

## Solidarity With Terror

Lee Kaplan has just returned from **infiltrating the International Solidarity Movement** of which **Rachel Corrie** was a member:

This June I attended a "training session" of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM), an organization of volunteers whose purpose is to obstruct Israeli defense forces attempting to protect the civilian population from terrorist acts. The ISM was set up by the Palestinians after Arafat broke off the Oslo peace talks and launched the second *intifada*. [...] The idea was to bring in international volunteers, mostly radical students from the United States, Canada and Europe, as "nonviolent peace activists" who would interfere with the Israeli army's anti-terrorist operations

Kaplan's report makes grimly fascinating reading. We found it via Wretchard, at **Belmont Club**, whose comments are, as usual, apt. But he concludes:

One of the grandest educations in life is to observe the hard Left operate in cold blood at close quarters. While it may not confirm your belief in the god of history it will infallibly cement your conviction in the existence of the Devil.

Well, it has not had that effect on us. There is nothing supernatural about evil. At root, it is nothing but error. There is room for hope that in due course, despite the ISM's manipulative techniques and closed ideology, some of Lee Kaplan's fellow-inductees at that training session will come to understand what he understood going in. For they too are about to observe the Hard Left at close quarters.

Fri, 07/02/2004 - 21:19 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

### At root, it is nothing but error.

"At root, [evil] is nothing but error".

Then morality is not based on good faith. How do you make a moral distinction between someone who makes an error in good faith and someone who makes a moral error--that is, someone who chooses

to do evil? If it is just a mistake about the structure of moral reality, how is that morally any different from making a mistake about the structure of physical or sociological reality? Can't you choose to do evil even though you have roughly as good an understanding of moral reality as people who choose to do good?

by a reader on Sat, 07/03/2004 - 15:59 | [reply](#)

## Sorting out errors

If someone *wants* to do bad then that's just a deeper error. He arrived at that state of mind by an accumulation of previous errors made in good faith.

So, yes, he can "choose to do evil even though [he has] roughly as good an understanding of moral reality as people who choose to do good". This is a bad hangup or flaw, which he eventually identified by exposing himself to criticism. The first step to curing the flaw is to understand why the theory and behaviour it promotes can expect to fail by their own terms. Next he has to invent and carefully establish some preventative good habits, being extra-cautious at the beginning. He must ensure that he has enough in the way of absorbing creative projects to sustain him through this difficult period. Finally, if possible and fitting he should make restitution for any harm done.

Only the last step applies to people who make an honest error. That is the distinction.

Btw, if I missed something or anyone knows another general way to eliminate character flaws pls comment or mail me.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Sat, 07/03/2004 - 21:43 | [reply](#)

## Re: Sorting out errors

One can contrast this approach (the willingness to expose ones theories to criticism) with this example:

"If God does not exist, and if religion is an illusion that the majority of men cannot live without...let men believe in the lies of religion since they cannot do without them, and let then a handful of sages, who know the truth and can live with it, keep it among themselves. Men are then divided into the wise and the foolish, the philosophers and the common men, and atheism becomes a guarded, esoteric doctrine - for if the illusions of religion were to be discredited, there is no telling with what madness men would be seized, with what uncontrollable anguish."

Irving Kristol, founder of neoconservatism

by a reader on Sun, 07/04/2004 - 12:39 | [reply](#)

**dear everyone,**

**The World:** I disagree that evil is error. Maybe with a broad

enough meaning of error, this view could be convergent with the truth. But it's a terrible way to analyse current situations. Much like "there aren't good and evil people, just some people make more mistakes than others" would almost certainly lead to confusion.

a reader: morality isn't *\*based\** on good faith. (please say intentions not faith. faith has a whole different meaning about faith in God) having honorable intentions is important certainly, but it's not everything.

tom: "a deeper error" is one description for someone who wants to do bad. but i think there are other ones that are more right-leading (opposite of misleading :D). even calling him evil seems to me to get the point across better. or "he means badly" is pretty good. describing things as an error leaves out key information.

a reader and tom: can a man understand morality and choose evil? well, sorta. if he understood enough, he would not want to choose evil. if he does choose evil, and someone else chooses good, we must suspect the good person knows something the evil one does not, and that this something is very critical. but it is possible the good person knows little else about morality, and the evil one knows all sorts of other things about morality (though rare-ish. ppl w/ good morality learn better. ppl w/ evil morality learn worse)

Irving: I see the conservatism, but that view sounds pretty ancient ;-P

Elliot Temple, The Most Curious Person In [The World](#)

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Sun, 07/04/2004 - 17:00 | [reply](#)

## Don't want to mislead

Elliot,

I don't think that evil is synonymous with error. I don't think that the World does either (the World being one of the very few places that espouses a rational, scientific and practical world view which includes room for right and wrong). I see the point that describing evil individuals as merely error-bound isn't sufficient, and could be misleading.

However, many people *\*are\** routinely misled in another important way when the subject of evil is brought up. They think of rushing winds, devils in black cloaks and other supernatural stuff. So they either choose to ignore evil (by pretending it doesn't exist) or they fail to deal with it adequately (by, say, confining their response to prayer).

Describing the nature of evil as being rooted in error IMO is beneficial in three ways. Firstly, it repudiates the unhelpful satanic nonsense. Secondly, if we could rewind a bad person's personal history, we'd find that his evil streak grew in response to one or more honourable errors. Finally, it reflects the fact that he could in principle be made to agree that he has been making mistakes (even by his own terms). (Evil streak == cluster of false ideas and bad

intentions). His values have become inconsistent, the hallmark of evil being not that it causes suffering to others, as it often does, but that it is self-defeating.

\*Fighting\* evil is a different matter. It must be condemned, thwarted, mocked, avoided, extirpated, neutralised, refuted and destroyed!

by **Tom Robinson** on Sun, 07/04/2004 - 23:13 | [reply](#)

## me talk more now

I believe, as demonstrated by fantasy worlds with magic, that self-defeating is not a sufficient description of evil. (acting in ways we consider wrong would sometimes lead to great success in such a world. at least by the normal criteria such a world.)

I think all **The World** did was misspeak a bit.

I agree there is useful truth in the evil as error idea, but I take exception to "at its root, it is \*nothing but\*"

i think devils in black cloaks are a straw man. that may be how many morality-deniers see evil (or claim to...), but if you listen to even very religious people carefully, they seem to associate evil with things like tyrants and oppression. And I think they would welcome a freedom fighter who wore a black cloak.

-- Elliot Temple  
<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 07/05/2004 - 00:12 | [reply](#)

## Re:dear everyone,

I think you might have misunderstood my comment. I think the fear of truth is the starting point of evil, i.e. pretending and wishful thinking instead of facing reality; to the point where the "illusion" becomes more important than reality. Yet this is precisely what Mr. Kristol is advocating. That illusion should win out over reality.

by a reader on Mon, 07/05/2004 - 01:31 | [reply](#)

## Re:dear everyone,

a reader,

i guess i did. ah well.

I agree that Mr. Kristol's view is bad. it's very pessimistic.

i agree that deluding yourself to avoid difficult propositions is very bad (I'm used to the terminology: failing to take XXX proposition seriously). however, i deny it's the \*starting point\* of evil; I don't think such a thing exists. there are many different evil things, and things to know about evil. put them all together, you get a complete description of evil. I don't think it makes sense to try to call one the

start or primary. you can start wherever you like and still get to the right answer.

-- Elliot Temple  
<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 07/05/2004 - 02:41 | [reply](#)

## Not a sufficient description, but the key property

acting in ways we consider wrong would sometimes lead to great success in such a world

True, and the key word is *sometimes*. If we replayed history, or equivalently examined nearby segments of the multiverse, we'd find a very different set of villains and dictators. Evil can succeed by chance. But for each success there is a graveyard of failures. People of good character would succeed more often, especially in the respectable professions.

Also, the normal criteria of success are usually connected to external stuff - money, houses, career title, etc. However: what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Can he still enjoy his money, houses and public prestige? If not, can he find new growth elsewhere? Evil is *self-defeating*. (Doesn't this follow logically from morality being about getting what you want?)

by **Tom Robinson** on Mon, 07/05/2004 - 21:30 | [reply](#)

## SLAY (subject lines are yucky)

Tom,

Maybe wishing to rule the world or dominate men is self-defeating with our physics, but no one has an argument that this must be so. And it isn't in some fantasy worlds. Sure, it may be difficult, but it can be done. Raistlin defeated the Gods, both good and evil, in a Dragonlance series (he was an evil mage). He didn't become powerful despite his path through life and simply by good luck -- his path of evil made him strong.

In Castle Greyhawk, there's a dungeon level with a bunch of orcs, ogres, bugbears and such. They are pretty incompetent and bored. They wish to find an evil demon to serve. And if they succeeded in that, and became evil lackeys, it would by their standards be a great success and improvement.

I also, again, deny there is such thing as a *\*key\** property to what evil is.

*Evil is self-defeating. (Doesn't this follow logically from morality being about getting what you want?)*

That would only follow if your premise was not just an aspect of morality but the entirety.

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 07/05/2004 - 23:11 | [reply](#)

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