



What Evil Means to Us

C. Fred Alford

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C. Fred Alford interviewed working people, prisoners, and college students in order to discover how people experience evil?in themselves, in others, and in the world. What people meant by evil, he found, was a profound, inchoate feeling of dread so overwhelming that they tried to inflict it on others to be rid of it themselves. A leather-jacketed emergency medical technician, for example, one of the many young people for whom vampires are oddly seductive icons of evil, said he would "give anything to be a vampire."Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Alford argues that the primary experience of evil is not moral but existential. The problems of evil are complicated by the terror it evokes, a threat to the self so profound it tends to be isolated deep in the mind. Alford suggests an alternative to this bleak vision. The exercise of imagination?in particular, imagination that takes the form of a shared narrative?offers an active and practical alternative to the contemporary experience of evil. Our society suffers from a paucity of shared narratives and the creative imagination they inspire.

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