

A Taxonomy of Heroes Philip Zimbardo

From “The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil”, by Philip Zimbardo

There are four (4) defining features of heroism:

1. The behavior must be voluntary
2. The behavior places the person at significant risk or potential sacrifice
3. The behavior is in service to others, both small or large in number
4. The behavior is not performed to produce an extrinsic secondary gain for the person at the time of the action.

With these four defining features in mind, a number of different types of heroism can be identify and used to classify heroes throughout history and heroes in the contemporary world.

Type of Heroism	Definition	Risk/Sacrifice
Military and other Duty-bound Physical-Risk Heroes	Individuals involved in military or emergency response careers that involve repeated exposure to high-risk situations; heroic acts must exceed the call of duty	Serious injury and/or death
Civil Heroes- Non-duty-bound Physical-Risk Heroes	Civilians who attempt to save others from physical harm or death while knowingly putting their own life as risk	Serious injury and/or death
Religious Figures	Dedicated, life-long religious service embodying higher principles or breaks new religious/spiritual ground. Often serves as a teacher or public exemplar of service	Sacrifice of self in ascetic path; upsetting religious orthodoxy
Politico-Religious Figures	Religious leaders who have turned to politics to affect wider change, or politicians who have a deep spiritual belief systems that informs their political practice	Assassination; Imprisonment
Martyrs	Religious or political figures who knowingly (sometimes deliberately) put their lives in jeopardy in the service of a cause	Certain or near certain death in the service of a cause or ideal
Political or Military Leaders	Typically lead a nation or group during a time of difficulty; serve to unify nation, provide shared vision, and may embody qualities that are seen as necessary for the group’s survival	Assassination; Opposition; Being voted out of office, Smear campaign, imprisonment



Adventurer/ Explorer/ Discoverer	Individual who explores unknown geographical area or uses novel and unproven transportation methods	Physical health; serious injury; Death; Opportunity costs (length of journey)
Scientific (Discovery) Heroes	Individuals who explore unknown area of science, uses novel and unproven research methods or discovers new scientific information seen as valuable to humanity	Inability to convince others of the importance of findings; Professional ostracism; Financial losses
Good Samaritan	Individuals who step in to help others in need; situation involves considerable disincentives for altruism; may not involve immediate physical risk	Punitive sanctions from authorities; Arrest; Torture; Death; Opportunity costs; Ostracism
Odds beater/ Underdog	Individuals who overcome handicap or adverse conditions and succeed in spite of circumstances and provide model for others	Failure; Rejection; Scorn, Envy
Bureaucracy Heroes	Employees in large organizations in controversial arguments within or between agencies; typically involves standing firm on principle despite intense pressures	Jeopardize carefully groomed career; Professional Ostracism; Loss of social status; Financial losses; Loss of Credibility; Risk to health
Whistle-Blowers	Individual who are aware of illegal or unethical activities in an organization who report the activity without expectation of reward	Jeopardize carefully groomed career; Professional Ostracism; Loss of social status; Financial losses; Loss of Credibility; Physical reprisal

(See pages 468-471 for more details concerning the taxonomy of heroism in “The Lucifer Effect”)

