



# What Makes a Hero?: The Surprising Science of Selflessness

By Elizabeth Svoboda

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Using dozens of fascinating real-life examples, science journalist Elizabeth Svoboda explains how our genes compel us to do good for others, how going through suffering is linked to altruism, and how acting generously can greatly improve our mental health.

Svoboda argues that it's a common misconception that heroes are innately destined to be that way. In fact, anyone can be a hero if they're committed to developing their heroic potential.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Can you—can any ordinary person—learn to build on your natural biological endowments to turn yourself into a model of selflessness and service to others? Svoboda's question is straightforward, but the path to an answer winds from evolutionary biology and neuroscience to educational philosophy and psychology via anecdote and personal reflection. But while the journo makes some interesting points, there is nothing particularly new here. She summarizes the basic evolutionary explanation for altruism and describes some of the classic relevant neuroscience work; her two main points are that a selfless attitude can be cultivated through practice, and that learning about evil and kindness can prepare people to act heroically when opportunities present themselves. However, Svoboda presents little hard data to support her position, relying instead on anecdotes, interpretations of past studies, and personal experiences, such as having an MRI scan, attending a Real Life Superheroes gathering in New York City, and handing out small care packages to homeless people in San Francisco. (Purple prose doesn't help, either: Offered a meager gift and a little kindness, people the world had written off as hopeless opened up the way parched blooms do after a few drops of rain.) Agent: Joe Veltre, Gersh Agency. (Aug. 29)

Review

“A satisfying investigation of the mechanics of heroism.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“The world would be a better place if everyone read Elizabeth Svoboda’s fun, fascinating, and deeply researched book.”

—**Joshua Foer**, author of *Moonwalking with Einstein*

About the Author

Elizabeth Svoboda has contributed to *Fast Company*, *Popular Science*, *Psychology Today*, *Discover*, *Salon*, and *The New York Times*, among others. In 2008, she received the Evert Clark/Seth Payne Award. She lives in San Jose.

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**Bill Dildy:**

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