is caught, though, I don't want to see him suffer. Justice to me would be for him to spend time with me. I will be his servant again, very courteous. At the end of two years with me he will say, "Yes, we can teach our children not to hate." I have no doubt I can redeem him without force. He'll see that goodness is far more rewarding than evil.

Magda Bass

She is 58, married and living in Los Angeles. She blames Mengele's experiments on her for four miscarriages before she had her only child, daughter Caryn, now 24:

I was holding on to my mother's hand at the train station. Suddenly somebody grabbed my arm. It was a German carrying a whip with leather thongs, but, of course, I didn't know his rank. And he said, "Are you sisters?" My mother said, "No, she is my daughter." The following day I found out it was Dr. Mengele.

He would never look straight at anyone. He always looked at you as if he was peering over the rims of some invisible glasses. He would just tuck his chin into his chest and look at you sideways.

About 25 or 30 of us, including my mother and me, were moved into a back room and given shots on the inside of our cheeks. I remember Mengele had a twisted finger because he gave me my shot. To keep my spirits up, my mother would joke about it all the time, saying God was punishing him. The next day about 95 percent of the women who got those shots had enormously swollen heads. Whenever I think about it, I always feel Mengele's hand grasping my arm at the railroad station. And I really had the feeling from that moment on that I wouldn't die in a camp, because that was the moment I knew he had the power to tell me to go to the left side and not the right side.

Ernest Michel

He is 61, lives in Manhattan and is executive vice-president and campaign director for the United Jewish Appeal Federation. In the summer of 1943, at 19, he worked as an orderly in the Auschwitz infirmary:

On several occasions Mengele might look at you with those steely eyes, and you realized at any time he could have pointed and said, "You go!" You tried to be invisible around him. I saw him on a regular basis walking through our camp in his uniform, looking elegant, unapproachable and surrounded by SS cohorts. He would walk through the infirmary rather slowly, looking at people in the cots and reading their charts—and pointing. Immediately as he pointed at people they were taken away on a truck. I must have carried out thousands of bodies to the trucks. My job was to fill out charts and describe a person's illness and cause of death. It was like going through a farce because everybody knew none of these people would come out alive. You would never write that somebody was shot; only "heart attack" or "weakness of body." They always kept meticulous records.

One day in the summer of 1944 we took eight women, mostly young and all healthy, into the room where the experiments would take place. I saw Mengele standing there in his uniform, surrounded by three or four others. There was electrical machinery the likes of which I had never seen. As we brought in each girl, an officer would strap her down. We left quickly because you just didn't want to be around Mengele for very long. After a while the screaming inside stopped. When we took them out two of the eight were dead, five were in a coma, one was still strapped to the cot. Mengele was standing there, discussing it very casually. The only word I could hear was "experiment."

Despite his image, there was a gentility about Mengele. He was soft-spoken. He did not yell, he did not rant. In some instances he was almost kind. When he pointed at somebody he would say, "Don't worry, you'll be well taken care of," knowing full well that the person was being sent to the gas chamber. Some people on whom he performed experiments have also told me that he had a very gentle manner. One said, "He was not at all demanding. He would say, 'Hold still, my child, nothing will happen.'"

He was always extremely well dressed, very elegant looking. I never saw him without his SS cap; he wore it even at the experiments.

Personally I don't think he is dead. But if forensic studies prove otherwise, then I hope he died a slow death. Only for the sake of history would I like to see him brought to justice. What happens to him afterward I really don't care about. How can a man atone for murdering hundreds of thousands of people?

Hadassa Rosensaft

She is 72 and lives in Manhattan. She was a dental surgeon in Sosnowiec, Poland until Aug. 4, 1943, when the Nazis sent her family to Auschwitz:

When we arrived my whole family—my parents, my first husband, my 6-year-old son—were selected and sent to the gas chambers. My younger sister was killed in April 1944 by Mengele. The first time I saw Mengele was when he came to our barracks and there was a scream, "Anstellen!"—that means "Stand in line!" He pointed out with his finger—here, here, here—and the women were taken away. He was at that time about the same age as we were, quite young. We never looked in his eyes. We were always too scared even to look up to see him, because we felt always, "We will not look at him and he will not see us." We

tried to be small and invisible. Sometime in November 1943 we were standing outside the barracks, awakened for roll call. Dr. Mengele spotted a woman who came a few seconds late. He ordered her to come forward, threw her to the floor and stomped down on her chest with his boot. He started to whistle an aria from *Madame Butterfly*, and held his foot there until the woman was dead. And then he left. There were no more selections that day. In April 1944 there was another selection and my sister was a victim. I never saw her again and there was nothing anybody could do. I was always wondering why countries in South America gave him a place to live and citizenship. It makes me angry and I regret that he escaped justice.

Frank Klein

He is 53, a retired office supply store owner from El Paso, Texas who was interned at Auschwitz-Birkenau for seven months:

The first time I saw Mengele was the day I arrived at the camp with my twin brother, Otto, my mother, my aunt and my sister. One of the men on the train platform asked my mother if Otto and I were twins. When my mother said, "Yes," he said, "I'll be right back." A few minutes later, he took us to Mengele. For the next hour we watched the selection process. My mother was sent to the gas chamber, and so was my aunt. About a week later we were called to Mengele's office. I must admit he didn't hurt us that day. He didn't do anything but examine us, dictating his findings to the nurse, who was also a prisoner. My brother and I survived, although Otto got tuberculosis after the war and my kidneys are failing. I think it had to do with the shots we got. And I've had a nightmare ever since the camp. I dream that Mengele is taking my brother away to kill him. Mengele looks the same as he did back then. I stopped having the dream about a year ago. I hope it never comes back.

Isabella Leitner

She is 61, still bears the concentration camp number 79212 and lives in New York City. She is the author of two books about the Holocaust: *Fragments of Isabella* and the forthcoming *Saving the Fragments* (New American Library, \$12.95):

I packed for my journey to Auschwitz on May 28, 1944—my 20th birthday. As we alighted from the cattle car—my mother, my brother and my four sisters—there was Mengele, looking magnificent with his dog, his pistol, his riding crop. He stood there as his henchmen separated the men and the women. Then with his thumb he would motion to the left or right, the ultimate god, choosing those who lived and those who died. He sent my mother to the crematorium immediately. She was too old to live. And my youngest sister, "Potyo" [little one, in Hungarian], she was too young for him at 13. Because the crematoriums were filled, they built big, open fires for the children.

My three sisters and I were led to the Vernichtungslager, the annihilation camp, where I saw Mengele many, many times a day. He would come and make selections for both the ovens and his experiments. And not long after he left, the crematorium would ooze the smoke and stench of burning flesh. My three sisters and I, we spent our lives—and our pitiful energies—running from Mengele. Once, as we ran out the back door of the block, trying to escape his sudden nighttime selection, he shot at us with his pistol. Another time he took a group of seven girls, including my sister, and injected them with live typhus, but it didn't take and my sister survived.

Mengele was as smooth, as civilized, as elegant as you can imagine, good-looking even. You would never suspect the evil. He was always magnificently attired. His boots shone, his shirts were beautifully pressed. Sometimes he wore white gloves. He smelled of life and we smelled of death.

And I still smell the stench of burning human beings. Forty years is not long enough to eliminate Mengele from my nostrils.

Then as now I had fantasies about what I would do to him. I would not kill him because I am not a killer. He was the genius of death. No, I would make him as helpless as he made me. I have a sort of revenge. It would kill Mengele to see that I gave birth to two of the most magnificent, beautiful, intelligent children.

But he is still in my conscious and subconscious. My husband says I cry out at night, and I know I have nightmares. On the subway during rush hour I'm never sure I'm not sitting next to him or to one of the henchmen who killed my mother or who butchered 128 members of my family—just counting my first cousins and aunts and uncles.

It's harder to live with now than in the beginning. I carry this unbearable luggage in my head—what Mengele did to me. Mengele had a grave for his mother and I do not. I cannot bring my sons or flowers to her grave. And Mengele went home at night from the camp and cradled his son. His son was a human being, and I, a Jew, was not. For me it happened yesterday, or tomorrow.

A SILENCE LOUD WITH LOST VOICES

And thus the voices, a mournful chorus echoing through an underworld without end: bodies dumped in freezing water, injected with fatal phenol, deprived of nourishment, of hormones, of blood, of everything but anguish.

Still, these excrescences occurred two generations ago. If Mengele escaped, slipping through the nets of the Americans, the West Germans, the Israelis, if he fled successfully to South America, what of it? That was then; this is now. Yes, he was a criminal; yes, he was the center of the black hole of wartime Germany. But isn't there a statute of limitations on rage as well as grief? Isn't President Reagan right when he proclaims, "Horror cannot outlast hope"? Why make a celebrity of a corpse or, at worst, a 74-year-old fugitive?

Certainly not for revenge; it is far too late for that. We know that vengeance is divine, not human, and that one life cannot begin to compensate for hundreds of thousands. The publicity of a postmortem or a show trial can have only one valid purpose: to illuminate the fragility of culture and to give the lie to the long-standing bromide about the banality of evil.

Mengele's evil was not banal. He was not just following orders. He was promulgating them. He was perverting the ideals and decencies of medicine's sacred Hippocratic oath, and by extension, of humanity itself. He was not simply the caricature in *Marathon Man* and *The Boys From Brazil*. He was a real man with a real family. He had a real education, listened to real music, read real books, ate real meals, spoke real sentences. He dreamed real dreams. But his waking life was a nightmare, and his clamorous silence fulfills a prophecy made by Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels: "If someday we are compelled to leave the scene of history, we will slam the door so hard that the universe will shake and mankind will stand back in stupefaction."

The world has yet to break free from that stupefaction. Until all is known about the sins of the Nazi years, we live in danger of seeing them recur in some new but equally virulent form, of turning away from the cries of the needy and ignoring history's moral demands. That notable survivor, Elie Wiesel, has repeatedly warned, "It is too late to save yesterday's victims...But it is not too late to save ourselves. The next time we truly hear the word Holocaust, it will be preceded by the word atomic. We had better learn from whom we can, while we can. Even from the Angel of Death himself."