

Most Good, Least Harm: a Q and A with author Zoe Weil



Q: Why did you write *Most Good, Least Harm*?

A: *Most Good, Least Harm* is a book that's been brewing in my mind for almost a decade. As a humane educator, I wanted to give the general public what I've been giving my students for years – the inspiration and tools to live deeply humane and meaningful lives that contribute to a better world.



Q: What is the MOGO principle, and why is it important?

A: MOGO stands for “most good,” which is a short version of the principle of doing the most good and the least harm for ourselves, other people, animals, and the environment. When we do the most good and the least harm through our daily choices, our acts of citizenship, our communities, our work, our volunteerism, and our interactions, we create inner and outer peace. This is the MOGO (Most Good) principle. Living with MOGO as a guiding principle opens us to growth, joy, renewed and renewing energy, and many and varied opportunities in life, work and our relationships.

Q: What's the central message of *Most Good, Least Harm*?

A: Your efforts to help improve the world will also improve your life (and the reverse). Choosing to do the most good and the least harm is personally enriching and helps to bring about a peaceful, sustainable, and humane world for all.

Q: Who would be interested in your book? What does your book offer the average person?

A: *Most Good, Least Harm* is for anyone who's eager to make a positive difference and who wants to live a more meaningful, fulfilling life.

Q: How is this book different from all the sustainability and “green living” books that have been published recently?

A: In two ways: it's not simply about green living, but about making choices that do the most good and least harm for everyone: you, other people, animals, and the environment. It's also about improving and enriching your own life.

Q: Many “green” books have focused on a list of small or simple actions to take. Why and how have you taken a different approach?

A: Often we see two different approaches to creating change. One is a laundry list of dos and don'ts. These are the books with 100 ways to do x, y or z. The other is policy focused, recognizing that individual personal choices won't save the world. The truth is, we need both. When, through our individual choice-making, we demand and support more humane and sustainable products, foods, etc., these develop more quickly. Yet, we also need systemic political, economic, educational, technological, and agricultural and other changes in order to make significant, rapid, and practical change.

Q: Isn't the MOGO principle about sacrifice and doing without? Isn't it unrealistic to expect most people to make such choices?

A: Virtually all of us are willing to sacrifice for a greater good. We do it all the time! We sacrifice for our children, our elderly parents, our friends and neighbors in need, our country, and more. Most of us find the greatest joy in our lives comes when we give to others, when we're part of creating good in the world. In the industrialized world, despite our relative affluence, happiness is on the decline. My premise, based on both personal experience and research, is that when we do the most good and least harm in a broad way, sacrifice becomes a misnomer because we feel joy in being part of a the creation of a better world and meaningful life.

Q: Isn't the MOGO principle primarily for people with wealth who can *afford* to make different choices?

A: People with wealth have an enormous opportunity to improve the world with their resources, and I believe they also have a responsibility to do so. But people with wealth are also more likely to buy lots of resource-depleting, pollution-causing stuff and to have a much larger carbon footprint. Those without wealth may already be making MOGO choices because they are more affordable (hanging laundry on a clothesline, using public transportation, shopping at thrift stores, etc.). There are *so* many ways to participate in the creation of a better world – many of them *don't* cost a lot of money -- and everyone can find their niche that inspires and enlivens them.

Q: What do you think prevents people from making MOGO choices?

A: Fear, apathy, greed, laziness, inconvenience, destructive systems, and lack of knowledge and support all come into play. We humans are capable of extraordinary goodness, and terrible cruelty, of altruism and selfishness (and everything in between). But even if we were to harness all our best qualities, we'd still have trouble always making MOGO choices, because there are so many systems in place that are unhealthy, exploitative, and destructive. One of the most important MOGO choices a person can make is to participate in the process of changing destructive systems into healthy ones.

Q: Most “green” books address conserving and protecting different species, but don't include animals as individuals within their circle of concern. *Most Good, Least Harm* does. Why?

A: Here in the U.S. we love our dogs and cats. We recognize that they are sentient, like us. They feel; they suffer; they experience happiness. We have laws to protect them. It would be illegal to go home and press a hot iron into the flesh of your dog or cat to leave a permanent mark. It would be illegal to put your pet bird into a cage so small she couldn't stretch a wing or to cut off half her beak with a hot blade. Yet these are normal practices in farming today, and we even have names for these things (branding and debeaking). But there's no difference between a dog and a pig, or a cow and a cat, or a chicken and a parakeet in terms of their ability to feel pain or pleasure. That we call certain things cruelty when perpetrated on one species and normal agricultural practice when done to another is not MOGO.

Most Good, Least Harm asks us to connect the dots and see the interrelationships among all forms of oppression and destruction so that we can create the most viable, meaningful, and positive solutions for all, including animals as individual beings.

Q: What did you learn from writing *Most Good, Least Harm*?

A: It was both humbling (my life is far from the MOGO ideal I seek) and liberating (MOGO is an ongoing process, not an outcome).

Q: Where should people who've read *Most Good, Least Harm* and want to continue pursuing a MOGO life go for resources and support?

A: Our website at the Institute for Humane Education (IHE) (<http://www.humaneeducation.org>) offers a variety of helpful resources (weblinks, suggested books, magazines, etc.) so that individuals can access additional information about MOGO issues. IHE also publishes a monthly Humane Edge E-Newsletter and a frequently-updated blog, Humane Connection (<http://humaneconnectionblog.blogspot.com>), both of which often include ideas and resources relevant to MOGO. IHE also has a Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Institute-for-Humane-Education/26537185845>) through which interested people can connect and share.

Additionally, one of the 7 keys to MOGO is to build community. The greatest support comes from others who share your passion for going on this journey to lead a MOGO life. *Most Good, Least Harm* offers suggestions about how to do this.

Q: Why have you focused on humane education in your work?

A: The sooner we transform our educational systems so that young people are offered relevant education for creating a peaceful, sustainable, and humane world, the better. Humane education teaches about the most pressing challenges of our time to help the next generation become creative changemakers for a viable, healthy future. I believe this is the most important work we need to do today, and if we neglect it and hope to just solve our problems without educating young people about the issues and engaging their creativity and sense of responsibility, we will be hard-pressed to succeed. I'd like to see humane education and the MOGO principle become the guiding philosophy of all education.

Q: Who inspires you? Who have been your teachers in making MOGO choices?

A: So many! There are obvious historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Harriet Tubman, but really I'm inspired every day by the students and graduates of our M.Ed. and certificate programs, as well as the staff at the Institute for Humane Education. They're my biggest daily teachers.

Q: What's your next project?

A: My next project is very big, but I look forward to starting it: I want to write a book about what's wrong with our educational system and how we can truly transform it so that we can educate a generation with the knowledge, tools, and motivation to be part of creating a healthy, peaceful world.

Q: What do you like to do when you're not writing or teaching?

A: I spend as much time as I can outdoors: hiking, gardening, swimming, running, and kayaking. I love summer street pan music (where I embarrass my son by being one of the first to start dancing). I also enjoy improvisational comedy, which sometimes finds its way into my teaching. I read voraciously. But most of all I love spending time with my family and friends.

For media bookings, review copies:

Contact: Lisa Braun Dubbels
Publicist
lisa@catalystpublicity.com
651.343.7315



Beyond Words Publishing
www.beyondword.com

ISBN-10: 1-58270-206-3
ISBN-13: 978-1-58270-206-3
\$15.00, Softcover
224 pages, 5 1/2 x 8 7/16 inches
Body, Mind & Spirit / Nature & Environmental Conservation