

What Do We Tell the Children?

by Daniel Mallock (November 2017)



Murder of Jews by Nazi/German mobile killing units ([photo info here](#))

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

–Walt Whitman, [national identity](#)? How do we talk about the disturbing duality of humanity—extraordinary compassion and decency, and capacity to commit the most terrible atrocities? If ever parental profundity were needed it would be in such a discussion. But, stating fact is not enough, particularly if the fact itself is disturbing and confusing. There must be more.

Whitman tried to take us there, lead us to a self-evident conclusion—that we are contrary creatures; we embrace our contradictions, like it or not. Perhaps Whitman was on the

right track by stating an essential truth but couching it in a semi-positive, triumphant way. But there is fear, too; and a great challenge and responsibility inherent in our contradictory nature.

When faced with choices great and small, we tell the children to make the right decision. What is the right decision? The right decision is to always support the veil of civilization that keeps barbarism at bay, and the rejection of self-centeredness and cruelty.

The right decision is fundamentally a brave compassion.

What do we tell the children? We tell them to make the right decision, and we pray quietly that they will, and that we will show them the way.

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