OP-Ed

A normal looking family sits at a table for breakfast in the 1930’s and are talking about the how good it would be for them to take a vacations to the beach for a while. Then the father stands up kisses his wife good bye and tells his children he loves them, he then puts on a jacket with the swastika on the right sleeve and the SS symbol on the left, and leaves to his command post in Auschwitz, the death camp were over 1.5 million people were killed.

This made up family was like many real families in Germany in the 1930s, they participated in normal family behavior at home but would leave and become monsters of the holocaust. Up till Hitler came to power a family like this probably would be unemployed and barely getting by getting their kids food and water. Up to 1933 when Hitler became leader over six million people were unemployed living in poverty (http://www.ihr.org/jhr/v12/v12p299\_Degrelle.html).

There is a clear line of people that are evil and people who have just been influenced too much by the truly evil people. There are people like Hitler who even admitted that he had to do the darkest of deeds to some but it would help the Aryans become there true form. He and his head leaders killed Millions of people for power; they are the true definition of evil. He saw that people in Germany would most likely do anything for money to feed themselves and their families and he took advantage of this and used it to make the holocaust possible.

Then there are the people like young teenagers who have been taught there whole life that they are pure and have seen posters and books supporting the idea of Aryan Superiority. Pope Benedict XVI was a member of Hitler youth at age fourteen due to the laws that stated all teenage males shall be a part of Hitler youth and he is considered a holy man by the catholic church. These people had been influenced for many years through propaganda that they were the superior race and for the pure Aryan race to live they needed to rid the world of Jews and other non-Aryan people. A former member of Hitler youth in a documentary said “it was great to be a part of the greatest race and the greatest nation on earth; I was told I was a pure German and I had German blood running through me that made me superior.” Should they have been judged for crimes against humanity? When you first look into it you automatically think yes, they killed 6 million people including kids, women, and the elderly. But like this man they were doing what they had been taught by their parents and posters in the streets, helping their country which had struggled for so long become strong again.

Like many Americans I share similar political views as my parents because of their influence, I don’t believe I have harmed anybody because of my beliefs. Could these young Nazis have had the same feelings? Influence is a huge factor to choose we make each day, for instance there was a study called the Asch Experiment (http://www.simplypsychology.org/asch-conformity.html )that had six normal people in a class room and tested them to see if they would go against their judgment and follow the group. There were four people who were not subjects but pretend to be and 2 who were. Then a professor showed the group a paper with four lines and another sheet that had only one line, the subjects lined up answered starting with the non subjects and the really subjects. They found that when the majority of the group, the non subjects, answered the wrong purposely answered incorrectly then the minority did the same even though the answer was clearly wrong. This lead to the theory of Conformity, were people go against what they think is right to fit in with the group. This could have had a large affect on good people in Germany in the 1930s, if it’s hard to go against the norm with six people that you don’t know imagine how hard it would be to go against it when a whole country does it including your parents and friends.

Obviously there was evil in Germany and it’s hard to think that people actually thought they were doing the right thing by murdering millions of people, but like many people they were just doing what they had been taught was right since they were young. After the holocaust passed and life was getting back to normal people began to realize what they had done and how it was wrong. It’s important to look at the past of this soldiers and other assets to the Nazi power to see whether they were just doing what they saw was right or if they truly were evil, but we have to see it from there point of view, we can’t automatically say they were terrible people.

Can we judge people like this because we have a different understanding of what is good and evil or what is morally right and wrong? Maybe our beliefs and understandings are the true definition of evil but we don’t know that because like the children of Germany we go off what is passed down by our parents and government. Think back to the family in the beginning, besides working at the death camp the father and all the kids probably participated in what we see as normal behavior. So are they criminals of humanity or simply people who have learned a different meaning of good and evil?