



# Moral Disengagement: How People Do Harm and Live with Themselves

By Albert Bandura

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## **Moral Disengagement: How People Do Harm and Live with Themselves** By Albert Bandura

How do otherwise considerate human beings do cruel things and still live in peace with themselves? Drawing on his agentic theory, Dr. Bandura provides a definitive exposition of the psychosocial mechanism by which people selectively disengage their moral self-sanctions from their harmful conduct. They do so by sanctifying their harmful behavior as serving worthy causes; they absolve themselves of blame for the harm they cause by displacement and diffusion of responsibility; they minimize or deny the harmful effects of their actions; and they dehumanize those they maltreat and blame them for bringing the suffering on themselves. Dr. Bandura's theory of moral disengagement is uniquely broad in scope. Theories of morality focus almost exclusively at the individual level. He insightfully extends the disengagement of morality to the social-system level through which wide-spread inhumanities are perpetrated. In so doing, he offers enlightening new perspectives on some of the most provocative issues of our time, addressing:

Moral disengagement in all aspects of the death penalty—from public policy debates, to jury decisions, to the processes of execution

- The social and moral justifications of major industries—including gun manufacturers, the entertainment industry, tobacco companies, and the world of "too big to fail" finance
- Moral disengagement in terrorism, and how terrorists rationalize the use of violence as a means of social change
- Climate change denial, and the strenuous efforts by some to dispute the overwhelming scientific consensus affirming the impact of human behavior on the environment

“Al Bandura is the most cited individual in the history of psychology for the depth, breadth and originality of his ideas and writings. Now with his ground-breaking new contribution, *Moral Disengagement*, his reach extends not only to teachers and students but also to the general public --making them aware of everyday evils in many spheres of daily life that must be counteracted by mindful moral engagement.”

----Phil Zimbardo, Ph.D. Author, *The Lucifer Effect*; President, The Heroic

## Imagination Project

“The authoritative statement by the world’s most-cited living psychologist, laying out his influential theory. Plunge into these fascinating historical and modern case studies of moral disengagement—morality tales for all time, illuminated by the psychology of how people do harm to themselves and others.”-- Susan T. Fiske, Psychology and Public Affairs, Princeton University

"This fascinating book is a sad reminder of the ubiquity of moral disengagement; it is a much needed call to arms; and it is even a practical primer of how to engage with others in ways that recognize and build on our shared humanity. It helps us identify and resist what threatens to diminish each of us and reminds us that morality is less about the ends we seek to achieve and more about the means we use. "

----Thomas D. Cook, Joan and Serepta Harrison Professor of Ethics and Justice, Professor of Sociology, Psychology, Education, and Social Policy, Northwestern University; and Senior Fellow, Mathematica Policy Research, Washington, DC

“Dr. Albert Bandura is one of the great behavioral scientists of our time. His superb contributions include a deep analysis of human morality, its fundamental importance and the complexity of its development.” ----David A. Hamburg, MD, Visiting Scholar, American Association for the Advancement of Science; DeWitt Wallace Distinguished Scholar, Weill Cornell Medical College; President Emeritus, Carnegie Corporation of New York

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#### Review

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----Thomas D. Cook, Joan and Serepta Harrison Professor of Ethics and Justice, Professor of Sociology, Psychology, Education, and Social Policy, Northwestern University; and Senior Fellow, Mathematica Policy Research, Washington, DC

"Bandura's book is a breakthrough in ethics. It shows how moral disengagement works in business, politics and social life, and how these practices should be unmasked for ethical human functioning."

----Laszlo Zsolnai, Professor and Director, Business Ethics Center, Corvinus University of Budapest and President, European SPES Institute, Leuven

"*Moral Disengagement* holds the key for unlocking the greatest mystery at the root of our biggest policy problems: why do moral people behave immorally? Compellingly written, Bandura draws on the best social science - much of it his own - to illuminate policy issues ranging from gun violence to climate change. It is, in short, must-reading for all."

----Jon D. Hanson, Alfred Smart Professor of Law and director of The Project on Law and Mind Sciences, Harvard Law School

"Timely and soaring above the plethora of psychological theorizing published today, Bandura's work on *Moral Disengagement* utilizes social cognitive theory to explain morality. This work should be essential reading for humanity. Sharp, insightful, and provocative, it provides comprehensive answers to dispel the myriad questions about how human beings can commit atrocious immoral acts and still live with themselves." Regan A. R. Gurung, Ph.D. Ben J. & Joyce Rosenberg Professor of Human Development & Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay"

## About the Author

**Albert Bandura** is one of the most eminent psychologists of modern times. He is a renowned scholar whose pioneering research in social cognitive theory has served as a rich resource for academics, practitioners, and policy makers alike across disciplinary lines. His illustrative career includes groundbreaking work across a broad range of areas. His seminal research on social modeling expanded our view of human learning and the growing primacy of this mode of learning in this electronic era. His later research on self-regulatory mechanisms laid the theoretical foundation for his theory of human agency. These diverse programs of research blend his theoretical interests with an abiding concern for the use of psychological knowledge for human enlightenment and betterment. He is the recipient of countless awards for his distinguished lifetime contributions to psychological science and innovative social applications."

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